



# State of UK Public Parks 2016

**Heritage Lottery Fund**

**State of UK Public Parks 2016**

**Research Report**

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Image: Moor Park, Preston © Peter Neal

## Acknowledgements

HLF is particularly grateful to all the local authority park managers, park trusts, friends of parks and park user groups who gave their time to complete the surveys and provide the evidence for this study. In addition we would particularly like to acknowledge the support for this study in promoting the surveys, chasing returns, contributing to case studies, hosting workshops and providing supporting information and data from:

Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE): Wayne Priestley  
Birmingham City Council: Darren Share MBE  
Birmingham Open Spaces Forum: Sarah Royal  
City of Cardiff Council: Jon Maidment  
City of Edinburgh Council: David Jamieson  
Department for Communities and Local Government: David Solly  
Green Connect: Karen Hughes  
Greenspace Scotland: Julie Procter  
Groundwork UK: Graham Duxbury  
Keep Britain Tidy and the Green Flag Award Scheme: Paul Todd  
London Parks and Green Spaces Forum: Tony Leach  
Liverpool City Council: Simon O'Brien and Dr Juliet Staples  
National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces: Sarah Royal and Dave Morris  
Nesta: Lydia Ragoonanan  
Newcastle City Council: Tony Durcan OBE and Su Cumming  
Nottingham City Council: Eddie Curry  
Rugby Borough Council: Chris Worman MBE  
Sheffield City Council: Paul Billington, David Cooper, Ian Turner and Chris Heeley  
The Core Cities Parks and Green Space Group  
The Land Trust: Iain Taylor  
The National Trust: Ellie Robinson, Matt Doran and Bella Crawford  
The Parks Alliance: Mark Camley and Sue Ireland  
West Midlands Parks Forum

# Contents

- Acknowledgements ..... 2
  
- 1.0 Introduction..... 5
  - 1.1 Objectives for this State of UK Public Parks study..... 5
  - 1.2 Contributors to this study..... 6
  - 1.3 Purpose of the survey ..... 7
  - 1.4 Structure of this report..... 7
  - 1.5 Headlines from the first State of UK Public Parks report..... 8
  
- 2.0 Parks for people, places and nature..... 11
  - 2.1 HLF Parks for People programme ..... 13
  - 2.2 Heritage value and impact of the parks programme ..... 14
  - 2.3 Wider initiatives across the parks sector..... 14
  - 2.4 Austerity and the impact on public services ..... 24
  
- 3.0 The commissioned surveys ..... 28
  - 3.1 Park managers’ survey..... 28
  - 3.2 Friends group survey..... 30
  - 3.3 Park trusts survey ..... 33
  - 3.4 Public opinion survey ..... 33
  - 3.5 Park Managers and Regional Forums ..... 33
  - 3.6 Supporting research and the wider evidence base ..... 37
  
- 4.0 The principal findings..... 40
  - 4.1 Number of parks and frequency of use..... 40
  - 4.2 Changes to revenue funding ..... 46
  - 4.3 Diversifying sources of income ..... 48
  - 4.4 Changes to staffing and skills..... 50
  - 4.5 Trends in quality and condition ..... 53
  - 4.6 Changing management arrangements, transfer and disposal of sites ..... 59
  - 4.7 Increasing participation of communities..... 62
  - 4.8 Park strategies and corporate commitment ..... 66

- 5.0 Immediate challenges and emerging trends..... 71
  - 5.1 Funding - the continuing disinvestment in parks ..... 72
  - 5.2 Skills - diminishing knowledge, skills and expertise ..... 77
  - 5.3 Quality - returning to a cycle of boom and bust..... 81
  - 5.4 Inequalities - growing differences across the regions ..... 88
  - 5.5 Commercialisation - increasing programmed uses, activities and events ..... 95
  - 5.7 Supporting innovation - developing new business models to sustain investment..... 102
  - 5.8 Enhancing nature - adapting traditional management regimes ..... 109
  - 5.9 Diversify management - an increasing role of partnerships and communities..... 111
  
- 6.0 Key themes for action ..... 118
  - 6.1 Continuing local authority leadership ..... 121
  - 6.2 Promoting active partnerships ..... 121
  - 6.3 Supporting communities to play a more active role ..... 122
  - 6.4 Developing new models of management and funding ..... 123
  - 6.5 Compiling, coordinating and updating data..... 124



Image: Williamson Park, Lancaster © Peter Neal

## 1.0 Introduction

Public parks are a central part of the physical and social fabric of neighbourhoods and communities right across the UK. Often overlooked, many have a long and rich social history that has helped to shape the collective cultural heritage of places and enriched countless personal lives, relationships and experiences. From the farsighted municipal park movement of Victorian times, that breathed life into increasingly industrialised and polluted towns and cities, to garden suburbs and post-war new towns, Britain can quite justifiably consider itself a nation of park-makers. This has built a considerable legacy of green and open spaces that continue to make attractive and popular places to live, work, raise families and retire.

Whilst these parks remain incredibly valuable assets for towns and cities, many local authorities now face a growing problem of how best to properly manage and maintain them through this time of austerity. The question now is whether Britain can also be a nation of great park-keepers? Having invested more than £850 million including £130 million from Big Lottery Fund (BLF) England, in restoring and regenerating public parks over the last 20 years, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is acutely aware of this challenge. To protect this investment and to understand these challenges in greater depth HLF has commissioned this study into the State of UK Public Parks. It follows two years after the first study was reported and fulfils a commitment to update and revisit the findings to understand better how parks are changing, what has improved, what is getting worse and how best to care for the nations great wealth of public parks in the future.

### 1.1 Objectives for this State of UK Public Parks study

This second State of UK Public Parks study draws directly on the structure and approach of the first report which was based on research conducted in late 2013 and published in the summer of 2014. It also makes direct reference to the Public Parks Assessment (PPA) that was co-



funded by HLF and published by the Urban Parks Forum in 2001. The PPA provides an important benchmark as it was the first UK-wide study that took stock of the condition of the nation's public parks at the turn of the century following more than two decades of neglect and under-investment. This new study, in 2016, repeats a number of questions to park managers that were originally asked in 2000 to see how things have changed since that time. The PPA helped raise awareness of the plight of the UK's parks and had a direct influence on public policy at that time. This led to a variety of public projects and government funded initiatives which, combined with HLF's parks programme and supporting local investment, led to what has been recognised as a renaissance in the nation's public parks and green spaces over the last decade and a half.

However, this current decade of austerity has brought about a radical change in public spending and the last State of UK Public Parks report warned that this parks' renaissance was at increasing risk. The large reduction in local authority funding has had a direct effect on public services and, in particular, non-statutory services including the upkeep of parks and green spaces. This new report continues to monitor and assess the impact of this change and draws together wider evidence of the challenges, trends and opportunities that currently face the UK's parks sector. The main objective for this research is to quantify and assess:

- the level and intensity of parks use by the general public
- the current quality and changing condition of parks over time
- changes in the revenue and capital funding of parks
- trends in staffing and skills of parks and park services
- contributions from Friends and Park User Groups
- areas of innovation and new practice across the parks sector

## 1.2 Contributors to this study

This study could not have been properly undertaken without the support and participation of the wider parks community for which HLF is immensely grateful. Contributors include:

- Local authority park managers
- Local friends of parks and park user groups
- Independent park trusts
- Regional park forums and advocacy groups
- BritainThinks, commissioned to undertake the public opinion poll

Local authorities have the greatest responsibility for parks and green spaces and many of the central findings of the study capture the views and opinions of almost half of the park managers working across the UK who all made time to complete the survey. A large number of Friends and Park User Groups also gave considerable support to both this and the previous study which provides an essential perspective from local advocates championing and supporting individual parks across the country.

An addition to this study has been the contribution of a number of dedicated park trusts who have responded to a supplementary survey that has captured their views. Leading park managers from the UK's core cities have also given their insight through a set of case studies that describe the particular challenges they are facing and specific initiatives they are adopting to tackle the challenges of austerity. Regional networks have also played an important part with

Greenspace Scotland, the West Midlands Parks Forum and the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum all taking time to promote the study and encouraging managers and friends groups to participate.

### 1.3 Purpose of the survey

The key findings from this study will help shape and inform HLF's approach to supporting and investing in parks in their next Strategic Framework from 2018/19 onwards. It will provide a clear picture on the main challenges facing the sector as reported by park managers and friends groups and will inform decisions on how best to protect lottery investment and support the restoration, development and management of public parks in the future. This survey found that over two thirds of park managers read the HLF State of UK Public Parks 2014 report and most found it useful or very useful. Individual comments recognised the value of this work, noting that "there is no other document that covers the same issues and highlights the problems faced by the sector with such independence", and "it helps to promote the importance of UK parks and how well they are used. It can help as a political tool when decisions are to be made to cut budgets". It is a clear intention of this report and the wider work of HLF and BLF England to continue to support the UK parks sector through raising awareness, sharing expertise and providing much needed investment to protect the UK's wealth of great public parks.

### 1.4 Structure of this report

The report has six sections which gives a logical narrative and sequence of information that builds to provide an analysis and overview of the current state of the UK's public parks.

**Section 2** Provides an overview of recent and current park initiatives; the reach and achievements of the HLF/BLF Parks programme; sources of technical information and advice; new funding and management initiatives; the current position on national policy; and an overview on the impact that austerity has had on public services across the country.

**Section 3** Describes the four surveys that have been commissioned to provide the primary source of data on which the main conclusions of this study are based. These are surveys for park managers; friends groups; park trusts; and, a concise public opinion poll. It also describes the wider evidence base which provides further points of reference and benchmarks that can be compared to the main findings of the report.

**Section 4** Sets out the principal findings of the study and compares these to the results in the last study. It looks at the use of parks; changes in funding; staffing and skills; the condition of parks; management arrangements; the role of communities; and the level of corporate commitment that local authority parks services enjoy.

**Section 5** Looks at the findings in further detail and, where appropriate, provides a regional analysis of the data. It considers trends in funding; changing priorities for skills; trends in the condition and quality of parks; issues of inequality; the growing commercialisation of parks services; areas of emerging innovation; and, changing approaches to management. To illustrate these trends and changes, a series of case studies are provided from a number of the UK's core cities.

**Section 6** Concludes with a set of actions and measures that can be adopted by parks services and the wider sector to respond to the challenges being faced. These address strategic

local authority leadership; promoting greater partnerships; supporting communities who are taking an increasingly active role; improving the extent, quality and use of data on parks and park services; developing new models of management, funding; and, opportunities to support and promote innovation across the sector.

This report forms part of a wider set of documents published by HLF on the study. These include a concise executive report, a film, a set of the survey data and detailed results of the public opinion poll. All documents are available on the HLF website - [www.hlf.org.uk/parksmatter](http://www.hlf.org.uk/parksmatter) - and this also includes the information from the last study published in 2014 that can be used as a comparison.

## **1.5 Headlines from the first State of UK Public Parks report**

To provide a benchmark and point of reference to this new State of UK Public Parks report, it is useful to make reference to the main findings for the first study, published in 2014. The principal areas of investigation focused on the use and condition of parks, levels of funding, changes in staffing and skills, the participation of communities in supporting their local parks along with some regional variations in the results.

The last study presented both good and bad news. Parks were well used; many people visited their parks very frequently and the majority of park managers recorded increasing numbers of visitors to their main parks. More than half of the UK's parks were considered to be in good condition. Local communities were taking a more active role in supporting their parks with a growth in both the number and membership of friends groups. Around three quarters of park users considered spending time in their local park to be important, if not essential, to their quality of life.





Image: Examples of underinvestment in various public parks © Peter Neal

At the same time, the majority of park managers faced cuts to their parks budgets, and almost a third of managers recorded cuts of more than 20% over the past three years. In parallel, over three quarters of park managers reported the loss of management and operational staff. The proportion of parks that were expected to be in an improving condition over the following three years fell by almost half when compared to the previous three years. Nearly half of park managers reported that their local authority was considering either selling parks or transferring their management to others. The following table provides a summary of the key findings and compares the results with those that are described in this new study:

Key Statistics:	State of UK Public Parks 2016	Change	State of UK Public Parks 2014
<b>Park Visits</b>			
UK adults who use their parks once a week or more	35%	The same	35%
UK adults <b>who</b> use their parks at least once a month or more	57%	Up 3%	54%
Households with children aged five and under who visit their local park at least once a month or more	90%	Up 7%	83%
<b>Park Condition</b>			
Park managers reporting their parks to be in a good condition	53% (52.9%)	Down 7%	60% (59.7%)
Park managers reporting their parks to have been improving over the past three years	27% (27.0%)	Down 14%	41% (41.1%)
Park managers expecting their parks to be improving over the next three years	20% (19.6%)	Down 1%	21% (21.3%)
Park managers expecting their parks to be declining over the next three years	39% (38.6%)	Up 2%	37% (37.4%)
<b>Park Budgets</b>			
Park managers reporting cuts to their revenue budgets over the past three years	92% (91.6%)	Up 6%	86% (86.4%)
Park managers expecting cuts to their revenue budgets over the next three years	95% (94.8%)	Up 8%	87% (87.1%)
Proportion of park managers expecting cuts of between 10-20% to their park revenue budgets over the next three years	55% (54.9%)	Up 17%	38% (37.7%)
Proportion of park managers expecting cuts of more than 20% to their park revenue budgets over the next three years	21% (20.8%)	Down 11%	32% (32.5%)
<b>Park Staffing</b>			
Proportion of park managers reporting a reduction in management staff over the past three years	75% (75.0%)	Down 6%	81% (81.3%)
Proportion of park managers reporting a reduction in operational staff over the past three years	71% (71.3%)	Down 6%	77% (77.4%)
<b>Park Friends and User Groups</b>			
Estimated number of park friends and user groups across UK	5,900	Up 1,110	4,800
Estimated value of fundraising by park friends and user groups each year	£50 million	Up £20m	£30 million
Estimated value of volunteering by park friends and user groups each year	£70 million	Up £30m	£40 million

**Table 1.1** Comparison of key findings from State of UK Public Parks 2016 and 2014 surveys



Image: Caldecott Park, Rugby © Peter Neal

## 2.0 Parks for people, places and nature

The public park is a complex and much valued community asset. It can be a focus for civic pride, adding character, identity and quality to neighbourhoods. Parks offer places to congregate, demonstrate for a cause and celebrate significant achievements. They are also somewhere local to meet and catch up with friends; for children to let off steam; they provide an opportunity to smell roses; listen to bird song; walk the dog; drink coffee; or just simply to sit back, relax and let the world go by.

Such qualities are timeless, many are immensurable, and can so easily be overlooked in the bigger scheme of things. But, innately, people really love their parks. For many, they are part of everyday life, a source of long-lasting memories and the essence of being human. In an attempt to capture and understand these personal qualities a little better, the study asked people to ‘tell us your favourite memory of your local park’. The answers were extremely varied and deeply expressive, recalling formative experiences of childhood, happy times with friends and family, of romance and opportunities simply to be close to wildlife and at peace with nature.

*“Playing in the paddling pool as a very young child with all my friends when it was very hot and we had ice cream from the ice cream van”; “my children running and playing with my in-laws, husband, sister-in-law, and myself”; “lying on the grass in the sun, with the low humming of insects, bird-songs and the smell of newly-mown grass”; “teaching my kids to ride bikes”; “walking hand in hand with my first girlfriend”; “taking my grandchildren now to the same park I took their parents to”; “lying on the grass and enjoying the sun while hanging out with my friends.”; “I went for a very long walk before going to bed, to improve the quality of my sleep, it was a very nice experience”; and, a “midnight midsummer stroll through the park on my way home. Warm, perfectly still and inured from the hustle and bustle of the city centre.”*



Strategically, parks have been a key part of town and city planning for centuries and a means to add quality and value to countless neighbourhoods and districts. Turn to George Chadwick's seminal book on *The Park and the Town*<sup>1</sup> or, for a more contemporary analysis, Alan Tate's *Great City Parks*<sup>2</sup> to understand in much greater detail the immense contribution public parks have made to the process of place making through the centuries.

Quite justifiably, the UK has an enviable and long-established reputation in the commissioning, design and construction of public parks. From Regents Park in London, Royal Victoria Park in Bath, Birkenhead Park in the Wirral and Princes Street Gardens in Edinburgh, parks across Great Britain have inspired the creation of many great city parks throughout the world. Today countless towns and cities are choosing to invest in new parks and refurbish overlooked and badly neglected green spaces and natural assets. Not only because it makes good economic sense, but also because they improve the perception of places, support the health and well-being of citizens and provide a central ingredient of more sustainable and resilient forms of urban development.

A recent research review undertaken by HLF into the values and benefits of heritage<sup>3</sup> found that publicly accessible parks and green spaces have a very positive impact on the lives and economic vitality of communities. Over 80% of people considered their parks and open spaces to be focal points for their communities. 74% thought that having green spaces, such as parks, gardens and commons nearby was 'very important'. A similar study<sup>4</sup> found this figure to be even higher with over 90% of people agreeing or strongly agreeing that 'having green spaces close to where I live is important'. Past research found that well-planned improvements to public spaces within town centres could boost commercial trading by up to 40% and generate significant private investment<sup>5</sup>. Whilst small businesses choosing a new business location rank open space, parks and recreation as a number one priority<sup>6</sup>.

A more recent review of the economic benefits of investing in the environment has been undertaken by Natural England<sup>7</sup>. This includes a variety of research on how green spaces can improve the economic competitiveness of places, where one study 'found that regions with more landscape amenities (for example, forests, open spaces) tended to grow faster in terms of population than those with less'. In Glasgow business located next to the regeneration of Glasgow Green (that has benefitted from HLF parks investment programme) felt that the location was attractive to customers and increased improved the morale and retention of staff.

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<sup>1</sup> Chadwick, G (1966) *The Park and the Town*, Architectural Press, Westminster

<sup>2</sup> Tate, A with Eaton, M (2015) *Great City Parks*, second edition, Routledge, London and New York

<sup>3</sup> Heritage Lottery Fund (2016) *Values and benefits of heritage, a research review*, April 2016 - p 5, 19 and 27  
See: <https://www.hlf.org.uk/values-and-benefits-heritage> [accessed 26/05/16]

<sup>4</sup> Natural England (2010) *Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: The National Survey on people and the natural environment*. Annual Report from the 2009-10 survey.

<sup>5</sup> Department of the Environment (1997) *Managing Urban Spaces in Town Centres - Good Practice Guide*.

<sup>6</sup> The Trust for Public Land (1999) *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space: How Land Conservation Helps Communities Grow Smart and Protect the Bottom Line*.

<sup>7</sup> Natural England (2014) *Microeconomic Evidence for the Benefits of Investment in the Environment 2*, Chapter 3, p18-19



Image: Kennington Park © Shaun Kiddell

## 2.1 HLF Parks for People programme

These values, alongside many others, provide a clear purpose and reason for investing in public parks, an activity HLF has been engaged in for over twenty years and BLF for ten. The HLF was launched in 1994 and, since then, has granted over £7.1 billion raised through the National Lottery Good Causes that has been distributed to over 40,000 projects to help restore, protect and sustain the UK's heritage. Benefits for people and communities are at the heart of all HLF projects and this is particularly true of projects that focus on improving the nation's public parks.

In January 1996, two years after HLF was established, the Urban Parks Programme was launched by the then chairman Lord Rothschild in a snowy Weston Park, Sheffield's first municipal park that was opened in 1875. The mid 1990s was a time of growing national concern at the neglect facing public parks and, in particular, the country's great wealth of historic urban parks. A number of significant publications and initiatives coincided to inform and add weight to this new and urgently needed parks programme. This included the influential *Park Life: Urban Parks and Social Renewal* report<sup>8</sup> published a year earlier jointly by Comedia (an organisation concerned with city life, culture and creativity) and Demos (a leading cross-party think tank). In 1996, the Green Flag Award was also launched, establishing a national quality standard for parks, and the Department of Environment published *People, Parks and Cities*<sup>9</sup>, a guide to good practice in urban parks.

The Urban Parks Programme, HLF's first 'special programme', was followed by the Public Parks Initiative and, in turn, the Parks for People programme that operates today. The last State of UK

<sup>8</sup> Greenhalgh, L and Worpole, K (1995) *Park Life, Urban parks and social renewal*. Comedia and Demos

<sup>9</sup> Greenhalgh, L and Worpole, K (1996) *People, Parks and Cities: a guide to current good practice in urban parks*. HMSO: Department of the Environment.

Public Parks report<sup>10</sup> provides further information on the history of the parks programme and a brief synopsis of the public park movement. For more in-depth historical analysis, refer to Hazel Conway's *People's Parks*<sup>11</sup> or, for a contemporary regionally structured overview of HLF park investment, Paul Rabbitts's newly published *Great British Parks: A Celebration*<sup>12</sup>.

In 2006 the Big Lottery Fund England (BLF) teamed up with HLF to joint fund the programme in England. In total, over the past twenty years, HLF has now invested over £850 million in public parks, of which £130 million has been funded by BLF. This has helped to restore and improve more than 800 parks in partnership with 64% of local authorities, providing better quality green spaces across hundreds of communities in the UK.

## 2.2 Heritage value and impact of the parks programme

To mark its twentieth anniversary, HLF commissioned a research report - *20 Years in 12 Places*<sup>13</sup> - to understand the impact of National Lottery funding in 12 very different locations selected from across the UK. This drew out a number of important findings that are significant to this parks study. It has been clearly shown that investing in heritage projects positively influences both people's quality of life and how communities relate to the places they live. A particularly prominent feature of the research was the impact that investment in public parks has had across almost all of the 12 places studied. The analysis included 20 different parks including Lister Park in Bradford, Glasgow Green, Heaton Park in Manchester, Central Park in Peterborough and Quarry Park in Shrewsbury. Not only does it show that parks register as some of the most recognised heritage projects that HLF has funded, but that they also contribute to a sense of civic pride and provide direct personal benefit for users and therefore National Lottery players.

Parks record some of the highest levels of awareness and use of all heritage projects and are shown to make a particularly large contribution to people's quality of life. High levels of use were commonly reported across the majority of park projects with more than half of the 20 parks being used by at least four out of every five residents surveyed. In Shrewsbury, for example, residents considered Quarry Park to be the heritage project that had had the greatest impact in their town with 93% of people using the park and 88% saying that it had made their personal quality of life better. It was also found that levels of the awareness of park projects and their direct use was higher across all socio-economic groups when compared with averages for all heritage projects and this was also true for all ethnic groups. In summary, it was shown that, in the 12 places studied, park projects generally reached the largest proportion of residents and recorded the greatest contribution to people's quality of life.

## 2.3 Wider initiatives across the parks sector

The first State of UK Public Parks report recorded the loss of the Government funded CAGE Space and the parks charity Greenspace England as national advocates for the parks sector. Whilst there has been a continuing call for a properly resourced national champion for parks and green spaces, the gap has been partially filled by the work of several organisations

<sup>10</sup> Heritage Lottery Fund (2014) *State of UK Public Parks 2014 Research Report*. Peter Neal Consulting and CFP, p21-27

<sup>11</sup> Conway, H (1991) *People's Parks: the design and development of Victorian parks in Britain*. Cambridge University Press

<sup>12</sup> Rabbitts, P (2016) *Great British Parks: A Celebration*. Amberley Publishing

<sup>13</sup> Heritage Lottery Fund (2015) *20 Years in 12 Places: 20 years of Lottery Funding for Heritage*. BritainThinks, see: <https://www.hlf.org.uk/about-us/research-evaluation/20-years-heritage> [accessed 26/05/16]



operating regionally or nationally. The Parks Alliance (TPA)<sup>14</sup>, formed through a national campaign to ‘Make Parks a Priority’<sup>15</sup>, held its inaugural conference in Birmingham in May 2014. Whilst development has been challenged by the lack of revenue funding, HLF awarded TPA a grant of around £10,000 in autumn 2015. ‘Creating A National Voice for Parks’ will help to establish its membership model and grow a more sustainable funding base. Additional support from the Landscape Institute has helped TPA work as an advocate for the sector highlighting both the importance of parks and green spaces and challenging government to address the growing funding crisis facing local authority park services. It recently published *Parks: The National Playground, Growing the Next Generation*<sup>16</sup> that gives a synopsis of recent research on the benefits and values of parks. It also hosted a round table in partnership with the Landscape Institute to discuss the need for leadership and innovation across the sector.

The British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI) operates as the Trade Association for the wider landscape sector. The National Contractors Forum (NCF) sits within BALI and represents large private landscape contracting and grounds maintenance companies, many of whom are responsible for long-term local authority maintenance contracts for parks and green spaces. The NCF held their first national seminar at Kew Gardens in March 2016 with contractors and local authority partners to discuss the challenges facing the UK’s parks and green spaces. The structure, value and duration of many park maintenance contracts are now in flux with several councils choosing to bring their contracts back in-house in an attempt to save costs and jobs.

The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces represents and campaigns on behalf of the community sector by providing a national network for parks forums and friends groups. Launched in 2010, through the earlier work of Greenspace England, it estimates there are over 5,000 local friends groups throughout the UK. This includes over 50 active city and local authority wide forums that meet regionally to provide support and advice for individual park friends and user groups.

Historic England, formally English Heritage, maintains a register of historic parks and gardens that includes registered urban public parks and country parks. It has also been steadily building a research resource on public parks that includes an early study on *The Park Keeper* (2005), a more recent *National Review of Research Priorities for urban parks, designed landscapes, and open spaces* (2014) and a soon to be published *History of Public Park Funding and Management*<sup>17</sup>. This provides a useful and detailed review of public, private, charitable and third-sector funding models dating back to the early 1800s. Currently admired and envied historic examples of philanthropy, subscription and land donation, the research suggests, were often ‘strategies of the last resort’ when anticipated parliamentary support failed to materialise. ‘The foundations of the funding crisis we face today were laid down with the parks themselves’.

The report observes that there has never been ‘a single ‘traditional’ model of local authority funding’ although over the past two centuries councils have looked after their parks for public benefit as part of their wider responsibility to support civil society. The models for creating and

<sup>14</sup> For further information on The Parks Alliance, see: <http://theparksalliance.org/> [accessed 27/05/16]

<sup>15</sup> For further information on Horticulture Weeks Making Parks a Priority Campaign, see: <http://www.hortweek.com/parks-priority> [accessed 27/05/16]

<sup>16</sup> The Parks Alliance (2016) *Parks: The National Playground, Growing the Next Generation*, see: <http://theparksalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/The-Parks-Alliance-National-playground-growing-the-next-generation-15-April-2016.pdf> [accessed 03/06/16]

<sup>17</sup> Layton-Jones, K (2016) *History of Public Park Funding and Management 1820-2010* Historic England Research Report 3/2016 <http://research.historicengland.org.uk/>

funding parks have always been varied and innovative. Within its conclusions the report suggests that many of the most radical models for funding green spaces, including endowments and trusts, are more easily established at the outset rather than through retrofit at a later stage.

### **2.3.1 Technical support, training and advice**

From a professional perspective, various organisations provide technical assistance and support to particular geographic areas of the parks sector – a number of which have received HLF funding. Most have been active for many years and have managed, with persistence, to continue to operate through the economic downturn. Greenspace Scotland<sup>18</sup>, a social enterprise and independent charitable company, has a membership of over 200 organisations and runs a variety of programmes and projects. It has benefitted from around £60,000 of HLF funding to help develop its business model and funding strategy alongside improving the resilience of Scotland's parks and green space heritage. Whilst it considers much of the advocacy work on valuing parks and green spaces is now done, its current focus is on pioneer projects that break new ground through design, funding and management. These projects are particularly responding to the effects of climate change to improve the resilience of neighbourhoods and spaces which it sees as an increasingly important issue. For example, the testing of innovative approaches to climate adaptation has been developed in partnership with Hazlehead Park in Aberdeen and the Dunfermline Public Park with its climate change park<sup>19</sup>. Project specific reports have been published for both of these sites and provide further detail on these initiatives.

The London Parks and Green Spaces Forum, which now operates as an independent charity, provides networks for both park managers and friends groups in London. Transition Funding of around £28,000 from HLF in spring 2015 has supported a strategic business review of the organisation and a skills development programme for staff, volunteers and the board. The forum runs a programme of events and focused action groups and provides training and advice on parks and green spaces across the capital. The work of its Parks Benchmarking Group, which was initially started by the London Borough of Newham, is now in its sixteenth year of collecting and sharing comparative data on park funding, resourcing and performance. It is symptomatic of the current climate that, this year, returns from the benchmarking group were so low they could not be used to identify and confirm meaningful trends. A recent heads of service meeting for London authorities highlighted on-going reductions in senior staff and an increasing drive to raise income targets particularly through large-scale events.

The London Parks and Gardens Trust has a professional and lay membership with a focus on improving the knowledge, appreciation and understanding of London's open space network. HLF provided a grant of around £15,000 at the start of 2015 to help develop its organisational structure, build the profile of its successful Open Garden Squares Weekend and develop a programme of life-long learning. The Trust has maintained London Gardens Online<sup>20</sup> for many years providing a well-used and in-depth web based resource for most of London's green spaces. Trust is increasingly concerned about the impact the funding crisis is having on the capital's public parks.

The Land Trust operates across Britain and was initially established to transform derelict and vacant land into public open space. It is a registered charity responsible for the upkeep of over

<sup>18</sup> For further information on Greenspace Scotland, see: <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/about-us.aspx> [accessed 27/05/16]

<sup>19</sup> For further information on Greenspace Scotland's climate change projects see: <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/greenspace-and-climate-change.aspx> [accessed 27/05/16]

<sup>20</sup> For further information on London Gardens Online, see: <http://www.londongardensonline.org.uk/> [accessed 27/05/16]

50 sites and is increasingly working with local councils and other land owners to maintain public parks and community green spaces. Its preferred method of funding is to establish an endowment to ensure adequate resources are available in perpetuity for the site's upkeep. This is an important model in the current economic climate. With support from HLF and BLF, the Trust has built the Prosperous Parks<sup>21</sup> website that provides a valuable and extensive set of park management case studies and funding models. To assess the benefits and impact of its work, it has also recently published two reports<sup>22</sup> on the value of the green spaces that it manages.

In 2014 BLF awarded £400,000 to Keep Britain Tidy to deliver a programme of support, training and advice to parks friends groups in England. Over the last two years the project has worked to increase the skills and capacity of park friends and user groups to allow them to take a far greater role in volunteering, supporting, managing and fundraising for parks and green spaces in future. In conjunction with the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces the project established 12 new area wide community group forums, which are important hubs of park community activity, providing mentoring support for new and developing groups and a focus for engagement between the community, local authority and other partner organisations. Friends groups across England have also benefited from opportunities for peer to peer support and learning through the 'seeing is believing' tour. The project has also continued to develop the Love Parks<sup>23</sup> brand, by establishing an online portal rich in information and resources, including a networking area where groups can upload details of events and activities. The site provides links to over 2,600 parks and to date over 1,100 new friend groups have registered with the portal.



Image: Go to the Park Volunteers, Rethinking Parks Project, Burnley © Simon Goff

<sup>21</sup> For further information on Prosperous Parks, see: <http://prosperousparks.com/?r=1&h=1080&w=1920> [accessed 27/05/16]

<sup>22</sup> The Land Trust (2016) The Value of Our Green Spaces, see: <https://thelandtrust.org.uk/charitable-aims/thebenefits/> [accessed 27/05/16] and Perceptions Survey and Social Value Survey (2015), see: <https://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Perceptions-Survey-and-Social-Value-Study-2015.pdf> [accessed 27/05/16]

<sup>23</sup> For further information on Love Parks Week see: <http://www.loveparks.org/home/1816> [accessed 01/08/16]

### 2.3.2 Rethinking Parks programme

Following discussions with HLF about the need to stimulate more innovation in parks, Nesta, the UK innovation foundation that was previously the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts, ran an 18 month innovation programme to find and test the potential for new business models for public parks. Featured as a key action from the first State of UK Public Parks report and funded jointly by HLF, BLF England and Nesta, Rethinking Parks supported 11 projects across the UK to prototype new business models and understand their potential. These were selected from 209 initial applications and a shortlist of 28 projects.

Projects looked at exploring a number of different themes including: Engaging Business – through the establishment of a park improvement district (based on Business Improvement Districts) in Camden, central London; Public Donations – such as the creation of a parks foundation in Bournemouth that could fundraise for parks from in-park contributions, legacies and grants not accessible to local authorities; and, New Forms of Management – that included a more ecologically orientated approach to park maintenance in Burnley, Lancashire.,

Rethinking Parks concluded in early 2016 with two conferences, the publication of a closing report and set of web-based case studies to disseminate the key findings and learning from the programme<sup>24</sup>. The projects brought together a number of organisations to work in partnership with local authorities on their individual projects. New partnerships, where local authorities worked with other organisations, were a key feature of the Rethinking Parks projects. Partnerships included councils with social enterprises (e.g. Burnley Council and Newground – a housing social enterprise), local authorities with private and charitable organisations (e.g. London Borough of Hackney, Groundwork London and Gensler), and councils working with national charitable organisations (e.g. Sheffield City Council and The National Trust).

The National Trust worked with Sheffield City Council to investigate the potential of a Parks Trust supported by an endowment to provide a sustainable future for all parks across a city and is described in more detail as a case study in section five. This approach aligns with the Trust's 10-year strategy<sup>25</sup>, published in 2015, which cited data from the last State of UK Parks report. It includes a strategic objective to help 'look after the places where people live' which will be achieved by investigating sustainable models and options for the future management of parks and green spaces.

### 2.3.3 New funding and management initiatives

The coalition government launched the first round of its Delivering Differently programme in early 2014 to help local authorities transform their public services in order to meet the challenges of reduced public funding. Run jointly by the Cabinet Office, Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Local Government Association (LGA), a subsequent round focused specifically on the delivery of services at a neighbourhood level. A limited number of projects were selected from across a variety of services including education, youth services and social welfare. Just two focused specifically on the redesign of parks and green space service delivery.

Within the first round, Kirklees Council looked at developing an alternative model for managing local green spaces created through housing development. Traditionally this was undertaken

<sup>24</sup> Rethinking Parks final report and case studies are available at: <http://www.nesta.org.uk/event/lessons-rethinking-parks> [accessed 27/05/16]

<sup>25</sup> The National Trust (2015) *Playing our part: What does the nation need from the National Trust in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?* p21, see: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/documents/national-trust-playing-our-part.pdf> [accessed 23/08/16]



using commuted sums paid by the developer or the collection of ground rents by a separate management company. A third-way, which has proved challenging to deliver, has sought to establish modestly funded community-led organisations to take on the responsibility for management.

The London Borough of Lambeth received funding in the second round of the programme to develop more collaborative partnerships with local communities that focussed specifically on local neighbourhood parks. Driven in part by the need to find approximately 50% savings from its parks budget, it has developed a Cooperative Parks<sup>26</sup> programme to support the management of over 60 parks and open spaces. The principal objective has been to build stronger partnerships with community groups to assist, co-manage or even lead on maintaining local parks. Funding through Delivering Differently allowed the council to start to develop more collaborative management frameworks with local friends groups for a small number of 'pioneer parks' including Larkhall Park, Slade Gardens and Myatt's Fields Park, that has also benefitted from HLF funding for its restoration. Whilst it is too early to draw firm conclusions on the merits of this approach it is understood from a recent HLF visit that the community group now responsible for managing Myatt's Fields Park is already experiencing challenges with resources, funding and accessing skilled support.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced the Community Right to Bid which came into operation in September 2012. This provides local people and parish councils with the opportunity to nominate a building or land for listing by the local authority as an Asset of Community Value (ACV). So far more than 3,000 assets of value to communities have been registered, with over 300 of these being parks and green spaces. DCLG's Community Ownership and Management of Assets (COMA) programme has worked with 51 separate partnerships between the voluntary and community sector and local public bodies. It has focussed on the transfer of multiple and often complex assets into community ownership. Local green spaces formed a central part of projects in Kielder, Herefordshire, and Bristol.

Following the change in government and aligned to a Conservative Party manifesto commitment, the DCLG launched a £1.5 million Pocket Parks programme<sup>27</sup> in 2015. Similar in many ways to the Mayor of London's programme, it has provided relatively modest amounts of capital to create up to 100 new pocket parks across deprived urban areas in England. Support for 87 individual community projects has been approved that include a match-funding requirement from councils that can be used to support future maintenance. An interactive map<sup>28</sup> for the programme illustrates distinct clusters of projects around Leeds, Bristol, Birmingham and Wolverhampton.

Supported by DCLG and delivered by Locality, the Community Economic Development (CED) programme<sup>29</sup> was launched in 2015. This will enable 50 areas and communities identify practical ways to develop their local economy and improve engagement to better influence and shape economic development. Community groups, local businesses and public institutions have

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<sup>26</sup> Lambeth Cooperative Parks Programme Information Booklet (2015). See: <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/CoopParksInformationBooklet.pdf> [accessed 03/06/16]

<sup>27</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2015) *Pocket Parks Prospectus*, see: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/474368/151103\\_Pocket\\_Parks\\_Prospectus.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/474368/151103_Pocket_Parks_Prospectus.pdf) [accessed 03/06/16]

<sup>28</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, Pocket Park Map, see: <http://communities.maps.arcgis.com/apps/StoryMapBasic/index.html?appid=eb4c1ca56a4d47cd98a7b9c1dfacd5ed&extent=-16.6977,49.1063,13.3169,55.9339> [accessed 03/06/16]

<sup>29</sup> For further information on Community Economic Development see: <http://mycommunity.org.uk/programme/community-economic-development/> [accessed 24/08/16]

come together to tackle a variety of interrelated environmental, social and economic issues in order to develop a CED plan for their area. Some of these plans have identified where they could develop existing green spaces to bring social wellbeing to those living and working in their community.

The introduction across England of a new charge for plastic bags in autumn 2015 included the requirement to donate the proceeds to charity after deducting reasonable administration costs<sup>30</sup>. It is estimated that more than £70 million a year<sup>31</sup> will be raised through the scheme for good causes which includes funding for local environmental projects. The largest scheme to emerge so far is Tesco's Bags of Help programme that is being used to create and improve community green spaces, including parks, across Britain. Working with Groundwork and Greenspace Scotland, over £11.7 million is currently being invested in a wide variety of local projects. For parks specifically, improvements include fitness equipment in Inverleith Park, Edinburgh, the renewal of a playground in Debdale Park, Manchester, and the establishment of a bat meadow in Bute Park, Cardiff.

### 2.3.4 New policy recommendations

Parks and green spaces have received renewed interest and attention from policy makers and think tanks over the past two years. The Policy Exchange, a centre-right think tank, published two reports that emphasise the importance parks have in the fabric of towns and cities to promote the health and well-being of citizens. The first, *Park Land*<sup>32</sup>, was published ahead of the last State of UK Public Parks report and was followed by *Green Society*<sup>33</sup> that was launched just after the report in autumn 2014. The second report focuses on mechanisms to increase funding for green spaces including the development of park improvement districts, green prescribing, prize incentivised competitions to promote strategic partnerships and the development of endowment funds. Two of these proposals – park improvement districts and endowment funds - have been explored further through the Nesta Rethinking Parks programme and are described in more detail in section 5.6.

A long-standing issue has been the deficiency and fragmentation of green space data across the sector which the *Park Land* report sought to address. A key recommendation was a proposal to develop a standardised urban green space map to understand better the number and extent of publically accessible parks and green spaces across the UK. Work is now being taken forward by the Ordnance Survey in Scotland with the support of the Scottish Government, and in England and Wales, with support of the renamed Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) following a commitment in the Autumn Statement 2014<sup>34</sup>. 'Green space map - Ordnance Survey will create a free online map of all the publicly accessible green space in England and Wales'. This GB-wide open greenspace dataset built through a standardised data specification is now in the pilot stage of development and is scheduled to be published in March 2017. This follows pioneering work by Greenspace Scotland that produced the first comprehensive open data national greenspace map<sup>35</sup>. In London, the City Bridge Trust

<sup>30</sup> England was the last UK country to introduce this charge; following Wales (2011), Northern Ireland (2013) and Scotland (2014)  
<sup>31</sup> See: The Guardian, 21/02/16. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/feb/21/sainsburys-lags-behind-rivals-in-plastic-bag-charity-donations-1p> and Tesco. <http://www.tesco.com/carrier-bags/> [accessed 03/06/16]

<sup>32</sup> Policy Exchange (2013) *Park Land: how open data can improve our urban green spaces*. Drayson, K & Ed. Newey, G.

<sup>33</sup> Policy Exchange (2014) *Green Society: policies to improve the UK's green spaces*. Drayson, K & Ed. Newey, G.

<sup>34</sup> HM Treasury (2014) *Autumn Statement 2014*, para 2.219. p88  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/382327/44695\\_Accessible.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/382327/44695_Accessible.pdf) [accessed 24/08/16]

<sup>35</sup> For further information on Scotland's Greenspace Map see: <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/scotlands-greenspace-map.aspx> [accessed 03/06/16]



has developed a London-wide map of parks and green spaces. Parklife LDN<sup>36</sup> provides a TripAdvisor-style website allowing individuals and organisations to post information, images and comments on their local parks. Interactive mapping can automatically link to smartphone and tablet users to guide them to their nearest parks.

The Fabian Society, Britain's oldest think tank, published *Places to Be*<sup>37</sup> in early 2015. This drew heavily on the findings in the State of UK Public Parks 2014 to address the fiscal challenges of supporting parks and green spaces through an extended period of austerity. In describing an 'existential crisis' being faced by green spaces during the course of the current parliament, the report sets out proposals to reshape the role of local government and facilitate a more strategic and popular environmentalism. It describes a number of opportunities for communities to take a structured and active role in the development and management of their local neighbourhoods including their parks and green spaces. Fundamentally, it argues, solutions must look beyond simply finding ways to manage land at the lowest public cost. National and local government needs to offer clearer leadership and be better organised to facilitate and harness the power of positive and productive community action.



Image: Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh © Peter Neal

An innovative tool to capture the content and quality of places has been developed in Scotland through a partnership between the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland and Architecture and Design Scotland. Launched in December 2015, the Place Standard<sup>38</sup> recognises the role of natural spaces (including parks, woodlands and other green spaces) in creating higher quality places. It provides a framework for articulating, identifying and creating good, sustainable places that can benefit physical and mental health and wellbeing, improve air quality, encourage wildlife and provide greater opportunities for play and recreation.

Since the publication of the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UKNEA) in 2011, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has been developing its

<sup>36</sup> To access the Parklife LDN map developed by the City Bridge Trust, visit <http://parklifelondon.org/> [accessed 03/06/16]

<sup>37</sup> Fabian Society (2015) *Places to Be: green spaces for active citizenship*. Wallis, E.

<sup>38</sup> For further information on The Place Standard for Scotland, see: <http://www.placestandard.scot/> [accessed 23/08/16]

approach to valuing natural capital. The most recent update to the UKNEA<sup>39</sup> published in 2014 notes that urban parks are the most visited spaces and this ‘has a positive effect on well-being through increased enjoyment and/or increased relaxation’. In referencing Birmingham’s Green Infrastructure Strategy it highlights the importance of nature in urban areas. ‘Trees break down air pollution and help reduce noise; and parks and other green spaces help prevent flooding, provide homes for wildlife and are enjoyed by people’. It continues on to acknowledge that these ecosystem benefits have often been overlooked but are now being recognised for providing many valuable ecosystem services that may increasingly provide new sources income in the future.



Image: Preston Park, Brighton © Peter Neal

This process of valuing ecosystem services is an important part of both DEFRA’s Natural Capital Committee<sup>40</sup> and its emerging 25 Year Environment Plan. There is increasing interest in calculating the contribution that parks make to Natural Capital Accounts. *The State of Natural Capital*<sup>41</sup>, the third report from the Natural Capital Committee published in 2015, includes a case study calculating the natural capital benefits of the Crown Estate’s Windsor Great Park. This valued the natural capital benefits of recreation, reducing pollution and carbon sequestration at £49 million across the entire estate. Focused studies have been undertaken for a few individual parks and are in the process of being developed for a number of larger cities in the UK including Sheffield and Birmingham.

<sup>39</sup> National Ecosystem Assessment (2014) *The UK National Ecosystem Assessment Follow-on: Synthesis of the Key Findings*. UNEP-WCMC, LWEC, UK. See: <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx> [accessed 28/07/16]

<sup>40</sup> For further information on the work of the Natural Capital Committee and the Natural Capital Accounting methodology see: <http://www.naturalcapitalcommittee.org/> [accessed 28/07/16]

<sup>41</sup> Natural Capital Committee (2015) *The State of Natural Capital, protecting and improving natural capital for prosperity and wellbeing*. Third report to the Economic Affairs Committee, p9, see: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/516725/ncc-state-natural-capital-third-report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/516725/ncc-state-natural-capital-third-report.pdf)



The Scottish National Performance Framework (NPF)<sup>42</sup> provides a set of indicators to measure various aspects of national and societal wellbeing that include a range of economic, social and environmental criteria and targets. These are updated as soon as the data becomes available providing the ability to assess progress towards the Scottish Government's Purpose and National Outcomes. In March 2016 an updated set of NPF indicators was released including two relevant to parks and green spaces. Measuring the increase in natural capital draws on the Natural Capital Asset Index to monitor annual changes in the quality and quantity of terrestrial habitats and their ability to deliver ecosystem services now and into the future. Measuring improving access to local greenspace assesses the proportion of adults within five minutes walking distance to their nearest local greenspace. Data is drawn from the Scottish Household Survey (referenced in section 3.6.3) and it is understood aspects of greenspace quality will be included in the future.

The Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) published its Culture White Paper<sup>43</sup> in March 2016. This included policies to promote the role of culture in building stronger and healthier communities, acknowledging that greater local and national partnerships are necessary to develop the role of culture in place-making. The only direct reference to public parks notes that the government is continuing to work on plans to merge the Royal Parks with the Royal Parks Foundation to become a single charity. The white paper does pay detailed attention to other local authority cultural assets and acknowledges the challenges and opportunities facing regional and local museums and commits to carrying out a wide-ranging review of museums.

Public parks have gained more direct attention from the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee<sup>44</sup>. The concluding report of committee work published at the end of coalition government acknowledged that 'as financial pressures on local authorities increase, they are likely to place their focus on statutory services, with discretionary services, such as parks, being increasingly squeezed'. With direct reference to the findings of the HLF State of UK Public Parks 2014 report, the committee agreed that 'there might be merit in our successors conducting an inquiry into parks. Amongst other matters, such an inquiry could consider how to secure future funding for parks at a time when local authorities find themselves under increasing financial pressure'.

In early July 2016 Parliament announced that its Communities and Local Government Committee will hold an inquiry<sup>45</sup> into public parks to examine the impact of reduced local authority budgets. In citing evidence from HLF's 2014 report The Committee will look at how parks should be supported now and in the future. This will include a review of alternative management and funding models, such as a mutuals and trusts. In announcing the inquiry The Committee chair, Clive Betts MP, stated that "with councils under enormous financial pressures and with no legal obligation to fund and maintain public parks, these precious community resources may be at risk. The Committee will be asking what the future is for our open spaces

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<sup>42</sup> For further information on the Scottish National Performance Framework, see: <http://www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms> and for the Natural Capital Indicator <http://www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/naturalcapital> [accessed 24/08/16]

<sup>43</sup> Department for Culture Media and Sport (2016) *The Culture White Paper*, see: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/510798/DCMS\\_The\\_Culture\\_White\\_Paper\\_3.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/510798/DCMS_The_Culture_White_Paper_3.pdf) [accessed 27/06/16]

<sup>44</sup> House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (2015) *The work of the Communities and Local Government Committee since 2010*. Tenth report of Session 2014-15. 10 March 2015. Para 124, p48

<sup>45</sup> House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (2016) For further information on the Public Parks Inquiry see: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/public-parks-16-17/> [accessed 28/07/16]

and we want to explore the ways in which parks can be supported and secured for generations to come”.

## 2.4 Austerity and the impact on public services

Funding of local government services is now facing complex and fundamental change. There are increasing demands on local services, large reductions in the level of public funding and the way local authority financing is provided is going through a process of significant restructuring. When combined, these represent very great challenges to those responsible for prioritising, budgeting and delivering these services. At the start of the parliament in 2010, almost 80% of council expenditure was financed by central government, by 2017 the revenue support grant will account for only 16% of spending and by 2019/20 this is projected to be only 5%<sup>46</sup>. This reduction is partially offset by the ability to retain a greater proportion of business rates but ultimately the government plans to eliminate the revenue support grant with local financing primarily provided by council tax and business rates.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has calculated that during the first half of this decade (2009/10 - 2014/15) grants from central to local government in England have been cut by 36.3% overall and 38.7% per person<sup>47</sup>. At the same time, demographic change that includes a growing population, people living longer and more young children, places greater demands on the social care and support services that councils are legally required to deliver. This increasing gap between falling government grants and rising cost pressures is best illustrated by the now infamous ‘jaws of doom’ graph. Prepared originally by Birmingham City Council at the start of the decade, it illustrated the need to save £600 million; nearly half of the city’s controllable spending, by 2016/17. At the time, the council leader Sir Albert Bore suggested the process signified “the end of local government as we know it”<sup>48</sup>.

The LGA represents all councils in England and Wales and has tracked the changing pattern of public funding on a regular basis. Some of its earliest projections suggested cumulative cuts for some services could reach 90% by the end of the decade. The most recent update, published in 2015<sup>49</sup> ahead of last year’s budget and autumn spending review, identified a cumulative reduction in funding of over £9.3 million for the majority of services. ‘With social care and waste spending absorbing a rising proportion of the resources available to councils, funding for other council services drops by 35 per cent or £9.3 billion in cash terms by the end of the decade’. However, the LGA considers this significantly understates the scale of cuts for many non-statutory services, including the maintenance of parks and green spaces, when funding their statutory obligations have to take priority. In its response to the autumn spending review Lord Porter, the then chair of the LGA, suggested that “even if councils stopped filling in potholes, maintaining parks, closed all children’s centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres and turned off every street light, that will not have saved enough money to plug the financial black hole they face by 2020”<sup>50</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> HM Government, Statement by the Secretary of State on the final local government finance settlement for 2016 to 2017, given on 08/02/16, see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/final-local-government-finance-settlement-england-2016-to-2017>

<sup>47</sup> Innes, D and Tetlow, G (2015) *Central Cuts, Local Decision-Making: Changes in Local Government Spending and Revenues in England, 2009-10 to 2014-15*, Nuffield Foundation & Institute for Fiscal Studies, p1

<sup>48</sup> The Guardian, Local government cuts: the ‘Jaws of Doom’ are ready to bite, 18/12/12 See: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/dec/18/local-government-cuts-jaws-doom-bite> [accessed 04/06/16]

<sup>49</sup> Local Government Association (2015) *Future funding outlook for councils 2019/20: interim 2015 update*, June 2015, p14

<sup>50</sup> Local Government Association (2015) *LGA responds to 2015 Spending Review*, 25/11/15, see: [http://www.local.gov.uk/spending-review/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/7586753/NEWS](http://www.local.gov.uk/spending-review/-/journal_content/56/10180/7586753/NEWS) [accessed 04/06/16]

Service area	2010/11 total ('000s)	Share of £1 council tax	2013/14 total ('000s)	Share of £1 council tax	2019/20 total ('000s)	Share of £1 council tax
Arts, museums, libraries, leisure and parks	3,605,310	6.97p	3,261,877	6.81p	1,732,006	4.47p
Road Repairs and street lighting	3,577,871	6.91p	3,413,007	7.13	2,040,965	5.27p
Bin collecting and recycling	3,393,453	6.56p	3,589,836	7.49p	3,795,747	9.81p
Looking after children	6,727,191	13.00p	7,001,479	14.63p	7,896,100	20.40p
Care for vulnerable adults	14,531,283	28.08p	14,711,822	30.73p	15,442,353	39.89p

**Table 2.1** Local government expenditure in England. Source LGA media release 23/03/15 [http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/7134458/NEWS](http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/7134458/NEWS) [accessed 04/06/16]

The table above, prepared by the LGA, illustrates that, over the decade, the funding of statutory services for children and adults is expected to increase significantly. Meanwhile, the funding for non-statutory cultural and leisure services that include parks will receive an increasingly smaller share of council tax by the end of the decade, representing a cut of over 50%. “It is likely that people will be paying similar levels of council tax over the next few years but most will see a lot less in return. People are rightly going to question why their streets and parks are less well kept, the local library is closing and bus services are being cut when they are still paying roughly the same council tax each month”<sup>51</sup> observed Cllr David Sparks the subsequent chair of the LGA.

In England, the New Local Government Network (NLGN) has recently completed a review of the funding for arts and culture over this extended period of austerity<sup>52</sup>. ‘Direct funding from local government to the arts, museums and libraries has been under enormous pressure in recent years as austerity bites, and organisations and services face severe sustainability challenges as a result’. Over the past five years, DCLG local government spending figures for England indicate that spending on arts and culture development and support has declined by 16.6%, from £1.42 billion 2010/11 to £1.2 billion in 2014/15, a reduction of £220 million.

Whilst not definitive, figures compiled for HLF for local authority spending on open space (which includes all types of public open spaces) in England shows a reduction of more than 18%, from £1.19 billion in 2010/11 to £973 million in 2014/15, a cut of £214 million. Comparative figures for NET local authority expenditure on all their open spaces provided by DCLG suggests this has fallen by 16% over five years from £781 million in 2010/11 to just under £654 million in 2014/15. However, it is not possible to calculate the change in expenditure that is specifically for public parks from this available information and it is understood these figures are not adjusted for inflation.

<sup>51</sup> Local Government Association, Majority of council tax will soon be spent on social care 25/03/15. See: [http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/7134458/NEWS](http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/7134458/NEWS) [accessed 04/06/16]

<sup>52</sup> New Local Government Network (2016) *Funding Arts and Culture in a Time of Austerity*. Harvey, A. p6

In Scotland, the Improvement Service's Local Government Benchmarking Framework<sup>53</sup> has compiled and published data over the last five years for a number of indicators for local authority culture and leisure services. This includes the costs of parks and open spaces per 1,000 residents (adjusted for inflation) which indicate expenditure on parks and open spaces decreased from an average of £39,036 per 1000 population in 2010/11 to £31,273 in 2014/15 – a average reduction of around 20%.



Image: Lewisvale Park, Musselburgh © Peter Neal

### 2.4.1 Regional variations in the impact of austerity

Several studies have analysed the effects of austerity across England and, in particular, marked regional variations. Commonly these note that those local authorities in the poorest parts of the country are affected the most. The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) suggests that these places are 'characterised by weak economic bases, have high levels of social need and experience the worst health outcomes'<sup>54</sup>. Parliament's Public Accounts Committee acknowledges that 'authorities in the most deprived areas had received the biggest cuts in spending power'<sup>55</sup>. For some councils, there is a concern that this may bring into question their financial stability as those with the greatest spending needs, that are generally the most deprived authorities, have received the largest reductions.

<sup>53</sup> For further information on the Improvement Service's Local Government Benchmarking Framework, see: <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/cultureleisure.html> [accessed 23/08/16]. Figures referenced from RAW DATA Real Costs table.

<sup>54</sup> Centre for Local Economic Strategies (2014) *Austerity Uncovered*, p22, see: <http://www.cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/TUC-Final-Report-Dec14.pdf> [accessed 04/06/16]

<sup>55</sup> House of Commons, Committee of Public Accounts (2015) *Financial sustainability of local authorities 2014* Thirty-fourth Report of Session 2014–15, printed 19 January 2015, p10



In a recent analysis of the impact of cuts on poorer communities, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)<sup>56</sup> found that cuts are contributing to rising levels of inequality. 'In England, there has been a striking convergence in the levels of funding between more and less deprived authorities'. In an analysis of funding to unitary and metropolitan authorities, it found that the most deprived councils saw cuts of more than £220 per head compared with under £40 per head for the least deprived. This trend is followed for most services including culture and environment, in which parks and green spaces generally sit. These have received higher levels of cuts in the most deprived authorities compared to those that are the least deprived.

As councils seek to adopt strategies to meet their finances, many chose to either invest to save, improve efficiency or reduce the level and amount of services they provide. This is often referred to as a policy of retrenchment. In illustrating specific retrenchment policies, the JRF study included the upkeep of parks with increasing citizen involvement in duties previously undertaken by councils. One particular case study on neighbourhood management notes that: 'While councils had largely protected major, central parks from cuts, changes to the maintenance and regulation of smaller parks and playgrounds can result in local spaces becoming unusable; the combination of seasonal grass cutting and increased amounts of rubbish and dog mess has meant a drop in the standard of cleanliness. Further, a lack of local wardens to monitor spaces has led to reports of 'gangs of young people'.

To date, the general narrative around cuts suggests that frontline services have continued to be protected. However, the JRF research indicates that the public are becoming more aware of the changes in services with general levels of satisfaction with councils beginning to decrease. 'Although the changes in satisfaction levels are not yet large, in virtually all cases satisfaction has fallen and negative responses have increased'. In continuing to monitor expenditure and standards of maintenance on principal parks that have been restored with lottery funding, HLF is fully aware of the unintended impact this may have on smaller local and neighbourhood parks. A key challenge in properly resourcing parks in the future will be to ensure there is adequate and balanced funding for different types of parks across a local authority area.

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<sup>56</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2015) *The cost of the cuts: the impact on local government and poorer communities*, see: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/most-deprived-areas-have-borne-brunt-local-government-budget-cuts> [accessed 04/06/16] p4



Image: Dudhope Park, Dundee © Peter Neal

### 3.0 The commissioned surveys

This section provides an overview of the surveys undertaken for this study. It describes their purpose and content and indicates particular modifications that have been made to the format of the previous surveys. These were undertaken in autumn 2013 and published in the 2014 report. Therefore data drawn from the last report is referenced as 2013 within this new report. The section concludes with a summary of additional studies that have been used to provide further points of reference in the subsequent sections of this report. Three surveys for park managers, friends groups and a public opinion poll have been completed. These give a rounded view of the subject from the perspective of those with a professional responsibility for managing and maintaining parks; voluntary community groups who have a particular interest in the upkeep of their local park; and a wider outlook from the general public. In addition, this time a parks trust survey was also commissioned to collect the views of independent organisations that are starting to become increasingly responsible for managing either individual parks or groups of parks.

The surveys include questions about the current situation in 2016 along with views over the past three years and the next three years. When combined with the previous study, this provides a decade-long perspective that is illustrated in the following table:

Financial year	Year	State of Parks 2014	State of Parks 2016	Number of Years
2010 - 2011	2010	Past three years 2010-12		1
2011 - 2012	2011			2
2012 - 2013	2012			3
<b>2013 - 2014</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Current Year 2013/14</b>	Past three years 2013-15	4
2014 - 2015	2014	Next three years 2014-16		5
2015 - 2016	2015			6
<b>2016 - 2017</b>	<b>2016</b>		<b>Current Year 2016/17</b>	7
2017 - 2018	2017		Next three years 2017-19	8
2018 - 2019	2018			9
2019 - 2020	2019			10

**Table 3.1** Comparison of the dates and financial years covered by the two parks surveys

### 3.1 Park managers' survey

The park managers' survey was an online questionnaire sent to all 418 local authority park managers and park departments in the UK. Since the 2013 survey, the total number of local authorities has reduced slightly from 433 to 418 with the introduction of a new structure for councils in Northern Ireland. Previously there were 26 separate unitary authorities in Northern Ireland but, from the start of April 2015, this number has reduced to 11. These new councils retain their responsibilities for sports, leisure services and recreational facilities along with parks, open spaces and playgrounds.

The survey had 41 mainly closed questions and closely followed the format used in the 2014 study to provide directly comparable results. To avoid duplication and to simplify the process of completion, there were fewer detailed questions on budgets, fees and charging, contracting, and the quantity of parks and green spaces. Current data on these topics are generally available from other sources. There were additional questions on sources of income; alternative forms of management; and changes in specific areas of staffing and skills. These were included as they are considered to be particularly pertinent in the current economic climate.

The survey was conducted over a five week period between 4 April and 6 May 2016. This was a similar length of time to the previous survey, although at an earlier time of the year. It was completed by 196 respondents including 193 different local authorities and three other organisations (2 town councils and a regional park authority). This represents a response rate of 46%. Four authorities completed the survey on behalf of districts where services are combined. Of those authorities that completed the survey, these represent a combined population of over 35 million people or 57% of the UK population. This is a slightly higher proportion than the previous survey.

Type of Authority	2016	2016	2016	2013	2013	2013
	Response	No. of LAs	% of LAs	Response	No. of LAs	% of LAs
District	70	201	34.8%	70	201	34.8%
Unitary	32	56	57.1%	32	56	57.1%
Metropolitan	27	36	75.0%	22	36	61.1%
London Borough <sup>1</sup>	18	33	54.5%	20	33	60.6%
County Council	8	27	29.6%	5	27	18.5%
Northern Ireland Unitary	4	11	36.4%	4	26	15.4%
Scotland Unitary	24	32	75.0%	15	32	46.9%
Wales Unitary	10	22	45.5%	10	22	45.5%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>46.2%</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>41.1%</b>

Notes: <sup>1</sup>City of London Corporation is included in the list of London Boroughs

**Table 3.2** Analysis of park managers' survey returns by local authority type for 2016 and 2013

The 193 authorities provide a fairly representative sample of all types of local authority and a reasonable geographic distribution across the UK - this sample is used for the primary analysis of the survey findings. Where a more detailed regional analysis of the data is undertaken the sample size is inevitably smaller and is noted where this occurs.

	2016	2016	2016	2013	2013	2013
Region	Response	No. of LAs	% of LAs	Response	No. of LAs	% of LAs
North West	20	41	48.8%	17	41	41.5%
North East	8	12	66.7%	6	12	50.0%
Yorkshire & Humber	12	22	54.5%	5	22	22.7%
West Midlands	25	33	75.8%	22	33	66.7%
East Midlands	17	45	37.8%	16	45	35.6%
East	19	52	36.5%	20	52	38.5%
London	18	33	54.5%	20	33	60.6%
South West	14	41	34.1%	18	41	43.9%
South East	22	74	29.7%	25	74	33.8%
England	155	353	43.9%	149	353	42.2%
Northern Ireland	4	11	36.4%	4	26	15.4%
Scotland	24	32	75.0%	15	32	46.9%
Wales	10	22	45.5%	10	22	45.5%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>46.2%</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>41.1%</b>

**Table 3.3** Analysis of park managers' survey returns by region for 2016 and 2013

The 5% increase in the number of responses for this second survey provides the ability to cross reference data from both surveys. There is a particularly strong set of returns from Scotland (75%) and the metropolitan authorities (75%) that represent many of the large urban areas in the Midlands and the north of England. The lowest response rate was received from county councils (30%) who commonly have less responsibility for parks and green spaces. However, this rate was a higher level than the previous survey. The unitary authorities in Northern Ireland had the same response rate to the previous survey although in taking this into account there is now a smaller number of authorities and the sample size is proportionately higher (36%). The distribution of regional responses is more balanced for this survey than the last one with a greater proportion of returns from northern England although responses from the London and the south of the country (East, South East and South West) are lower.

### 3.2 Friends group survey

The friends group survey was sent directly to the 407 organisations that completed the survey in 2013 and provided valid contact details. It was also circulated more widely via local authorities, regional forums and networks of friends groups. The survey included 20 mainly closed questions. To provide directly comparable results to the previous survey, the structure and content follow very closely to that used in the past. Additional questions were included to understand the formal structure and constitution of groups; the trend in condition of parks in the local authority area; as well as more detailed questions on specific activities the group undertakes along with the proportion of time spent on these activities. Two additional questions explored the appetite of the group to take on a more active role in management.

The survey was conducted over the same five week period as the park managers' survey - 4 April to 6 May 2016. This was a week longer and at an earlier time of the year than the previous survey in 2013. It was completed by 441 respondents (436 in 2013) distributed across much of the UK from central Scotland to the south coast of England. This included responses from groups in 119 different local authority areas (123 in 2013) which represent around 30% of all local authorities in the UK. The majority of groups are associated with public parks and, when

combining public parks, public gardens and country parks, this represents a total sample of 361, or 82% of the entire returns. The breakdown of responses and their comparison to the previous survey are presented in the following table.

Type of Open Space	2016	2016	2013	2013
	n <sup>a</sup> (n=441)	% <sup>b</sup>	n <sup>a</sup> (n=436)	% <sup>b</sup>
Public Park	321	72.8%	285	65.4%
Natural and Semi-natural Greenspace (including urban woodland)	80	18.1%	146	33.5%
Outdoor sports facility	31	7.0%	71	16.3%
Amenity Greenspace	174	39.5%	67	15.4%
Public Garden	86	19.5%	54	12.4%
Green Corridor	128	29.0%	53	12.2%
Country Park	109	24.7%	45	10.3%
Allotment, community garden or urban farm	36	8.2%	22	5.0%
Cemetery or burial ground	13	2.9%	8	1.8%

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Total refers to number of groups completing the survey although the sum total of responses is greater as this was a multiple-choice question

<sup>b</sup> Percentages expressed as 'n' divided by total number of groups responding, ie. 441

**Table 3.4** Distribution of Friends Group Survey returns by open space type for 2016 and 2013

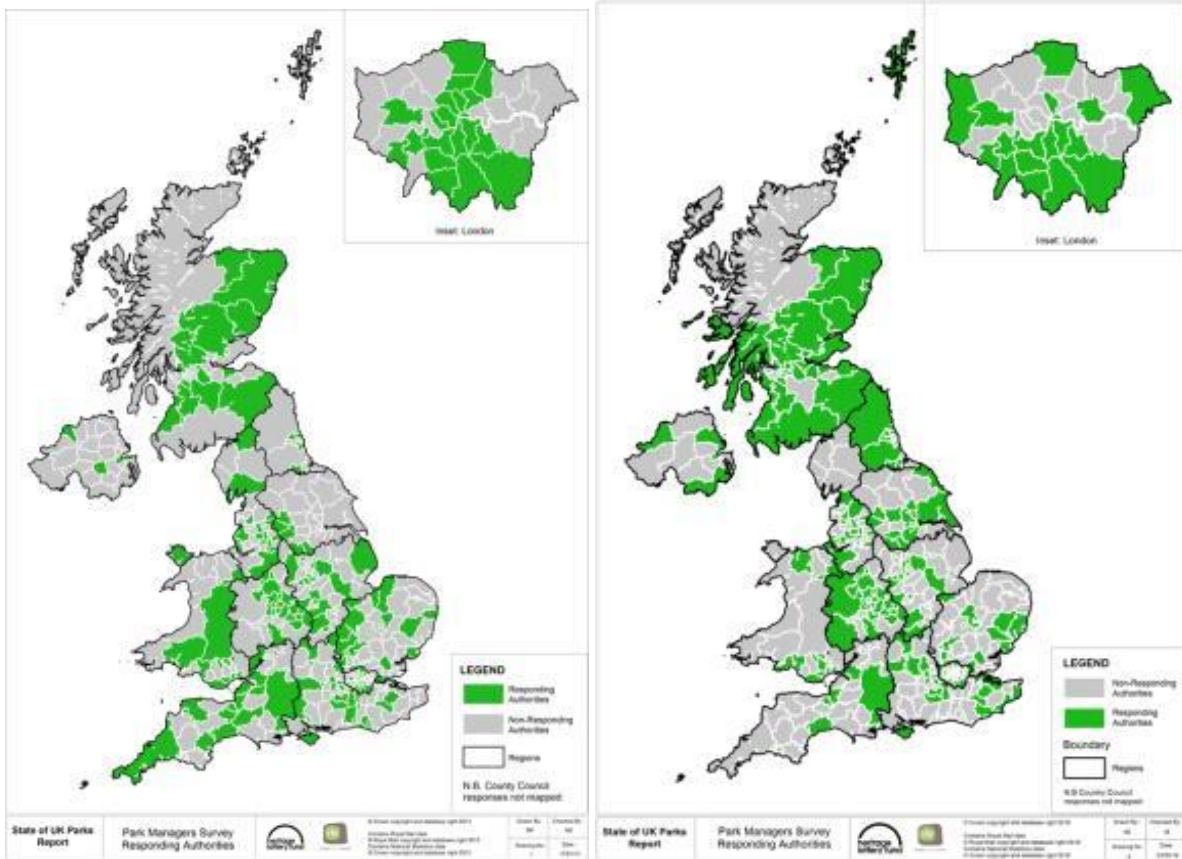


Figure 3.1 Distribution of Local Authority respondents to Park Managers' Survey 2013 (left) 2016 (right) © CFP

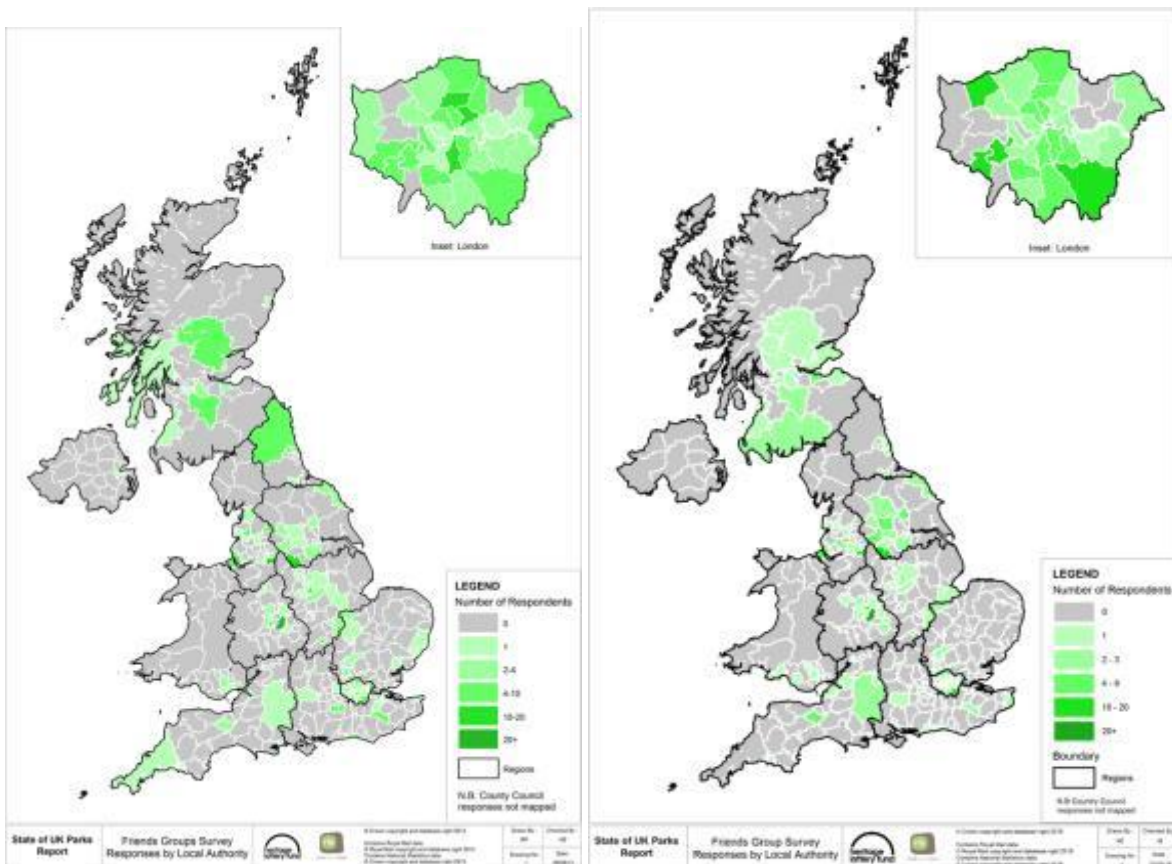


Figure 3.2 Distribution of respondents to Friends and Park User Group Survey 2013 (left) 2016 (right) © CFP



### 3.3 Park trusts survey

Parks trusts were an additional survey for this study. Whilst it is acknowledged that the trust sector in the UK is still small, it was undertaken to see if trusts are facing similar or different challenges to those reported by local authorities. The majority of the survey closely followed the structure of the park managers' survey and used the same question format. Areas of particular interest focused on changes to funding and staffing and the condition and quality of parks.

The survey was sent to 35 trusts identified by HLF; there were 19 replies giving a response rate of 54.3%. The majority of trusts were from England (16 in total) with two replies from Scotland and one from Wales. Two thirds manage a single site (12/19). While the majority of organisations were established from the 1980s onwards, two were set up before the 20th century and two have been formed since 2010. The majority are responsible for managing public parks or natural and semi-natural green space although the full set of returns cover a wide variety of green spaces. These include country parks, sports facilities, allotments, urban farms and a cemetery. Three quarters of the trusts were able to state the total area of their land holdings (14/19) which averages to be around 310 hectares for each. Of the 12 trusts that were able to state their revenue budgets, the average is just over £800,000 each for 2016/17.

### 3.4 Public opinion survey

The public opinion survey was undertaken by BritainThinks, an independent research consultancy. Four of the eight questions were the same as those in the 2013 survey. These asked about: the frequency of use of local parks; opinions on the current condition; the trend in condition of parks over the past three years; and how concerned people are about the impact of reducing council budgets on the condition of their local parks. New questions this year explored opinions on: the trend in condition of various elements of parks in greater detail; priorities for spending; opinions on alternative ways to fund parks; and, to conclude, captured favourite personal memories of parks.

Fieldwork was conducted with a representative sample of 2,130 adults (16+) resident in the UK between 27 and 31 May 2016 using an online survey method. This differed from the previous 2013 survey which was conducted face-to-face and in-home with a sample of 1,037 adults. The online method allowed for more open questioning and is generally easier for respondents to use, especially when answering more complex questions. It was also considered that this approach will present more meaningful responses as respondents could take as long as they needed to answer each question.

The larger sample improves the ability to draw regional analysis from the results. It is recognised that the consistently higher proportion of respondents answering 'Don't know' in this year's survey may be largely attributable to the use of an online rather than face-to-face method. The question on frequency of use identified that 12% of people never visit their local park (in 2013 this was 22%). For some analyses these respondents have been omitted to provide a sample of 'park users only'. In these cases, the sample is reduced to 1,808 and the figures state they are for 'the park-going public' only.

### 3.5 Park Managers and Regional Forums

The contribution and influence of regional forums is apparent through the high level of returns to the Park Managers' and Friends Group surveys. The Core Cities Parks and Green Space

Group, Greenspace Scotland, the West Midlands Parks Forum and the London Parks and Greenspace forum all actively engaged with the study and provide valuable insight through correspondence, workshops and direct meetings.

### **3.5.1 West Midlands Parks Forum**

To establish more detailed and personal perspectives on the issues facing park managers, friends groups and stakeholders, a regional workshop was held in the West Midlands to inform this study. The region was selected as it covers the largest urban population and conurbation outside London. It offers a good variety of urban and rural contexts and includes a variety of different types of councils. In terms of deprivation, the region has some of the most and least deprived authorities in England - Sandwell ranks 9th, Birmingham 13th, Coventry 53rd and Solihull 212th of the 326 English authorities ranked in the index of multiple deprivation.

The workshop was held on 13 May 2016 and attended by 31 participants including representatives from councils in the West Midlands, a trust, independent consultants, a grounds maintenance contractor, members of individual friends groups, a city wide friends forum and a residential organisation. The main focus of the day was a set of structured discussions and several rounds of digital voting on four key themes that were drawn from the first State of UK Public Parks research - external funding; partnership working; asset transfer; and, community involvement. The principal observations and findings are summarised as follows:

#### ***External Funding***

The workshop highlighted the degree to which external funding can support parks, although the benefit this gives can be limited when taking into account the high level of cuts and cost savings being made by councils in the region. Particular funding issues include the difficulty to secure enough match-funding from councils to support bids for grants. The reduction in development staff has also made it harder to find the time and expertise to prepare strong applications for funding. This has led to a more reactive and opportunistic approach to generating external funding rather than adopting a more strategic and long-term plan. A further issue is that external funding is generally dedicated to capital programmes rather than supporting the revenue costs for on-going maintenance. This lack of revenue to maintain capital investments is a growing concern for councils that are keen to avoid any increase in their maintenance responsibilities.

Whilst there is a growing demand for park services and an increasing drive to run more activities and programmes to generate income, this has to be achieved with fewer staff. Some parks are more suitable for self-financing strategies but these tend to be the larger country parks with more space, the ability to charge for car parking and able to derive other sources of income from cafés, concessions and charging for facilities. The increasing commercialisation of parks in some areas is facing public opposition where this has an impact on free access or has adversely affected the structure and layout of parks.

#### ***Partnership Working***

Some authorities have been successful in developing partnerships with third sector organisations and community groups which has led to an increasing number of visitors to parks. However, it is perceived that this approach may have a net loss when taking into account the impact of heavier use, the wear and tear on the fabric of parks and higher levels of littering that all add to the level of maintenance costs. It was acknowledged that some return can be obtained through the secondary spend associated with events and more visitors but this did not generally generate a significant increase in income. Political influences also have to be taken

into account where some approaches to income generation are likely to have greater public opposition than others.

### ***Asset Transfer***

This is currently occurring on a small scale as local authorities rarely have a strategic and long-term strategy in place for asset transfer. This issue is compounded by the fact that many local authorities no longer have an up to date green space strategy that could set out an agreed approach to this issue. There is also the view that income generated through the disposal of assets is often small in scale and this requires a significant amount of officer time and resources to secure. These additional costs are generally not taken into account when considering an approach to the transfer or disposal of green spaces.

Whilst the income generated can contribute to future maintenance costs, asset transfer is often very contentious and politically sensitive and therefore has limited value as an alternative model of funding and management. In some cases, asset transfer can fail and councils end up having to take back facilities or land. On return these assets can be in a poorer condition than when transferred, incurring additional costs that outweigh many of the advantages. A growing trend is for new green spaces created through development to be adopted and maintained by independent management companies. These often operate and deliver varying standards of quality and it is generally considered that local authorities are far better placed to maintain consistency across the district.

### ***Community Involvement***

A common view is that there is an increasing need to develop a broader base of skills to engage with and support a greater participation of communities. Consultation with and the participation of communities should be considered in a much wider manner than being narrowly focused to friends and user groups. More volunteer opportunities need to be offered to take into consideration the motivation and training needs of participants at the outset. This will help to achieve improved outcomes, higher levels of volunteer satisfaction and better skills and expertise for all involved. Many volunteers do not have enough time to participate in traditional volunteering activities so a greater variety of activities need to be offered. This may include micro-volunteering on small tasks, support with marketing and stakeholder engagement in addition to more traditional outdoor maintenance activities. Having a stronger and adequately resourced volunteer coordinator within park services is seen to be the most appropriate means to facilitate this. At present councils do not consider they would have the capacity or resources to support such a post even though it is acknowledged that it would be of direct benefit to the wider operation of park services.

### ***Concluding observations***

A consistent theme in the workshop was the need for more funding and resources that could be used to apply for external funding, to support partnerships and to increase community involvement. Support to help develop and guide a clearer and more strategic picture of the service was also seen as important. This could be achieved through sharing of best practice, regular monitoring and auditing procedures alongside better structured agreements with stakeholders and partners. It was also considered important to continue to champion and demonstrate the value of parks and green spaces to both government and the general public. Participants expressed particular concern with the current absence of a national voice for parks that is needed to promote the profile and value of parks and their ability to improve the health and wellbeing of communities. Furthermore, a more structured platform is needed to enable the

better sharing of data, project experiences and resources that can help improve the management of parks under increasingly tighter budgets.

Whilst there have been several interventions to address the shortage of resources most are not considered to be large or strategic enough to bridge the growing public funding gap. The particular focus on funding highlighted the need to identify new forms of both traditional and innovative income. It was felt that existing sources of income cannot be relied on too heavily as these have not proved to be a robust model in many cases. Going forwards, improving park management networks is seen to be a key opportunity to share approaches and expertise. Specifically, support and resources are needed to help local authorities transition from the current challenges they are facing to establish more sustainable and robust models of management and development over the next few years. The sharing of best practice, the development of new skills and the ability to establish more commercial and community based partnerships is considered essential. Regional networks have a particular role to play and it is considered particularly beneficial to host at least biannual workshops to collaborate and test alternative funding and management approaches and help collectively establish new models of best practice for the future.

### **3.5.2 Greenspace Scotland Park Managers' Forum**

In 2015, Greenspace Scotland established the Scottish Park Managers' Forum to provide a professional network for park managers from Scottish local authorities. It is one of Greenspace Scotland's responses to the 'Call to Action' in the HLF's State of UK Public Parks 2014 and is supported by a HLF start-up grant of around £10,000. It connects over 130 local authority officers from all 32 Scottish local authorities.

The Forum supports the professional and operational development of park managers – enabling them to share practice across council areas, develop skills and explore challenges so that they can more effectively and efficiently manage Scotland's parks heritage. Much of its focus is responding to the increasingly challenging financial environment for park services that are having to adapt to shrinking resources and fewer staff. Providing opportunities to meet and discuss ways to improve and change delivery, develop best practice and investigate different models of management is greatly valued by participants. It is also significant that one of the highest return rates to the park managers' survey was from Scotland, suggesting that the network is better positioned to collectively respond to broader issues that the sector faces.

A recent forum meeting included two discussion groups held to inform this study by focussing on the impact of austerity and particular challenges being faced by the parks sector in Scotland. The need for improved asset management systems was emphasised to help park managers make better informed decisions. A coordinated system of data capture that could easily be kept up to date would help managers' better coordinate activities and make the most efficient use of more limited resources.

Some managers are starting to consider alternative uses for sites, suggesting that the sale or transfer of green spaces may become more likely. Angus Council provides one such example with the planned transfer of Pitskelly Park to a local football club. The Scottish Community Empowerment Act is expected to promote greater local ownership and there is growing pressure on managers to transfer maintenance responsibilities. For some this will be in entirety, whilst for others this may lead to split responsibilities with the council retaining its role to cut the grass and manage trees. The general view was that whilst the policies for community asset



transfer are in place, most managers report little has yet been transferred so far. This in part can be attributed to the shortage of staff, expertise and time to facilitate this process, an issue that was also highlighted at the West Midlands workshop.

Planning will bring particular challenges as there will be greater pressure to find new sites for housing in the next round of local development plans. This will inevitably include a review of existing council owned green spaces but also take into account those spaces that councils have maintained for years but now find they do not own. There is a growing view that local authorities should focus on managing existing spaces and avoid adopting new areas that have been created through development. Some are considering establishing community development trusts that can operate at arm's length from councils with East Dunbartonshire Leisure and Culture Trust providing one such example. Others have found that asset transfer will not be possible for a number of sites that have either been gifted to councils or have particular covenants and legal restrictions that prohibit specific uses and commercial activities.

### 3.6 Supporting research and the wider evidence base

In addition to the surveys directly commissioned for this research there are a number of other studies that provide a wider evidence base for this study. In recent years a few other organisations have been compiling information that relate to various aspects of parks and park services as part of their wider activities. Where this information is publicly available, or has been shared directly with HLF for this study, this has been used as a point of reference and benchmark to compare with the results of the directly commissioned surveys. The principal studies include:

- APSE Performance Networks
- Natural England's MENE research programme
- The Scottish Household Survey
- Scotland's People and Nature Survey
- Green Flag Award Scheme, currently run by Keep Britain Tidy
- University of Sheffield research into Local Authority Green Space Management

Most studies have been collecting information for several years which provides useful longitudinal sets of data for the parks sector. Specific and relevant findings from these studies are included as points of reference and discussion in the following sections of this report. Their principal focus is briefly summarised as follows:

#### 3.6.1 APSE Performance Networks

The Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE)<sup>57</sup> provides the largest and most regular voluntary public sector benchmarking service in the UK and has been collecting data on key service areas and indicators since 1999. The Parks, Open Spaces and Horticultural Services network compiles data on 38 separate indicators that cover all aspects of grounds maintenance service. This includes maintenance costs, hectares maintained, charge per hectare, playgrounds and environmental practices. In addition, the Land Audit Management System provides a quality inspection system to monitor the quality of grounds maintenance. The group currently includes responses from 64 self-selected local authorities that are able to subscribe to different sets of indicators. APSE regularly publishes state of market surveys, trend analysis

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<sup>57</sup> For further information on APSE Performance Networks see: <http://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/performance-networks/> [accessed 05/06/16]

briefing papers and summary reports. A number of these are made freely available through APSE’s website. Recent parks and green space publications relevant to this study include:

- 2016, April - State of the Market Survey 2016, Briefing 16-15<sup>58</sup>
- 2015, December - Trend analysis 2014/15, Briefing 15-62
- 2015, May - State of the Market Survey 2015, Briefing 15-28

### 3.6.2 Monitoring Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE)

This is an annual survey funded by Natural England, DEFRA and the Forestry Commission. The first survey was undertaken in March 2009 and the survey is now in its sixth year and the following table sets out the annual study and fieldwork dates:

Date	Referred to as:	Fieldwork period
2009/10	Year one	Mar 2009 – Feb 2010
2010/11	Year two	Mar 2010 – Feb 2011
2011/12	Year three	Mar 2011 – Feb 2012
2012/13	Year four	Mar 2012 – Feb 2013
2013/14	Year five	Mar 2013 – Feb 2014
2014/15	Year six	Mar 2014 – Feb 2015

Source: Natural England, Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment, Headline Report from the 2014-15 survey (December 2015) p6.

**Table 3.5** Annual MENE Survey dates for each of the six years that the survey has run

Questions are asked of respondents in England only and at least 800 people aged 16+ are asked questions each week through a face-to-face omnibus survey. A further set of questions are asked monthly that builds up to a cumulative sample set of over 55,696 responses annually. The survey provides information about the relationship between people and the natural environment and mainly focuses on the frequency and types of visits to the natural environment. This includes visits to parks in towns or cities, country parks, allotments, children’s playgrounds and playing fields. The latest data from the study includes:

- 2015, December - MENE headline report: March 2014 to February 2015<sup>59</sup>
- 2015, December - MENE technical report: March 2014 to February
- 2016, February - MENE quarterly report: December 2015 to February 2016

### 3.6.3 The Scottish Household Survey

The Scottish Household Survey<sup>60</sup> provides a variety of information on the characteristics, attitudes and behaviour of Scottish households and individuals on a range of issues. Since its inception in 1998 the structure and survey methodology has developed and been refined. It includes questions on parks and green spaces that provide a relatively complete longitudinal data set from 2007/08 with the results for 2015 due to be published in September 2016. Alongside the section on ‘Visits to the Outdoors and Local Greenspace’ featured in the Annual Report for 2014, Greenspace Scotland provides a review<sup>61</sup> of relevant parks data from the

<sup>58</sup> For APSE State of the Market Survey for Parks and Green Space Services see: <http://apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/members-area/briefings/2016/16-15-local-authority-parks-and-green-spaces-state-of-the-market-2016/> [accessed 05/06/16]

<sup>59</sup> Natural England (2015) *Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment, Headline Report from the 2014-15 Survey*, see: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/481299/mene-headline-report-2014-15.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/481299/mene-headline-report-2014-15.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> Scottish Government, Scottish Household Survey. See: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/16002> [accessed 24/08/16]

<sup>61</sup> For Greenspace Scotland’s information on the Scottish Household Survey 2014 see: <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/scottish-household-survey-shs-2011.aspx> [accessed 24/08/16]

survey. This includes information on access, frequency of use and satisfaction of greenspace and the relationship between greenspace and public health.

### 3.6.4 Scotland's People and Nature Survey

Commissioned in 2013, Scotland's People and Nature Survey (SPANS)<sup>62</sup> will be repeated this year (2016) and every third year until 2022. This provides information on how people in Scotland use, value and enjoy the natural environment, providing a parallel study to England's MENE study. It includes visits to a variety of environments including 'Visits to Urban Greenspace'. A synopsis of the main findings relevant to parks and green spaces has been provided by Greenspace Scotland<sup>63</sup>. This includes data on the proximity to local greenspace, visits to local greenspace and the expectations and perceptions of greenspace.

### 3.6.5 Green Flag Award Scheme

The Green Flag Award Scheme is now in its twentieth year and provides the most commonly used and easily recognised method to measure the quality of parks. The scheme was first run formally by the Civic Trust and has been managed by a variety of organisations over its existence. It is owned by the DCLG and currently delivered under licence by Keep Britain Tidy in partnership with the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens and the National Housing Federation although this is soon up for review.

The eight criteria that are used for assessment provide a rounded view of how each site looks, how well it is maintained and marketed and how the community is involved in its upkeep. Awards can also be given to heritage sites and smaller community spaces. More recently, the scheme has been expanded to include a housing category and is now used in a number of foreign countries including Australia and New Zealand. HLF funded park projects are required to achieve and retain Green Flag Awards for seven years post completion of capital works. HLF/BLF and the projects they have funded are therefore considerable funders of the Green Flag Awards scheme through payment of annual application fees for individual sites.

### 3.6.6 Green Space Management Survey

The Place-keeping Group at the Department of Landscape at the University of Sheffield was commissioned in 2015 to undertake a UK-wide survey into local authority maintenance of parks, green spaces and streets. The INOPS<sup>64</sup> project is a multi-centre comparative study that included partners in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. This is the first UK study of this kind to focus specifically on the delivery of green space and streetscene services. Whilst providing an overview of current arrangements, its particular focus is to understand the impact and effect of austerity on these services.

The Place-keeping Group has developed a national reputation in research on various aspects of management and maintenance and has published the leading text on the subject - *Place-Keeping, Open Space Management in Practice*<sup>65</sup>. The study was led by an online survey that ran between September and November 2015 which asked questions about current management arrangements; the split between in-house, contract and third party providers; strengths, weaknesses and satisfaction with current practice; and, anticipated future trends.

<sup>62</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage (2014) *Scotland's People and Nature Survey 2013/14*, see: <http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1471713.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Greenspace Scotland (2015) *Scotland's People and Nature 2013/14, Findings relating to urban greenspace*, see: <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/scotland%E2%80%99s-people-nature-2013-14.aspx> [accessed 24/08/16]

<sup>64</sup> For further information on the INOPS Study see: <http://www.place-keeping.org/projects/inops/> [accessed 24/08/16]

<sup>65</sup> Dempsey, N, Smith, H and Burton, M Eds (2014) *Place-Keeping, Open Space Management in Practice*, Routledge



Image: Waterloo Park, Norwich © Peter Neal

## 4.0 The principal findings

This section presents the main results from the surveys and is structured around key themes relating to quantity, use, funding, staffing, management and the condition of parks. It principally focuses on reporting UK-wide results from the current State of UK Public Parks research and compares these to the results collected in 2013 and published in the last report in 2014. It also makes reference to research and surveys undertaken by others to provide a comparison with the results. Section five will look at particular themes in further detail, providing a breakdown of the results for each country or region and type of local authority where this is appropriate.

### 4.1 Number of parks and frequency of use

**Public parks continue to be used very regularly, more than half of the UK population visit their local parks at least once a month or more and levels of use are increasing. Young people, families with children and those living in urban areas are particularly regular users.**

The parks sector has found it a continuing challenge to collate and keep up to date robust information on individual parks and wider park services. This includes figures and information for the total number of parks, the total area of parks, visitor surveys across all sites and annual budgets. The shortage of robust data reported in the last survey still appears to be an issue and there is an increase in the number of respondents who have difficulty providing the basic figures for their service.



Do you know the total number of parks and green spaces your council manages?	2016 n	2016 %	2013 n	2013 %
Yes	147	77.8%	147	83.1%
No	42	22.2%	30	16.9%
Total	189	100.0%	177	100.0%

**Table 4.1** Proportion of managers who know the number of their parks and green spaces

Do you know the total area of parks and green spaces your council manages?	2016 n	2016 %	2013 n	2013 %
Yes	110	58.2%	112	64.4%
No	79	41.8%	62	35.6%
Total	189	100.0%	174	100.0%

**Table 4.2** Proportion of managers who know the area of their parks and green spaces

In asking park managers whether they ‘know the total number of parks and green spaces your council manages’ the proportion who do not know is close to a quarter (42/189 - 22.2%) and this has increased since the last survey (30/177 - 16.9% / 2013). In asking ‘do you know the total area of parks and green spaces your council manages?’ the number who are unable to answer rises to over 40% (79/189 - 41.8%) and is again higher than the last survey (62/174 - 35.6% / 2013).

How many of the following types of spaces do you manage?	2016 Public Parks n=134	2016 Country Parks n=127	2016 Green Spaces <sup>1</sup> n=126	2013 Public Parks n=118	2013 Country Parks n=99	2013 Green Spaces <sup>1</sup> n=118
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0	3
Maximum	569	54	12,000	667	61	4,400
Average (mean)	48.8	3.5	453.9	45.0	4.0	331.5
Total	6,540	440	57,191	5,314	395	39,114

Notes: <sup>1</sup>This is the total number of publicly accessible green spaces

**Table 4.3** Number of spaces local authority manages recorded for 2016 and 2013

The most commonly used figure for the total number of parks and recreational open spaces in the UK is 27,000. This was estimated by the Public Parks Assessment<sup>66</sup> (PPA) in 2001. Whilst there is yet to be a more accurately calculated figure, the expectation is that the new open data GB-wide greenspace map (referred to in section 2.3.4) will soon provide a more definite answer to this question. The last State of UK Public Parks survey estimated that the average number of public parks and country parks was approximately 50 per local authority, giving a total of 21,650 across the UK.

<sup>66</sup> Urban Parks Forum (2001) *Public Parks Assessment*. Funded by Department for Transport Local Government and the Regions, the Heritage Lottery Fund, The Countryside Agency and English Heritage, Chapter 3-33



Image: The Level, Brighton © Shaun Kiddell

Using the same approach, this 2016 study calculates a marginally higher average number of parks to be 52 per local authority, which equates to 21,736<sup>67</sup>. The similarity of these two figures, just 86 apart, adds confidence to this estimate. Whilst again lower than the PPA figure of 27,000, it should be noted that the higher PPA figure included all recreational open space<sup>68</sup> that would significantly add to this current figure.

This State of UK Public Parks study found that the average area of all publicly accessible green spaces that individual local authorities manage is 952.4 hectares. This is very close to the 950.2 hectares reported in the last survey. An indicative estimate of the total area of all publicly accessible green spaces local authorities manage in the UK can be calculated by multiplying these average figures by the number of local authorities. The total figure estimated for this 2016 study is around 400,000 hectares<sup>69</sup> in 2013 this was estimated to be around 410,000 hectares.

The total area of parks and recreational open spaces estimated by the PPA in 2001 was 143,000 hectares. The wide discrepancy between this figure and that calculated for the current 2016 study is likely to be attributed to what is or is not included within the different definitions of open space. It is expected recreational open space included parks, playing fields and playgrounds whilst publicly accessible green space will also include amenity green space, natural and semi-natural green space, greenways and green corridors, cemeteries and possibly housing areas and allotments. These will add greatly to the total figure.

<sup>67</sup> This figure for 2016 is calculated as  $52 \times 418 = 21,736$ . The calculation for 2013 was  $50 \times 433 = 21,650$

<sup>68</sup> As there is no standard definition of what Recreational Open Space and Publicly Accessible Green Space includes it is not appropriate to make a comparison between these figures.

<sup>69</sup> This figure for 2016 is calculated as  $952.4 \times 418 = 398,103$ . The calculation for 2013 was  $950.2 \times 433 = 411,437$

#### 4.1.1 The use of parks

Whilst there has been a reduction in the number of authorities undertaking visitor surveys across all their sites, an increasing number of park managers report that they now measure visitor numbers. This has risen from just over 10% in 2013 (20/176 - 11.4%) to almost 40% in 2016 (72/188 - 38.3%). The trend in visitor numbers also shows a modest increase in the past three years although the question was asked differently in the last survey in 2013. Currently 75% of park managers report that visitor numbers have increased. Comparisons between the two surveys are shown in the following table:

What has been the trend in visitor numbers over the past three years (2013-15)?	2016 (n=72)	2013 Across key sites (n=77)	2013 Across the whole authority (n=19)
Increasing	75.0%	70.7%	47.4%
Staying the same	22.2%	24.7%	42.1%
Decreasing	2.8%	5.2%	10.5%

**Table 4.4** The trend in visitor numbers recorded by park managers compared between the 2016 and 2013 surveys

For park trusts, 63% undertake visitor surveys (12/17 - 63.2%) and 92% report visitor numbers have been increasing over the past three years (11/12 - 91.7%).

#### 4.1.2 The frequency of park use

Results from the public opinion poll undertaken for this study show that local parks are a heavily and regularly used public asset. Many surveys, including results from MENE<sup>70</sup> over the past five years and more recently by Fields in Trust (FIT)<sup>71</sup>, formerly the National Playing Fields Association, concur. The principal figures from the public opinion poll on the use of local parks record:

- 11% of people typically use, visit or pass through their local park almost every day; in 2013 this was 12%.
- 57% use, visit, or pass through their local park at least once a month or more; in 2013 this was 54%.
- Only 12% state they never visit their local park.

More detailed figures on the use of local parks are provided in the following tables:

<sup>70</sup> Full details of Natural England's MENE surveys are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results> [accessed 28/07/16]

<sup>71</sup> For further information on the Fields in Trust survey see: [http://www.fieldsintrust.org/why\\_secure.aspx](http://www.fieldsintrust.org/why_secure.aspx) [accessed 06/06/16]

How frequently, if at all, do you typically use, visit, or pass through your local park? (n=2,130)	All Public %	Age 16-17	Age 18-24	Age 25-34	Age 35-44	Age 45-54	Age 55-64	Age 65+
Almost every day	11%		12%	13%	14%	11%	11%	8%
At least once a week	24%	44%	27%	32%	26%	19%	19%	19%
About once a month	22%	18%	29%	25%	21%	20%	21%	17%
Within the last 6 months	12%	13%	12%	10%	12%	12%	12%	12%
Within the last year	7%	6%	6%	4%	5%	8%	7%	10%
Longer ago	10%	11%	6%	4%	7%	12%	13%	16%
Never	12%	7%	4%	8%	11%	14%	15%	16%
Don't know	3%		3%	4%	4%	3%	3%	2%

**Table 4.5** Frequency of total parks visits and the distribution across different age groups

How frequently, if at all, do you typically use, visit, or pass through your local park? (n=2,130)	All Public %	Children aged Under 5 <sup>1</sup>	Children aged 5-10 <sup>1</sup>	Children aged 11-15 <sup>1</sup>	Urban	Sub-Urban	Rural
Almost every day	11%	17%	20%	12%	12%	10%	10%
At least once a week	24%	38%	32%	30%	25%	24%	22%
About once a month	22%	35%	29%	23%	24%	21%	19%
Within the last 6 months	12%	2%	8%	13%	13%	11%	10%
Within the last year	7%	1%	2%	7%	7%	8%	6%
Longer ago	10%	2%	3%	6%	7%	12%	12%
Never	12%	3%	4%	7%	9%	12%	17%
Don't know	3%	4%	2%	1%	3%	2%	4%

Notes: <sup>1</sup>This is the proportion of households with children in particular age groups

**Table 4.6** Frequency of parks visits for households with children and people living urban/ suburban/rural locations in 2016

It is clear from both the current survey and the last that certain sections of the community use their local parks more frequently than others. Young adults, parents with children, those living in urban areas and those from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities are the most regular park users:

- Young adults - people between the ages of 18-24 and 25-34 are the most regular park users. 68% and 70% respectively use their parks at least once a month, this is more than 10% higher than the average of 57% for all users. Those aged 16-17 are also regular park users, whilst people aged over 65 visit parks the least.
- Families with young children - parks are clearly important for parents and those looking after young children. Over half of people with children under 10 in their households visit their local parks at least once a week. Those with children under five are the most frequent park users and 90% visit their park at least once a month. In comparison those households without children this figure is 50%.



- Urban residents - people living in urban locations use their parks more frequently than those in rural areas where 61% of urban residents visit their parks monthly or more compared to 51% for those living in rural places.
- BAME communities – are more likely to be frequent users of their local parks where 45% use their local park at least once a week compared to 34% of White residents.

#### 4.1.3 Increasing levels of park use

Comparing results from the present public opinion poll with the last indicates that the use of local parks is generally increasing. Currently 85% of people have used their local park compared to 78% recorded in 2013. Modest increases in use are also seen across the different frequencies of use where currently 69% of people visit their local park at least once a month compared to 64% recorded in 2013. Age also remains a defining factor where 90% of households with children currently visit their local park at least once a month compared to 83% recorded in 2013.

This increase in use has also been recorded by other surveys and Natural England’s MENE programme is probably the most useful comparative study which has now run for six years. Whilst results are presented in a slightly different manner in each annual and quarterly report it is shown that parks in towns and cities are the most frequently visited destination type and this use is increasing. The rising visitor numbers to parks over the duration of the study is illustrated on the following table:

	Year 1 2009/10 <sup>1</sup>	Year 2 2010/11 <sup>1</sup>	Year 3 2011/12 <sup>1</sup>	Year 4 2012/13 <sup>1</sup>	Year 5 2013/14 <sup>2</sup>	Year 6 2014/15 <sup>3</sup>
Type of Open Space	12 month visit estimate '000 visits	12 month visit estimate '000 visits	12 month visit estimate '000 visits	12 month visit estimate '000 visits	12 month visit estimate '000 visits	12 month visit estimate '000 visits
Park in town or city	677,631	557,838	628,383	709,861	778,000	843,000
Another open space in town / city	226,280	188,684	221,587	247,703	256,000	326,200
Playing field / recreation area	195,411	190,962	228,865	206,731	246,000	306,500
Country park	198,630	176,258	196,595	204,311	208,000	235,800
Children’s playground	82,157	75,804	80,171	85,516	98,000	133,800
Allotment or community garden	17,205	15,637	20,600	22,420	23,000	31,000

Source: <sup>1</sup> Natural England, Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment, Technical Report from the 2014-15 survey (December 2015) table 4-6 p32.

<sup>2</sup> Natural England, Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment, Annual Report from the 2013-14 survey (January 2015) figure 3.4 p22.

<sup>3</sup> Natural England, Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment, Quarterly Report from March to May 2015, figures for June 2014 to May 2015, p3.

**Table 4.7** MENE Six year visit estimates by specific place visited per year in England

Particularly significant headline findings for park from the MENE study are:

- The estimated annual visits taken to locations within towns and cities has increased from 1.16 billion in year one to 1.36 billion in year five

- Parks in towns and cities are the most frequently visited destination type, accounting for 778 million visits in year five increasing to 827 million<sup>72</sup> in year six
- Visits to parks has increased further to 886.3 million over an annual period in the latest figures published for March 2015 to February 2016<sup>73</sup>

This high frequency of park use has also been recorded by the Scotland's People and Nature Survey 2013/14<sup>74</sup>. This found that nearly half of urban residents in Scotland visit their park on a weekly basis. 'In total, adults in Scotland made an estimated 162.6 million visits to local parks and open spaces in 2013/14 – making them the most popular outdoor destination, accounting for 41% of all visits to the outdoors.'

## 4.2 Changes to revenue funding

**Funding to parks and park services has significantly reduced over the decade, over 90% park managers report their maintenance budgets have fallen in the past three years and even more expect their funding will continue to be cut.**

As with many public services, the current park managers' survey and the last highlight that council funding for parks and green spaces has reduced significantly over the past five years, however, there are large variations in the level of these cuts across the UK. It is also shown in the case studies from the core cities in the following section that some authorities cut spending early in this period; others have phased reductions incrementally over the past five years; and, others have sought to protect budgets as a result of public advocacy and corporate priority.

As with information on the numbers and areas of parks, a relatively large proportion of managers could not provide financial figures. Almost 40% of councils are unable to give information on their budgets (73/189 - 38.6%). This figure is 10% higher than the previous survey (51/178 - 28.7%). Similarly, 7 out of 19 parks trusts were also unable to provide data. For the majority of local authorities that were able to provide current annual revenue budgets an average figure can be calculated which can be compared with that from 2013.

- 2016 average revenue budget for all parks and green spaces = £2,566,635<sup>75</sup>
- 2013 average revenue budget for all parks and green spaces = £3,145,135<sup>76</sup>

Whilst these figures only provide an indicative estimate of average local authority revenue budgets, they suggest around 18.4% or £0.5 million (£578,500) has been cut from individual councils' parks and green space budgets between 2013/14 and 2016/17. If multiplied by all 418 authorities, this would represent a reduction of around £240 million across the UK since the last survey in 2013.

It is interesting to note that this average 18% reduction over a four year period aligns with figures compiled for HLF for local authority spending in England on all open spaces

<sup>72</sup> 827 million is the main figure reported in the MENE Headline Report for Year 6 (2014-15), The 843 million figure included in table 4.7 is from the detailed breakdown of June '14 to May '15 visits in the Quarterly Report for March to May 2015

<sup>73</sup> Natural England (2016) *Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment, Quarterly Report - December 2015 to February 2016*, p3, see: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/521334/mene-report-december-2015-february-2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/521334/mene-report-december-2015-february-2016.pdf) [accessed 06/06/16]

<sup>74</sup> Greenspace Scotland (2015) *Scotland's People and Nature Survey 2013/14, Findings relating to urban greenspace*, p12, see: <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/scotland%E2%80%99s-people-nature-2013-14.aspx> [accessed 24/08/16]

<sup>75</sup> Calculated as the total revenue budget for all respondents divided by number of respondents - £292,596,357 / 114

<sup>76</sup> Calculated as the total revenue budget for all respondents divided by number of respondents - £270,481,619 / 86

(summarised in section 2.4). This indicated a reduction of more than 18% representing a cut of £214 million over a five year period from 2010/11 to 2014/15.

The following tables record the level of cuts reported by the park managers' surveys in 2016 and 2013. The largest proportion of park managers (35.7%) report the level of reduction has been between 10% and 20% to their revenue budgets over the past three years whilst cumulatively 68% of managers have faced cuts of over 10%.

<b>Looking back over the past three years (from 2013-15), what would you say the changes in your revenue budgets has been?</b>	<b>2016 (n=168)</b>	<b>2013 (n=163)</b>
Budget Increased	0.0%	6.8%
Not Changed	8.3%	6.8%
Decreased by less than 10%	23.2%	24.7%
Decreased by between 10% and 20%	35.7%	29.6%
Decreased by more than 20%	32.7%	32.1%

**Table 4.8** Change in revenue budgets in the past three years (2013-15)

<b>Looking forward over the next three years (from 2017-19), what would you say the changes in your revenue budgets will be?</b>	<b>2016 (n=173)</b>	<b>2013 (n=163)</b>
Budget Increased	0.0%	3.9%
Not Changed	5.2%	9.1%
Decreased by less than 10%	19.1%	16.9%
Decreased by between 10% and 20%	54.9%	37.7%
Decreased by more than 20%	20.8%	32.5%

**Table 4.9** Expected change in revenue budgets in next three years (2017-19)

Over the past three years, more than nine in ten councils (91.6%) have faced a cut in their revenue budget; this is a higher proportion than in the previous survey (86.4% / 2013). Looking forward to the next three years, the proportion is even higher (94.8%), and is, again, above the figure from the last survey (87.1% / 2013).

No councils expect an increase in their budget over the next three years even though, in real terms, costs are likely to rise. Over half of all councils will face reductions in their budgets of between 10% and 20%, although a smaller proportion will face cuts of more than 20% in comparison to the previous survey (20.8% / 2016 - 32.5% / 2013). A recent APSE survey<sup>77</sup> records a very similar figure where those local authorities who expect a change in their budget over the next year, 90.2% expect a decrease in revenue. And, over the next five years 18.6% of respondents expect a decrease by more than 20%.

Whilst there were limited questions on capital funding in the survey, almost half of park managers expect to have a capital budget to invest in parks and green spaces (88/188 - 46.8%). Whilst totals vary between nothing and £5 million, the average capital budget for next year is expected to be over £0.5 million (£587,004 for 2017/18) and this is anticipated to fall to just under £0.4 million in three years (£388,653 for 2019/20)

<sup>77</sup> APSE (2016) *State of the Market Survey 2016, Local Authority Parks and Green Spaces Services*, Briefing 16-15, p5

In comparison to local authorities, 37% of park trusts have seen an increase in their budget over the past three years (6/16 for 2013-15). For 12.5% of trusts, their budget has not changed, whilst 18.8% faced a decrease by more than 20%. In the next three years, 27% of trusts will see an increase in their budget (4/15 for 2017-19) with just one reporting a decrease of more than 20%. When compared to local authority park managers, 61% of trusts report that they will have a capital budget over the next three years (11/18). On average this is between £130,000 - 140,000 per year. Although the sample size is small, these figures suggest trusts have been less affected by austerity. A good proportion of trusts have also been able to protect and even increase their revenue budgets over the past three years.

### 4.3 Diversifying sources of income

#### Local authorities report increasing levels of park funding from external sources with planning gain remaining the most important contributor followed by charging for services and grants from the National Lottery.

With local authorities facing significant and on-going budget cuts, there is clear need to diversify sources of income. When asked 'what percentage of your budget is from external sources', responses from park managers varied from 0% to 100% for this financial year (2016/17). On average, around a quarter, 22.5%, is from external sources. This mean average rises to 29% when park managers are asked to predict the next three years (2017/19). The main sources of the external funding that has been secured during the past three years are shown on the following table. Results are compared to those from the previous survey. Some sources, such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and health organisations, were new options for 2016 so do not feature in the 2013 results.

In addition to direct council funding, what other sources of funding have been secured in the past three years (2013-15)?	2016 N=189	2016 %	2013 N=168	2013 %
Funding from planning including s106, s75	154	81.5%	150	89.3%
Funding from charging for services	127	67.2%	114	67.9%
Funding from other council departments / services	122	64.6%	86	51.2%
Funding from the National Lottery - HLF, BIG, etc	106	56.1%	111	66.1%
Funding from events and festivals	97	51.3%		
Funding from commercial enterprises / partners	88	46.6%	65	38.7%
Funding from gifts and fundraising	58	30.7%	54	32.1%
Funding from health organisations	40	21.2%		
Other	30	15.9%		
Funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	26	13.8%		
None	2	1.1%		

**Table 4.10** Sources of additional funding for parks and green spaces for 2016 and 2013

The greatest source of external funding for parks comes from planning gain that combines both traditional s106 (s75 in Scotland and Article 40 in Northern Ireland) income with CIL. This is used by over 90% of all park managers. It is likely that the approximate 10% fall in income from s106 since 2013 may be attributed to the change in legislation governing planning gain. However, this reduction appears to have been supplemented by income from CIL. The same proportion of managers from each survey gain income by charging for services (67%) and over half of all councils still benefit from funding from the National Lottery (56%).

The results also show that over half of respondents receive income from commercial sources that include events and festivals (51%) and commercial enterprises (47%). Income from health organisations is also used by one in five park managers (21%). Managers were also asked ‘where are your top five priorities for generating income’ and the results are listed in the following table:

Where are your top 5 priorities for generating income?	2016 N=181	2016 %
Use of facilities e.g. buildings	105	58.0%
Pitches and sports use	104	57.5%
Refreshment provision / catering	99	54.7%
External (commercial) events	89	49.2%
Cemetery and Crematorium fees	82	45.3%
Car parking	71	39.2%
Internal recharges	58	32.0%
Allotment fees	45	24.9%
Council run events	43	23.8%
Other	32	17.7%
Commercial filming and photography	24	13.3%
Educational visits	18	9.9%

**Table 4.11** Priorities for generating income for parks and green spaces in 2016/17

The use of existing park facilities provides the main priorities for generating income. Over half of managers use of facilities, such as buildings, for occasional, short or long-term rent along with charging for the use of sports pitches. The provision of on-site refreshments and catering is also a principal source of income as is the running of external and commercial events. APSE’s most recent State of the Market Report also asked local authorities what areas they intend to increase fees and charges over the next three years and the order of priorities recorded are relatively similar:

- 69.4% Sports pitch lettings
- 53.1% Festivals / concerts / events
- 49.0% Allotments
- 46.9% Fairgrounds
- 44.9% Bowling greens
- 32.7% Ice cream vans / mobile caterers
- 32.7% Car parking charges

The majority of ‘other’ income generating measures noted by park managers focus on the selling of professional services and the carrying out of works for external clients. One respondent noted service level agreements with schools and housing providers whilst, for another, contract work includes external grounds maintenance, landscape, arboricultural and ecological services. In addition, one individual council runs a Japanese knotweed pesticide gang for external contracts. Income from angling club licences, along with a narrow gauge railway operator, golf course operator and in-house cycle hire operation were also stated as other forms of income by individual authorities.

When asked ‘Are you able to ring-fence income within the park and green space service’, just over half of park managers stated that they could (99/184 - 53.8%). This suggests that



approximately half of park managers can guarantee that the income generated for the service can be ploughed back into parks and green spaces.

For park trusts, their principal sources of income over the past three years have been from events and festivals (12/19), gifts and fundraising (11/19) and charging for services (11/19). Over half of all trusts benefit from National Lottery grants, funding from local authorities and commercial enterprises. Other sources include rental, income gift shop revenue, weddings, donations and log sales.

#### 4.4 Changes to staffing and skills

**There is a continuing loss of parks staff, three quarters of park managers report a reduction in numbers and over the next three years no local authorities expect to increase the size of their workforce. The front line horticultural skills of operational staff, needed to properly maintain parks, are declining the most.**

The last survey highlighted a very significant reduction in staff in the parks sector. Over three quarters of all local authorities reduced staff between 2010 and 2012 with the numbers of management staff being cut the most. It was found that 81.3% of councils lost management staff and 77.4% lost operational staff. This 2016 survey explored the issue in greater detail and included questions on changes to staffing levels across operational, managerial and developmental teams. These were chosen as all have specific roles to deliver, develop and reposition park services in the future. Figures for staffing for the past and next three years are presented in the following table:

Over the past / next three years, what has been / will be the change in staffing levels for:	2013-15	2017-19
<b>Front line operational staff</b>	(n = 164)	(n = 132)
Staffing increased	0.0%	0.0%
Not changed	28.7%	23.5%
Decreased by less than 10%	20.1%	22.0%
Decreased by between 10% and 20%	29.9%	40.9%
Decreased by more than 20%	21.3%	13.6%
<b>Management staff</b>	(n = 156)	(n = 120)
Staffing increased	0.0%	0.0%
Not changed	25.0%	22.5%
Decreased by less than 10%	18.6%	19.2%
Decreased by between 10% and 20%	27.6%	35.0%
Decreased by more than 20%	28.8%	23.3%
<b>Development staff</b>	(n = 137)	(n = 99)
Staffing increased	0.7%	0.0%
Not changed	22.6%	36.4%
Decreased by less than 10%	16.8%	11.1%
Decreased by between 10% and 20%	19.0%	24.2%
Decreased by more than 20%	40.9%	28.3%

**Table 4.12** Changes to local authority parks and green space staffing for 2013-15 & 2017-19

With the exception of a negligible increase in development staff, no local authority has either increased the numbers of parks and green space staff or proposed to do so in the next three years. On average, three quarters of all park managers report staff reductions over the past three years and expect this to continue over the next three.

Front line operational staff levels still appear to be falling at a similar rate to that recorded in the last survey. 71% of managers report a reduction in operational staff in the past three years and 77% expect a further reduction in the next three years. The reduction in management staff is moderately lower than the last survey. 75% of managers report a reduction in management staff the last three years and 78% expect a reduction in the next three years. The proportion of local authorities that have reduced development staff in the past three years is 77% which is similar to the other two groups. What is particularly marked is the high proportion of park managers (41%) reporting a decrease of more than 20% for development staff over the past three years. However, expected reductions in development staff are lower (64%) over the next three years. This may be due to the fact that these skills are expected to be more in demand in the future or simply because there has already been a high loss of these posts.

The 2016 survey also included a more detailed analysis of changes to specific skills both over the past three years and what is expected over the next three years. The results for these questions are shown on the following tables:

Looking back over the past three years can you tell us how the levels of skills have changed?	n	2013-15 Increased	2013-15 The same	2013-15 Declined
<b>Front line operational staff</b>				
Horticultural skills	185	13.0%	45.9%	41.1%
Landscape design	182	6.0%	66.5%	27.5%
Ecological skills	184	16.3%	62.5%	21.2%
<b>Management staff</b>				
Financial management	187	32.1%	58.8%	9.1%
Sourcing external funding	186	36.0%	48.4%	15.6%
Strategic planning skills	187	33.2%	49.7%	17.1%
<b>Development staff</b>				
Developing projects	185	37.8%	47.6%	14.6%
Partnership working	184	48.4%	42.9%	8.7%
Community engagement	184	47.3%	40.8%	12.0%

**Table 4.13** Changing skills in operation, management and development staff 2013-15

Looking forward to the next three years can you tell us how you expect the levels of skills to change?	n	2017-19 Increased	2017-19 The same	2017-19 Declined
<b>Front line operational staff</b>				
Horticultural skills	183	16.4%	48.6%	35.0%
Landscape design	181	8.8%	60.2%	30.9%
Ecological skills	182	17.0%	55.5%	27.5%
<b>Management staff</b>				
Financial management	185	35.1%	56.2%	8.6%
Sourcing external funding	183	50.8%	37.2%	12.0%
Strategic planning skills	181	35.9%	51.4%	12.7%
<b>Development staff</b>				
Developing projects	182	40.1%	45.1%	14.8%
Partnership working	182	49.5%	36.8%	13.7%
Community engagement	182	46.7%	39.6%	13.7%

**Table 4.14** Changing skills in operation, management and development staff 2013-15

The most distinctive trend in skills is the decline in front line horticultural skills. The proportion of park managers recording these have fallen in the past three years (41.1%) and the next three years (35.0%) is the highest of all skills analysed. This is followed by landscape design and ecological skills. Particular skills that are recorded to be increasing and will continue to increase include those for sourcing external funding, developing projects, partnership working and community engagement.

Managers were asked ‘how important do you think these skill areas will be to the future of the service’. The following list places these skills in order of priority and combines the proportion of responses for ‘extremely important’, ‘very important’ and ‘important’:

- Financial management – 94.7% (n=188 : 58.0% extremely; 36.7% very)
- Sourcing external funding - 92.0% (n=187 : 57.8% extremely; 34.2% very)
- Partnership working - 90.3% (n=186 : 51.6% extremely; 38.7% very)
- Community engagement - 88.7% (n=186 : 48.9% extremely; 39.8% very)
- Developing projects - 80.6% (n=186 : 34.4% extremely; 46.2% very)
- Strategic planning skills - 80.3% (n=188 : 44.1% extremely; 36.2% very)

This clearly shows the primary focus for skills development in the future will concentrate on financial expertise and greater need for partnership working and engaging with communities. This correlates with the trend towards a more mixed and diverse approach to managing parks and green spaces that will be discussed in following sections of this report. It is also a clear response to the need for park services to generate more external income and become more entrepreneurial in practice.

At the same time it is a concern that all three operational skills are considered less important by park managers when compared to other skills going forwards. Landscape design is ranked the lowest on the list - 39.1% (n=187 : 11.8% extremely; 27.3% very), followed by ecological skills 57.2% (n=187 : 11.8% extremely; 27.3% very) and horticultural skills – 59.9% (n=187 : 20.9% extremely; 39.0% very). This suggests that the specific skills and niche expertise required to properly manage landscapes will be increasingly eroded in the future.

Park trusts have seen more stable staffing levels with a good proportion also reporting increasing numbers for the past three years. This is set to be repeated over the next three years. Whilst the sample size is small and figures can only be considered indicative, the following table offers a comparison of trust staffing to local authorities.

Over the past / next three years, what has been / will be the change in staffing levels for:	2013-15	2017-19
<b>Front line operational staff</b>	(n = 15)	(n = 11)
Staffing increased	20.0% (3)	18.2% (2)
Not changed	46.7% (7)	45.5% (5)
Decreased by less than 10%	0.0 (0)	0.0% (0)
Decreased by between 10% and 20%	20.0% (3)	27.3% (3)
Decreased by more than 20%	13.3% (2)	9.1% (1)
<b>Management staff</b>	(n = 14)	(n = 10)
Staffing increased	28.6% (4)	20.0% (2)
Not changed	42.9% (6)	50.0% (5)
Decreased by less than 10%	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Decreased by between 10% and 20%	14.3% (2)	30.0% (3)
Decreased by more than 20%	14.3% (2)	0.0% (0)
<b>Development staff</b>	(n = 13)	(n = 12)
Staffing increased	30.8% (4)	33.3% (4)
Not changed	46.2% (6)	25.0% (3)
Decreased by less than 10%	0.0% (0)	8.3% (1)
Decreased by between 10% and 20%	7.7% (1)	25.0% (3)
Decreased by more than 20%	15.4% (2)	8.3% (1)

**Table 4.15** Recent and expected changes to park trust staffing for 2013-15 and 2017-19

Park Trusts were asked the same questions about the trends and priorities for skills going forwards. Whilst the sample size is small, management and development skills have increased the most over the past three years and these are expected to continue to grow in the future. The relative importance of different skills going forwards follows the same trend as that reported by local authorities. Sourcing external funding, partnership working, developing projects and financial management are all reported to be the most important whilst landscape design, horticultural skills and ecological skills are considered to be the least important.

#### 4.5 Trends in quality and condition

**Whilst at least half of all park managers, friends groups and the public consider their parks are currently in a good condition, more than a third of all park managers and friends groups expect their parks to be declining in condition over the next three years.**

Views on the quality and condition of parks are an important element of this study. To gain a rounded view, the same questions on current condition and the trend in condition over the past three years has been asked in all surveys. For continuity this also follows the same format used in the PPA in 2001. Park managers, park trusts and friends group surveys also ask about the expected trend in condition over the next three years and the results are given in this section.

**4.5.1 Measuring quality**

Park managers were also asked what systems they use for measuring the quality of their parks. The results show a modest reduction in the number of councils undertaking quality assessments since the last survey.

- 69.7% use the Green Flag Award system, negligibly down from 71.2% in 2013
- 31.4% use their own system, also down from 38.4% recorded in 2013
- 15.4% have no system for measuring quality, up from 10.7% in 2013
- 11.7% use another system, also up from 7.3% in 2013

Parks trusts also favour the Green Flag Award with 10 using the scheme, 7 using their own system and 3 have no system for measuring quality

**4.5.2 Current condition**

Figures for the current condition and the trend in condition over the past and next three years are set out in the following three tables along with results from the PPA in 2001 for comparison:

What do you consider to be the current condition of your public parks?	2016 Park Managers (n=189)	2016 Friends Groups (n=359)	2016 Park Trusts (n=19)	2016 General Public <sup>1</sup> (n=2,130)	2001 PPA (n=339)
Good	52.9%	49.6%	68.4%	49%	18.0%
Fair	45.5%	43.7%	31.6%	33%	69.0%
Poor	1.6%	6.7%	0.0%	6%	13.0%

Notes: <sup>1</sup>These figures do not add up to 100% as 12% stated they ‘Don’t Know’

**Table 4.16** Current condition of parks recorded by park managers, trusts, friends groups and the general public in 2016

For the current condition of parks:

- Parks in a Good Condition - Around half of all park managers, friends groups and the general public consider their parks to be in a good condition which indicates a close consensus of views. A higher proportion of park trusts are reporting their parks to be in a good condition.
- Parks in a Fair Condition - Just under half of park managers and friends groups consider their parks are currently in a fair good condition whilst approximately 30% of park trusts and the general public share this view.
- Parks in a Poor Condition - The same percentage of friends groups and the general public report their parks to be in a poor condition - this is 6%. Less than 2% of park managers report this to be the case whilst no park trusts currently report that their parks are in a poor condition.

This also highlights that the proportion of park managers currently reporting their parks to be in a good condition is much higher than that reported by the PPA in 2001. There are also a much lower proportion of managers reporting parks in a poor condition.



**4.5.3 Trend in condition over the past 3 years**

What do you consider to be the trend in condition of your public parks over the last three years?	2013-15 Park Managers (n=189)	2013-15 Friends Groups (n=360)	2013-15 Park Trusts (n=19)	2013-15 General Public <sup>2</sup> (n=2,130)	2001 PPA <sup>1</sup> (n=334)
Improving	27.0%	42.2%	63.2%	20%	29.4%
Stable	55.0%	26.9%	21.1%	53%	33.2%
Declining	18.0%	30.8%	15.8%	10%	37.4%

Notes: <sup>1</sup>PPA asked the trend in condition over the last 10 years

<sup>2</sup>-These figures do not add up to 100% as 17% stated they ‘Don’t Know’

**Table 4.17** Trend in condition of parks recorded by park managers, friends groups, trusts and the general public for the past three years (2013-15)

For the trend in condition of parks over the past three years (2013-15):

- Parks in an Improving Condition - The highest proportion of park trusts followed by friends groups, 63% and 42%, report their parks to be in an improving condition. In comparison a lower and similar proportion of park managers and the general public report this to be the case - 27% and 20% respectively.
- Parks in a Stable Condition - Again, a similar proportion of park managers and the general public report their parks to be in a stable condition. This is around half, whilst approximately a quarter of friends groups and park trusts report this.
- Parks in a Declining Condition - A similar proportion of park managers, park trusts and the public, approximately 15%, report their parks to be in a declining condition. However around 30% of friends groups report this to be so which is twice as high as the other groups.

It is interesting to see that a greater proportion of park trusts and friends groups consider their parks to be in an improving condition. This may indicate the value of these groups focusing on improving specific parks that they have a vested interest in. The higher proportion of friends groups reporting their parks to be in a declining condition may also suggest that through local action these groups have been formed to tackle concerns about the condition of their local park.

#### 4.5.4 Trend in condition over the next 3 years

What do you consider to be the trend in condition of your public parks over the next three years?	2017-19 Park Managers (n=189)	2017-19 Friends Groups (n=359)	2017-19 Park Trusts (n=19)	2017-19 General Public	2001 PPA <sup>1</sup> (n=334)
Improving	19.6%	32.9%	57.9%	n/a <sup>2</sup>	29.4%
Stable	41.8%	29.2%	26.3%	n/a	33.2%
Declining	38.6%	37.9%	15.8%	n/a	37.4%

Notes: <sup>1</sup>PPA asked the trend in condition over the last 10 years

<sup>2</sup>The public opinion poll did not ask this question

**Table 4.18** Trend in condition of parks recorded by park managers, friends groups and trusts for the next three years (2017-19)

For the expected trend in condition of parks over the next three years (2017-19):

- Parks in an Improving Condition - The highest proportion of park trusts, 60%, expect their parks to continue to improve. Only a third of friends groups, 33%, report this and less than a quarter of park managers, 20%, expect their parks to be improving.
- Parks in a Stable Condition - The largest number of park managers, 42%, expect their parks to be in a stable condition whilst a lower proportion of friends groups, 29%, and park trusts, 26%, expect this to be the case.
- Parks in a Declining Condition – A near identical number of park managers and friends groups, 38%, expecting their parks to be declining and this is increasing. It is a concern that this is the same proportion recorded by the PPA in 2001, although it should be noted that this was looking at the condition of parks over the previous ten years during the 1990s.

Whilst views on the current condition and expected trend in condition of parks vary across the 2016 surveys some general conclusions can be drawn from the results:

- Park Managers – over half consider their parks to be in a good condition and have been stable over the past three years. In the next three years fewer managers expect to have improving parks, 27% down to 20%, and even more expect to have declining parks, 18% up to 39%.
- Friends Groups – follow a similar pattern to the park managers although this is more accentuated. Half of all groups report their parks are currently good, more consider they have been improving and more report them to be declining. Going forwards fewer expect their parks will continue to be improving, 42% down to 31%, and more expect them to be declining, 31% up to 38%.
- Park Trusts – whilst the sample size is much smaller trusts report the highest proportion of good quality parks. Over two thirds, 68%, consider their parks are currently good, a similar number, 63%, consider they have been improving in the past three years and a higher number, 58%, anticipate this to continue.
- The General Public – Again half, 49%, consider their local park to be in a good condition and stable, 53%. Although much fewer people consider they have been improving, 20%, or declining, 10%, over the past three years.

### 4.5.5 Comparison between 2013 and 2016 surveys

Results from the three 2016 surveys can also be compared with the results from 2013 to identify indicative trends in the changing condition of parks. These are set out in the following three tables.

What do you consider to be the current condition of your public parks?	2016 Park Managers (n=189)	2013 Park Managers (n=176)	2016 Friends Groups (n=359)	2013 Friends Groups (n=347)	2016 General Public (n=2,130)	2013 General Public (n=1,037)
Good	52.9%	59.7%	49.6%	50.1%	49%	44%
Fair	45.5%	38.6%	43.7%	39.5%	33%	38%
Poor	1.6%	1.7%	6.7%	10.4%	6%	10%

**Table 4.19** Comparison of 2016 and 2013 survey results for the current condition of parks recorded by park managers, friends groups and the general public

What do you consider to be the trend in condition of your public parks over the last three years?	2013-15 Park Managers (n=189)	2010-12 Park Managers (n=175)	2013-15 Friends Groups (n=360)	2010-12 Friends Groups (n=345)	2013-15 General Public (n=2,130)	2010-12 General Public (n=1,037)
Improving	27.0%	41.1%	42.2%	47.0%	20%	25%
Stable	55.0%	41.7%	26.9%	27.2%	53%	53%
Declining	18.0%	17.1%	30.8%	25.8%	10%	13%

**Table 4.20** Comparison of 2016 and 2013 survey results for the trend in condition of parks recorded by park managers, friends groups and the public in the last three years

What do you consider to be the trend in condition of your public parks over the next three years?	2017-19 Park Managers (n=189)	2014-16 Park Managers (n=174)	2017-19 Friends Groups (n=359)	2014-16 Friends Groups (n=346)	2001 PPA <sup>1</sup> (n=334)
Improving	19.6%	21.3%	32.9%	32.4%	29.4%
Stable	41.8%	41.4%	29.2%	34.1%	33.2%
Declining	38.6%	37.4%	37.9%	33.5%	37.4%

**Table 4.21** Comparison of 2016 and 2013 survey results for the expected trend in condition of parks recorded by park managers and friends groups in the next three years

Results from both sets of surveys indicate reasonable continuity with generally modest changes between each of the two surveys. In comparing results for 2016 and 2013 on the current and trend in condition of parks:

- **Good and Improving Parks** – the general trend for park managers and friends groups indicates a decline in both good and improving parks. Park managers report this more clearly than friends groups whose results are very similar between the two surveys. The public’s view varies slightly to this as 2016 survey shows a modest, 5%, increase in the number of people reporting good parks. However, there is also a modest, 5%, reduction in the number of people considering their parks have been improving over the past three years.
- **Fair and Stable Parks** – The general view across all three surveys indicates a relatively constant proportion of fair and stable parks. The most distinct change between reporting

in 2013 and 2016 is that more park managers are reporting their parks are in a fair condition and more consider they have been stable over the past three years. A slightly smaller number of people now report their parks to be in a fair condition than the 2013 survey.

- Poor and Declining Parks – Variations between the two surveys are relatively modest and figures from park managers are almost identical across the two surveys. There is a small, 4%, reduction in the number of friends groups and the general public reporting poor parks. In parallel there is also a modest, 5%, increase in the number of friends groups reporting their parks have been and will continue to be declining in condition.

In conclusion there is general consensus between park managers and friends groups on the changing condition of parks although figures are relatively similar between both surveys. The proportion of managers and groups reporting good and improving parks is falling and the proportion of fair and declining parks is increasing. It should be noted that it is likely these two groups will view the condition of their parks differently. Park managers are professionally responsible for a wide portfolio of parks that are likely to have differing characteristics. On the other hand, friends groups will generally have a lay perspective that will often be focussing on a single space.

The public has a slightly different view and reports a modest increase in good parks and a small reduction in poor parks. There is also a small reduction in the number of people reporting both improving and declining parks. This may potentially be attributed to the fact that the public opinion poll was undertaken in the spring this year rather than the autumn previously. It may also be the case that people will base their options on different and immediate factors of cleanliness and general standards of maintenance. This is in comparison to park managers and friends groups who are more likely to understand underlying issues facing their parks in greater detail.



Image: Manor Fields Park, Sheffield © Peter Neal

## 4.6 Changing management arrangements, transfer and disposal of sites

**The number of local authorities who are considering disposing or transferring the management of green spaces is increasing and the organisations responsible for managing parks are expected to become more varied.**

The proportion of local authorities that were considering selling some off their parks and green spaces or transferring their management to others received a lot of attention when the last study was published.

- In 2013, 45% of local authorities (78/174 - 44.8%) were considering either selling parks and green spaces or transferring management to others over the next three years. 19% were considering disposing of parks specifically (31/162 - 19.1%).

This new study for 2016 has looked again at this issue and provides an analysis of the sale or transfer of a variety of different types of green spaces that has occurred over the past three years and the intentions of councils in the next three years.

### 4.6.1 Disposal or transfer of sites

In 2016, 50% of local authorities (94/189 - 49.7%) have disposed of or transferred the management or ownership of green spaces in the past three years

- In the next three years (2017-19) 59% of local authorities are considering disposing of or transferring the management or ownership of green spaces (111/189 - 58.7%)

This indicates that the disposal or transfer of management and ownership of parks and green spaces is expected to increase. A more detailed analysis of the responses from 189 park managers who answered this question is presented in the following tables:

<b>Over the past three years (2013-15) have you disposed / transferred the management or ownership of any green space? (n=189)</b>	<b>Sold entire site</b>	<b>Sold part of site</b>	<b>Transfer to community group</b>	<b>Transfer to voluntary sector</b>	<b>Transfer to a trust</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
Outdoor sports facilities	4 6.1%	1 1.5%	33 50.0%	11 16.7%	7 10.6%	10 15.2%	66
Amenity green space	9 19.1%	13 27.7%	8 17.0%	2 4.3%	2 4.3%	13 27.7%	47
Public parks and gardens	1 2.4%	9 22.0%	10 24.4%	3 7.3%	6 14.6%	12 29.3%	41
Natural / semi natural green space	2 5.6%	7 19.4%	6 16.7%	8 22.2%	5 13.9%	8 22.2%	36
Other type of space	5 22.7%	1 4.5%	6 27.3%	4 18.2%	-	6 27.3%	22
Provision for children and young people	3 17.6%	1 5.9%	2 11.8%	1 5.9%	-	10 58.8%	17

**Table 4.22** Local authority disposal or transfer of management of different types of green spaces in the past three years (2013-15)



Over the current and next three years (2017-19) are you considering disposing of / transferring the management or ownership of any green space? (n=189)	Sold entire site	Sold part of site	Transfer to community group	Transfer to voluntary sector	Transfer to a trust	Other	Total
Amenity green space	18 18.2%	20 20.2%	26 26.3%	12 12.1%	9 9.1%	14 14.1%	99
Outdoor sports facilities	3 3.1%	5 5.1%	52 53.1%	20 20.4%	12 12.2%	6 6.1%	98
Natural / semi natural green space	12 13.8%	7 8.0%	28 32.2%	18 20.7%	12 13.8%	10 11.5%	87
Public parks and gardens	5 6.3%	12 15.2%	24 30.4%	14 17.7%	13 16.5%	11 13.9%	79
Provision for children and young people	2 5.0%	1 2.5%	17 42.5%	6 15.0%	6 15.0%	8 20.0%	40
Other type of space	4 17.4%	3 13.0%	7 30.5%	3 13.0%	2 8.7%	4 17.4%	23

**Table 4.23** Local authority disposal or transfer of management of different types of green spaces that is being considered in the current and next three years (2017-19)

As this was a multiple choice question, with managers able to select more than one approach to the transfer or disposal of parks and green spaces, it is not possible to provide a cumulative percentage of the number of authorities considering these options. However the proportion of local authorities considering individual options for public parks and gardens (specifically recognised as public parks rather than other forms of green space listed in the table above) can be calculated as follows:

- Only 0.5% of authorities report selling one or more parks in their entirety (1/189 - 0.53%) over the past three years. This is expected to increase to over 2% in the next three years (5/189 - 2.6%)
- Just under 5% of local authorities report having sold part of a park over the last three years (9/189 - 4.8%) and this is expected to increase slightly to 6% in the next three years (12/189 - 6.3%)
- Just over 5% of local authorities report having transferred the management of a park to a community group over the last three years (10/189 - 5.3%) and this is expected to more than double to 12% in the next three years (24/189 - 12.7%)

The survey results for both the last and next three years indicate clear patterns emerging for different types of green space. Certain types are more likely to be sold in part or in their entirety, some are more likely to be transferred to community groups or the voluntary sector whilst others may also be transferred to a trust.

- Public parks - are unlikely to be sold off in entirety, although the potential for this is expected to increase in the next three years. When selling occurs, it is more likely for part of sites to be sold than whole sites. Parks are more likely to transfer their management or ownership than be sold. It is expected that the majority of management transfers will be to community groups but the voluntary sector and trusts are likely to take a more active role in management in the next three years.
- Outdoor sports facilities - are less at risk of full or partial sale, but are the most likely type of green space to be transferred to community groups and this is increasingly expected to include the voluntary sector in the next three years.

- Amenity green spaces - these are neighbourhood green spaces that are too small to form formal parks but are often created through planning and development. These are the most likely sites to be sold in their entirety and this is expected to increase in the next three years. A relatively large number of sites have seen part of their land sold and this is also set to continue. These sites are also increasingly likely to be transferred to a community group.
- Natural and semi-natural green spaces – these are of value to urban wildlife and will increasingly be at risk of disposal in their entirety. After sports facilities, they are the second most likely type of space to be transferred to community groups, the voluntary sector or taken on by a trust.
- Provision for children and young people – these are principally neighbourhood play spaces that are also commonly created through planning and development. They are the least likely sites to be sold in in part or entirety. While they may be transferred to community groups they are the least likely of all groups to be transferred to other organisations.



Image: Ferry Meadows, Nene Park Trust, Peterborough © Peter Neal

Park trusts were also asked whether they had disposed of or transferred the management or ownership of any green spaces. Over the past three years (2013-15), two confirmed they had (2/19). One trust reported that this was a natural / semi-natural green space that had been transferred to another trust. The proportion of disposals or transfers is expected to double in the next three years (4/19). Again these were reported to be natural / semi-natural green spaces that would be transferred to another trust. One respondent stated that a small area of land had been sold for a single dwelling house building project.

#### 4.6.2 Site acquisition

Park managers were also asked whether they had acquired any more green spaces in the past three years. The following table compares responses for the last three years, the next three years and data collected for the 2013 survey:

Proportion of councils acquiring new green spaces through the planning process by type	2017-19 (n=121)	2013-15 (n=108)	2013 (n=55)
Public parks and gardens	35.5%	27.8%	25.5%
Outdoor sports facilities	34.7%	19.4%	23.6%
Amenity green space	77.7%	74.1%	43.6%
Natural / semi natural green space	47.9%	38.9%	32.7%
Provision for children and young people	57.0%	49.1%	41.8%
Other type of space	6.6%	2.8%	5.5%

**Table 4.24** Proportion of local authorities acquiring additional green spaces through the planning process by type for next three years, last three years and in 2013

Over half of councils have increased the number of sites they manage (108/189 - 57.1%) and this is expected to rise in the next three years (121/189 - 64.0%). The vast majority of acquisitions have come through the planning process and this is most likely to be via formal adoption by a council, possibly with a commuted sum (funding provided by a developer for future maintenance over a set period of time) as park managers also report planning gain provides a high proportion of external income (see section 4.3, table 4.10).

Park trusts were also asked if they had acquired any new green spaces. 4/19 had acquired space in the past three years and this is expected to increase to 6/19 in the next three years. Most of these acquisitions have come through the planning process, although some trusts had purchased natural / semi-natural green space. In the future, they stated, acquisitions may also come from local authorities and parish councils.

#### 4.7 Increasing participation of communities

**Park managers report that the average number of friends groups has increased over the past three years and individual groups state the number of members has also risen. It is also estimated the amount of volunteering and fundraising friends groups contribute to their parks has increased significantly.**

Community groups and partnerships with voluntary and third sector organisations are playing an increasingly important role in supporting and managing parks and green spaces. This was a clear finding from the 2013 survey and has been observed in a number of other studies and reports.

##### 4.7.1 Number of Friends Groups

Park managers were asked 'how many active Friends of Parks or Park User groups are there across your local authority'. The number of active friends groups has increased by around a quarter since the last survey. In 2013, the average (mean) number of groups was 11.1 (sample n=174) and in 2016 this is reported to be 14.1 (sample=180). The following table sets out the trend in the number of friends groups in the last and next three years and compares this with figures from 2013. This indicates that around half of all local authorities expect an increasing number of friends groups over the next three years.

	2016	2016	2016	2016	2013	2013
What has been the trend in the number of friends or user groups over the past three years?	Over past 3 years 2013-15 (n=188)	Over past 3 years 2013-15 %	Over next 3 years 2017-19 (n=188)	Over next 3 years 2017-19 %	Over next 3 years 2014-16 (n=176)	Over next 3 years 2014-16 %
Increasing	75	39.9%	92	48.9%	94	53.4%
Staying the same	95	50.5%	87	46.3%	74	42.0%
Decreasing	18	9.6%	9	4.8%	8	4.5%

**Table 4.25** Comparison of 2016 and 2013 survey results for the trend in number of Friends and User Groups recorded by park managers

#### 4.7.2 Membership of Friends groups

The friends group survey asked a similar question on changes to the number of members in the last three years. 45% of groups stated numbers had increased (162/360 - 45.0%) and 12% stated numbers had decreased (43/360 - 11.9%). In 2013 these figures were 47% stating numbers had increased (163/346 - 47.1%) and 11% stating they had decreased (39/346 - 11.3%). These reflect similar trends to the figures from the park managers’ survey shown above.

The survey also asked how many members each Friends group has. The average (mean) number for this has increased significantly since the last survey, rising from 83 members in 2013 to 113 members in 2016. With these figures it is possible to provide indicative estimates for the change in the total number of members of friends groups across the UK.

- In 2013, the estimated total number of groups was around 4,800 (a similar figure to the 5,000 stated by the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces) and the total number of friends group members was around 400,000<sup>78</sup>
- In 2016, the estimated total number of groups is now around 5,900 and the total number of group members is over 650,000<sup>79</sup>

#### 4.7.3 Status of friends groups

The Friends Group survey asked ‘what is the ‘status’ of your Friends / User Group’ to understand the formal structure of groups, whether any operate as companies, registered charities or have entered into any lease agreements on park land. The responses are set out in the following table:

<sup>78</sup> Figures for friends groups and members in 2013 is calculated as: 11.1 (average number of groups) x 433 (number of local authorities) x 83 (average number of members)

<sup>79</sup> Figures for friends groups and members in 2016 is calculated as: 14.1 (average number of groups) x 418 (number of local authorities) x 113 (average number of members)

What is the 'status' of your Friends / User Group?	Yes (n)	Yes %	No (n)	No %	Total (n)
Formally constituted (have a constitution & committee)	314	95.2%	16	4.8%	330
Registered charity	59	26.9%	160	73.1%	219
Registered company	11	5.6%	185	94.4%	196
Lease holder	3	1.6%	185	98.4%	188
Informal association (no-constitution / committee)	32	16.0%	168	84.0%	200

**Table 4.26** Organisational status of Friends of Parks and Park User groups in 2016

This indicates that the vast majority of groups state they operate with a formal constitution (95.2%) whilst a small number (16.0%) act as an informal association without a constitution<sup>80</sup>. Over a quarter of groups (26.9%) are registered charities, offering a number of financial and tax benefits. Just three groups who responded appear to have a lease on their land suggesting that a limited number have formally entered into long-term management agreements. Scaling this proportion up, using the estimated total for all groups (5,900), suggests there may be around 100 groups that operate with leases.

The survey also found that 80% of groups are actively involved in the management of their green space (285/357 - 79.8%), a near identical response to the 2013 survey (268/341 - 78.6%). It then asked what activities the group undertakes and the results, which can be compared with data from the last survey, are as follows:

What activities does your Friends / User Group undertake?	2016 (n=283)	2016 %	2013 (n=267)	2013 %
Promoting and encouraging use of the site	224	79.2%	211	79.0%
Help with maintenance	222	78.4%	196	73.4%
Organising events	213	75.3%	200	74.9%
Improvement tasks	194	68.6%	191	71.5%
Fund raising for the site	191	67.5%	167	62.5%
Preservation of features	147	51.9%	147	55.1%
Consult with management	124	43.8%	138	51.7%
Customer surveys	112	39.6%	122	45.7%
Interpretation and education	105	37.1%	109	40.8%
Capital projects	94	33.2%	94	35.2%
Political lobbying	68	24.0%	71	26.6%
Site security	51	18.0%	33	12.4%
Operation of facilities	34	12.0%	27	10.1%
Other	25	8.8%	26	9.7%
Full responsibility for site maintenance/management	20	7.1%	15	5.6%

**Table 4.27** List of activities Friends and Park User groups undertake for 2016 and 2013

<sup>80</sup> The total for these two groups exceeds 100% as this was a multiple choice question.



The results from both surveys show a clear correlation over the three years with the principal activities ranked in a very similar order of frequency between the two survey results. Over three quarters of all groups take an active role in the maintenance of their parks and this proportion is slightly higher than in the last survey. The number of groups who actively fundraise for their site is also higher than previously recorded and more groups contribute to site security, although this is a less common activity. This year also records a reduction in the number of groups who consult with the local authority management of the site. The combination of these particular trends could be attributed to having to respond to reduced council staffing and levels of maintenance.

Around 40% of all park managers keep records of how many volunteers take an active part in supporting their park (79/188 - 42.0%). The number that keep records is marginally down on the 46% recorded in 2013 (81/175 - 46.3%). These figures are lower than those for the park trusts where over 60% report that they keep records (12/19 - 63.2%). Managers were asked how many volunteer days (equivalent to 7.5 hours per day per person) are contributed specifically to parks per year. A comparison with figures for 2013 suggests the amount of volunteer days contributed to parks has more than doubled:

- In 2013 the average number of volunteer days per local authority was around 1,340 (sample n=63, average (mean) 1,339.8)
- In 2016 the average number of volunteer days per local authority is now around 3,690 (sample n=67, average (mean) 3,692.3)
- For park trusts the average number of volunteer days per year for parks only is just over 1,000 (sample n=11, average (mean) 1,046.3)

Figures from the park managers' surveys can be used to estimate the total value of volunteering in parks across the UK. The following table indicates there has been a significant increase in the equivalent value of volunteering since 2013. In monetary terms this represents an increase of around £48 million more per year.

<b>Figures taken from Park Managers' Surveys 2013 and 2016</b>		<b>2016 (n=67)</b>	<b>2013 (n=63)</b>
Average volunteering days per year per local authority	A	3,692	1,340
Recognised value of £50 per volunteering day <sup>1</sup>	B	£50	£50
Estimated value of volunteering per local authority (A x B)	C	£184,600	£67,000
Total number of local authorities	D	418	433
Estimated UK equivalent value of volunteering (C x D)	E	<b>£77,162,800</b>	<b>£29,011,000</b>
Estimated UK annual value of volunteering circa:		<b>£77 million</b>	<b>£29 million</b>

Notes: <sup>1</sup>This is the value placed on unskilled labour and used by HLF Parks for People programme

**Table 4.28** Estimated annual value of volunteering by friends groups recorded in the park managers surveys in 2016 and 2013

Similar estimates can be calculated using figures from the friends group surveys for both volunteering and fundraising. These are shown on the following table:

Figures taken from Friends Group Surveys 2013 and 2016		2016 (n=317)	2013 (n=308)
Average volunteering days per friends group	A	247	183
Recognised value of £50 per volunteering day <sup>1</sup>	B	£50	£50
Estimated value of volunteering per group (A x B)	C	£12,350	£9,150
Total number of friends groups	D	5,900	4,800
Estimated UK equivalent value of volunteering (C x D)	E	£72,865,000	£43,920,000
Indicative annual UK value of volunteering by groups		<b>£70 million</b>	<b>£40 million</b>
		(n=257)	(n=236308)
Average value of fundraising by groups over last 3 years	F	£28,131	£20,862
Equivalent value of fundraising per year (F ÷ 3)	G	£9,377	£6,954
Estimated number of friends groups in the UK	H	5,900	4,800
Estimated UK value of fundraising each year (G x H)		£55,324,300	£33,379,200
Indicative annual UK value of fundraising by groups		<b>£50 million</b>	<b>£30 million</b>

Notes: <sup>1</sup>This is the value placed on unskilled labour and used by HLF Parks for People programme

**Table 4.29** Estimated annual value of volunteering and fundraising by friends groups recorded by the friends group surveys in 2016 and 2013

Whilst these calculations can only provide indicative estimates, the park managers and friends group figures are similar and suggest that, in the past three years, friends groups across the UK have given the equivalent of around £70 to 77 million in volunteer time per year. They have also contributed around £50 million through fundraising each year. This figure, when divided by the number of councils in the UK, potentially represents around £280,000 in community support per local authority.

As the sample size for park trusts is much smaller, estimates of the gross contribution of volunteers are very indicative. Taking the average number of volunteer days per trust and multiplying this by £50 gives a value of £52,300. When multiplied by the 35 trusts identified by HLF for the survey this equates to around £1.8 million in total value to trusts per year.

## 4.8 Park strategies and corporate commitment

**Whilst park strategies can have a positive influence on the condition of parks, fewer local authorities now have a strategy in place. In 2014 this was reported to be three quarters of all councils, in 2016 this is now just under a half. Parks also appear to becoming less of a corporate priority for councils.**

### 4.8.1 The impact of strategies

Local authority park strategies can take a variety of forms. Some focus exclusively on public parks whilst others take a broader and more holistic view and include all types of open space and wider green infrastructure networks. In England, past planning guidance driven by Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17), strongly encouraged local authorities to prepare open space strategies. Changes to national guidance, introduced by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012, places less emphasis on strategies but suggests that policies

should be based on up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities.

In Scotland, Scottish Planning Policy 11: Open Space and Physical Activity required local authorities to undertake an open space audit and prepare an open space strategy for their area. This has now been superseded by Scottish Planning Policy in 2014, whilst the Planning Advice Note 65, published in 2008, continues to promote the preparation of strategies. In Wales, Technical Advice Note 16: Sport, Recreation and Open Space, also encourages the preparation of corporate open space strategies.

The last survey asked whether councils had a strategy and whether this was up to date. The same question was asked this year. Results from both surveys are set out in the following table:

	2016 (n)	2016 %	2013 (n)	2013 %
<b>Does your authority have a strategy?</b>				
Yes	91	48.4%	134	76.1%
No	97	51.6%	42	23.9%
<b>Is your strategy up to date?</b>				
Yes	63	69.2%	108	67.5%
No	28	30.8%	52	32.5%

**Table 4.30** Presence of a parks strategy and whether it is up to date for 2016 and 2013

The results show there has been a clear reduction in the number of strategies. In 2013, around three quarters of councils had a strategy, now this is under half. A similar proportion of authorities in both surveys state that their strategy is up to date. When asked a further question in the 2016 survey about which year the strategy is due to expire 29% confirm that their strategy expired in 2015 or earlier (23/79 – 29.1%).

In asking managers whether they ‘consider parks and green spaces to be a corporate priority for your authority’, just over half stated they were (106/188 - 56.4%). This proportion has fallen slightly since 2013 (103/174 - 59.2%). A similar trend was found for the number of councils who have an elected member who acts as a champion for their parks and green spaces. This year around 65% of councils have a champion (125/188 - 66.5%) compared with just under 70% in 2013 (122/175 - 69.7%).

The 2013 study looked at the correlation between having a strategy and the current condition and trend in condition of parks. In 2013, this indicated that local authorities were more likely to report a higher proportion of good parks, improving parks and fewer declining parks if they had a strategy in place. The same analysis from the survey this year is shown on the following two tables.

	2016 Strategy	2016 No Strategy	2013 Strategy	2013 No Strategy
<b>What is the trend in condition of your public parks over the last three years</b>	<b>2013-15 n=91</b>	<b>2013-15 n=97</b>	<b>2010-12 n=133</b>	<b>2010-12 n=42</b>
Improving	56.0%	44.0%	49.5%	26.2%

	2016 Strategy	2016 No Strategy	2013 Strategy	2013 No Strategy
<b>What is the trend in condition of your public parks over the last three years</b>	<b>2013-15 n=91</b>	<b>2013-15 n=97</b>	<b>2010-12 n=133</b>	<b>2010-12 n=42</b>
Stable	45.2%	54.8%	40.6%	45.2%
Declining	47.1%	52.9%	13.5%	28.6%

**Table 4.31** Presence of a parks strategy and influence on the trend in condition over the last three years for 2016 and 2013 surveys.

The impact of strategies is still present but is less marked in the 2016 compared to the previous survey. This still indicates strategies have a positive influence on the trend in condition of parks. As the figures in table 4.31 show, where local authorities have a parks strategy, over the past three years they are more likely to have improving parks and less likely to have declining parks than those without.

In looking at figures for the expected trend in condition of parks over the next three years (2017-19), this positive effect continues and is also shown in the expected trend in the condition of parks over the next three years. Those authorities that have a strategy are over 10% more likely to have improving parks and are less likely to report declining parks.

- 57% of parks expected to be improving with a strategy (21/91 - 56.8%)
- 43% of parks expected to be improving without a strategy (16/97 - 43.2%)
- 46% of parks expected to be declining with a strategy (34/91 - 46.2%)
- 54% of parks expected to be declining without a strategy (39/97 - 53.8%)

However this positive effect is not so apparent for the current condition indicated by the following table:

	2016 Strategy	2016 No Strategy	2013 Strategy	2013 No Strategy
<b>What do you consider to be the current condition of your public parks?</b>	<b>n=91</b>	<b>n=97</b>	<b>n=134</b>	<b>n=42</b>
Good	51.5%	48.5%	64.2%	45.2%
Fair	44.2%	55.8%	34.3%	52.4%
Poor	66.7%	33.3%	1.5%	2.4%

**Table 4.32** Influence of park strategies on the current condition for 2016 and 2013 surveys.

For councils with strategies, there is a marginally higher proportion of park managers reporting good parks but also a distinctly higher proportion reporting poor parks. This change in the impact of strategies may be attributed to the wider effects of austerity and the fact that fewer councils have strategies in place and those that are present are becoming out of date. The relationship between the level of cuts and strategies is also more tenuous. It appears through further analysis those councils with a parks strategy are less likely to face cuts above 30% but are more likely to have cuts of 30% or lower.

**4.8.2 Corporate commitment to parks**

As the resourcing for parks and green spaces becomes increasingly competitive, there is clear advantage in having corporate policies that give a commitment to parks services. This can be in

the form of high level corporate strategies and plans that set out the principal priorities for the local authority alongside business plans, marketing strategies and planning policies. Additional benefit can be gained by having an elected member appointed as a lead and champion for parks and green spaces. Both surveys have asked questions about this and the results are presented in the following table:

	2016 (n)	2016 %	2013 (n)	2013 %
<b>Do you consider parks / green spaces to be a corporate priority for your authority?</b>				
Yes	106	56.4%	103	59.2%
No	82	43.6%	71	40.8%
<b>Do you have an elected member as a champion for the authority's parks and green spaces?</b>				
Yes	125	66.5%	122	69.7%
No	63	33.5%	53	30.3%

**Table 4.33** Whether parks are a corporate strategy and there is an elected member as a champion compared between 2016 and 2013

Whilst the changes are small, it appears that parks have become slightly less of a corporate priority since the last survey and there are slightly fewer councils who have an elected member acting as a champion for the service. The 2013 survey also looked at the relationship between the trend in the condition of parks and whether parks were a corporate priority. This found that, where parks were considered to be a priority, it is more likely that they will have been stable or improving over the previous three years and less likely to decline over the next three years. The same analysis has been undertaken for the new survey and is shown on the following table:

	2016 Priority	2016 Not a Priority	2013 Priority	2013 Not a Priority
<b>What is the trend in condition of your public parks over the last three years (2016 : 2013-15) and (2013 : 2010-12)</b>	n=106	n=82	n=102	n=71
Improving	82.0%	18.0%	46.1%	33.8%
Stable	47.1%	52.9%	42.2%	40.8%
Declining	47.1%	52.9%	11.8%	25.4%
<b>What is the trend in condition of your public parks over the next three years (2016 : 2017-19) and (2013 : 2014-16)</b>	n=106	n=82	n=101	n=71
Improving	83.8%	16.2%	23.8%	18.3%
Stable	59.0%	41.0%	47.5%	32.4%
Declining	39.7%	60.3%	28.7%	49.3%

**Table 4.34** Presence of a parks strategy and influence on the condition and trend in condition over the last three years for 2016 and 2013

In 2016, the analysis shows a more striking relationship between the condition of parks and corporate priorities. Where parks are a priority, they are more than 60% more likely to be improving (83.8% improving when a corporate priority compared to 16.2% when not a priority for 2016-19). This is the case for both the past three years and the next and there are also a lower



proportion of parks that are reported to be declining where they are a priority than where they are not.

Where there is an elected member acting as a champion for parks and green spaces, this appears to have a positive effect on the trend in condition of parks. Further analysis shows that, for both the last three years and the next, the proportion of authorities reporting their parks are improving will be at least 50% higher than those without an elected champion (2013-15: 40/50 - 80.0% improving with an elected champion compared to 10/50 - 20.0% without a champion. 1216-19: 28/37 - 75.7% improving with an elected champion compared to 9/37 - 24.3% without a champion).

Councils are also much more likely to have parks that are stable when they have an elected parks champion (58/78 – 74.4% stable with a champion, 20/78 – 25.6% stable without a champion for 2017-19). However these results should be treated with caution as the sample sizes for some results are small (the lowest is 34/193). The positive pattern is also not followed for parks that are declining. This shows there is a slightly higher proportion of declining parks when there is an elected champion (39/73 – 53.4% declining with a champion, 34/73 – 46.6% declining without an elected champion).



Image: Avenham and Miller Parks, Preston © Peter Neal

## 5.0 Immediate challenges and emerging trends

This section discusses the main findings of the surveys in further detail and is structured around a set of key themes that address: funding; staffing and skills; the changing quality of parks and emerging inequalities; the increasing drive for commercialisation with the need to generate income; opportunities for innovation; promoting more active parks; and, approaches to changing management practices to save money and capture greater environmental benefit. Where appropriate, the survey results provide both an analysis for individual types of local authority (such as metropolitan and unitary councils), and a regional breakdown of the results for each of the nine English regions and for individual countries in the UK.

The high level of returns to the park managers' survey provides the opportunity to undertake this more detailed analysis but, inevitably, as the sample size gets smaller for individual categories, the analysis and conclusions become more indicative. When the sample size falls below 30% for individual categories, this is noted on the following tables. Where possible, the findings are also compared with other data to provide a benchmark and identify where other surveys concur or contrast with the findings from this study.

Throughout this section, a series of case-studies are included to provide individual and detailed perspectives from many of the Core Cities in the UK. These look at specific challenges park managers and park services are currently facing in particular cities and describes the measures they are adopting to meet these challenges.

## 5.1 Funding - the continuing disinvestment in parks

**No local authorities expect to increase their park budgets over the next three years and alongside county councils, urban metropolitan and unitary authorities anticipate the highest level of cuts to their budgets over the next three years.**

This study highlights that over 90% of councils have faced a cut in their revenue budget over the past three years and this is expected to increase to 95% of all local authorities in the UK over the next three years. Certain types of local authority have faced higher levels of budget cuts than others. The following table compares the anticipated level of change for the eight different types of local authorities over the next three years as reported by park managers within those authorities.

Type of Authority	No of LAs	n	Budget increased	Budget not changed	Budget Decreased by less than 10%	Budget Decreased between 10% - 20%	Budget Decreased by more than 20%
District	201	56 <sup>2</sup>	0.0%	5.4%	28.6%	53.6%	12.5%
Unitary	56	31	0.0%	3.2%	9.7%	71.0%	16.1%
Metropolitan	36	27	0.0%	0.0%	7.4%	44.4%	48.1%
London Borough <sup>1</sup>	33	17	0.0%	11.8%	11.8%	70.6%	5.9%
County Council	27	6 <sup>2</sup>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%
Northern Ireland Unitary	11	4	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%
Scotland Unitary	32	22	0.0%	4.5%	36.4%	59.1%	0.0%
Wales Unitary	22	10	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	30.0%	50.0%
<b>Averages</b>	418	173	0.0%	5.2%	19.1%	54.9%	20.8%

Notes <sup>1</sup> The City of London Corporation is included within the list of London Boroughs

<sup>2</sup> The sample size for this type of authority is below 30%

**Table 5.1** Expected change to revenue funding for each type of local authority over the next three years (2017-19)

The sample sizes for this analysis are reasonable although it should be noted that for Districts and County Councils this is below 30% (27.9% and 22.2% respectively). Those anticipating the highest level of cuts over the next three years include:

- County Councils anticipate the highest level of cuts of 10% or more (100%), although the sample size suggests this may not be conclusive
- 92% of Metropolitan Authorities expect cuts of 10% or more
- 87% of Unitary Authorities expect cuts of 10% or more

A similar analysis can be made for the nine English regions and for each country in the UK. This is shown on the following table:

Region	n	Budget increased	Budget not changed	Budget Decreased by less than 10%	Budget Decreased between 10% - 20%	Budget Decreased by more than 20%
North West	19	0.0%	0.0%	15.8%	47.4%	36.8%
North East	7	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	85.7%	14.3%
Yorkshire & Humber	12	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%
West Midlands	23	0.0%	0.0%	21.7%	60.9%	17.4%
East Midlands	13 <sup>1</sup>	0.0%	7.7%	15.4%	38.5%	38.5%
East	16	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	81.3%	6.3%
London	17	0.0%	11.8%	11.8%	70.6%	5.9%
South West	13	0.0%	7.7%	7.7%	53.8%	30.8%
South East	16 <sup>1</sup>	0.0%	12.5%	31.3%	43.8%	12.5%
England	136	0.0%	3.0%	16.4%	59.0%	21.6%
Northern Ireland	4	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%
Scotland	22	0.0%	4.5%	36.4%	59.1%	0.0%
Wales	10	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	30.0%	50.0%
<b>Averages</b>	173	0.0%	5.2%	19.1%	54.9%	20.8%

Notes <sup>1</sup> The sample size for this region is below 30%

**Table 5.2** Expected change to revenue funding for each region and country over the next three years (2017-19)

The sample sizes for this analysis are again reasonable, although it should be noted that, for the East Midlands and the South East, this is below 30% (28.9% and 21.6% respectively). Those regions anticipating the highest level of cuts over the next three years are:

- 100% of councils in the North East expect cuts of 10% or more
- 88% of councils in the East expect cuts of 10% or more
- 84% of councils in the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber and the South West expect cuts of 10% or more

In comparing the level of cuts across individual countries: 80% of English and Welsh councils expect cuts of 10% or more, followed by almost 60% of Scottish councils (59.1%) and exactly half of councils in Northern Ireland (who actually expect cuts of more than 20%). For the English regions, this analysis suggests park managers in the more urban metropolitan and unitary authorities expect the see the greatest decrease in their revenue budgets over the next three years. Geographically, this includes urban areas in the North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humber, the East and the South West.

### 5.1.1 Regional impact of funding reductions

This analysis also suggests park managers in the North East metropolitan authorities are likely to face the greatest decrease in their revenue budgets over the next three years. This grouping includes Newcastle upon Tyne, Sunderland, Gateshead, North Tyneside and South Tyneside (although it should be noted that not all of these authorities may have responded to the park managers' survey). This assessment is in line with that made by Newcastle City Council in its scrutiny of the local authority spending settlement for 2015/16<sup>81</sup>. This concluded that the most

<sup>81</sup> The Guardian, Council cuts: the burden falls again on the north and the inner cities, 14/01/15, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/patrick-butler-cuts-blog/2015/jan/14/council-cuts-burden-falls-again-on-north-and-inner-cities> [accessed 18/06/16]



deprived urban areas were being disproportionately affected the most and that the northern cities along with inner London councils continue to face the biggest cuts in government funding.

Newcastle's current budget proposals for 2016/17<sup>82</sup> set out the city's approach to meeting the considerable financial challenges it faces and include proposals to restructure its parks service. "We will continue to use our investment in public health to support open spaces and parks, as a resource for encouraging active lifestyles and wellbeing. But a longer term sustainable approach to operating parks is required. The council is now actively pursuing the creation of a new charitable body to take responsibility for the principal parks in the city". The following case study describes this emerging approach in further detail.

### **Spotlight on Newcastle** - developing a social enterprise for mutual benefit



Image: Jesmond Dene, Newcastle © Peter Neal

Newcastle has almost 2,000 hectares of green space that includes over 45 public parks, country parks, sports pitches, play areas, allotments and wildlife corridors. At the heart of this green estate lies the vast Town Moor with its ancient grazing rights that represents almost a quarter of the city's total open space and has a direct influence on the city's character and identity. Several parks, including Jesmond Dene, Exhibition Park, Leazes Park and Walker Park, are of historic significance and have benefitted from HLF and BLF England investment in recent years.

Austerity has had a massive impact on the city's finances. Between 2011 and 2015 the council has had to find savings of over £190 million and is now facing the prospect of around £70 million of further budget reductions over the next three

<sup>82</sup> Newcastle City Council (2016) Ambition in the face of austerity: Newcastle City Council's Budget proposals for 2016-17, February 2016, see: [http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/wwwfileroot/ambition\\_in\\_the\\_face\\_of\\_austerity\\_-\\_budget\\_2016-17\\_0.pdf](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/wwwfileroot/ambition_in_the_face_of_austerity_-_budget_2016-17_0.pdf) [accessed 18/06/16]

years<sup>83</sup>. Early in this process, the parks budget was hit particularly hard, losing almost 60% of its funding by 2012. As a result, all the city's park keepers, 13 park rangers and three members of the management team were lost. The service is now managed by just two staff posts, supported by 11 rangers and operatives, and the knock-on effect has been considerable. Losing park keepers was a big concern for the public who had a good rapport with on-site staff. Training programmes for the long-term unemployed and educational opportunities for schools are significantly reduced and the collective knowledge and experience that was embedded within the service is now much depleted.

#### *The search for a new delivery model*

A three year budget plan up to 2015 included a restructuring of the service combining parks, arts, leisure, libraries and customer services, to collectively secure an additional 40% in savings. A further phased programme of cuts including £1 million in 2015/16 has taken the total reduction for parks to 70% and a net base budget to just £300,000 per annum. Factoring in rising commitments for social care and other statutory responsibilities, the city, like many local authorities, fears it will be unable to fund non-statutory services, including parks, by 2020. Whilst originally being criticised in some quarters as overly alarmist, Newcastle is now not the only local authority who might not be able to run its park services from core funding in the future.

This has led to a complete reappraisal of the city's approach to the service. Whilst there are a number of established models for delivering leisure services, which generally benefit from a fixed and reliable income stream, there are few examples for parks. With political support, the management team has explored a number of alternative models over the past year with advice from a consultant team and the National Trust. The work aligns closely with Newcastle's plan to become a Cooperative Council<sup>84</sup> which will increasingly co-deliver services with staff, partners and communities through the greater use of partnerships, cooperatives and mutuals. A core task has been to compile data on the assets and finances for all parks including their legal status, covenants, formal restrictions and statutory regulations. This has built a set of individual park profiles for every space across the city.

#### *A social enterprise with mutual values*

A detailed review and appraisal of different management options followed. These included maintaining the status quo; wholly owned local authority trading companies; and, various forms of trusts and mutuals. Developing a social enterprise emerged as the preferred model. This will initially focus on the city's principal parks and open spaces including the Armstrong parks, given to the city in the 1880s by the armaments manufacturer Lord Armstrong, along with those parks that have been restored with HLF/BLF funding. Smaller parks, not yet included in the model, and other sites such as historic monuments and closed graveyards, may be included

<sup>83</sup> Headline figures for Newcastle's budget taken from City Leader's 13/01/15 Blog, see:

<https://newcastlecitycouncil.wordpress.com/2015/11/13/letter-to-the-prime-minister/> [accessed 05/05/16]

<sup>84</sup> Newcastle's cross cutting themes, 2014. Being a cooperative council – changing the way we work, see:

<https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/policies-plans-and-performance/our-policies-and-plans/council-plan/cross-cutting-themes>



subsequently. An independent self-governing company with mutual values and charitable status brings a number of financial and tax advantages. All profits generated by the social enterprise would be reinvested into the city's parks and ownership of each site would remain with the council but leased on a nominal rent.

The potential to support the model through core funding generated by income, and possibly some endowment funding, is being informed by learning from the National Trust's Nesta Rethinking Parks project with Sheffield City Council, although other funding models are also being explored. Initially resources will come principally from public health which currently commits around £1 million each year<sup>85</sup>. This is anticipated to be extended over the next few years while the new model is being implemented. The relationship between health and parks is particularly strong in Newcastle and there are direct links between both Leazes Park and Paddy Freeman's Park and the neighbouring Royal Victoria Infirmary and Freeman Hospital which will be cultivated further. There is also an increasing desire to develop all parks within the model as centres of therapeutic excellence and to promote them as essential public health assets for people.

A social enterprise also has the ability to access funding that is not available to local authorities. There is particular interest in capturing opportunities for social finance and the role of social impact bonds. Resources from development and section 106 agreements could be accessed alongside grants from a variety of organisations that may be more receptive to supporting an independent organisation than the City Council. Going forwards, the team is starting to develop a business plan to explore governance issues and funding sources in much greater detail. If the model is proved to be financially robust then it would undergo a round of testing, scrutiny and wider consultation before being put forward for council approval.

#### *An increasing role for communities*

From a members' perspective, the appeal of a social enterprise model is that it will operate directly for the benefit of citizens and communities. With mutual values, both staff and park users - its customers - will have a voice and role in its management and operation. It will also have a greater reliance on third sector companies, voluntary bodies and local communities across the city. The Newcastle Parks Forum, which represents around 20 groups, will have an increasingly important role and there is clearly a need to build community capacity and get more people involved. This emerging model is favoured as it anticipates that a formal and independent structure can facilitate better partnerships between organisations, communities and individuals for the long-term benefit and protection of the city's main parks.

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<sup>85</sup> Horticulture Week, Newcastle scopes health-backed parks mutual. 19/02/16, p4

## 5.2 Skills - diminishing knowledge, skills and expertise

**Whilst there is a continuing loss of parks staff across all authorities, the English unitary authorities generally expect the greatest reduction. Park development staff that are particularly needed to establish partnerships and secure additional funding and resources are expected to decline the most in the next three years.**

There has already been a significant reduction in park staff for the vast majority of councils and this trend is projected to continue over the next three years. The last survey found that staffing levels in urban authorities, along with the North West region, had faced the highest levels of cuts in staff numbers. Currently, over three quarters of park managers expect that they will continue to reduce numbers of operational, management and development staff.

A further analysis of the data provides variations across different types of authority and for each English region and country and these are shown on the following two tables. It should be noted that the sample size for individual responses is markedly lower than the aggregate sample for the whole of the UK and, therefore, results can only be considered as indicative.

Type of Authority	n=	Average Operational staff change	n=	Average Management staff change	n=	Average Development staff change
District	37 <sup>1</sup>	-7.0%	37 <sup>1</sup>	-10.0%	31 <sup>1</sup>	-13.0%
Unitary	23	-19.0%	18	-18.2%	18	-22.0%
Metropolitan	23	-11.0%	23	-14.0%	17	-14.0%
London Borough	13	-9.0%	11	-10.0%	9 <sup>1</sup>	-15.0%
County Council	8 <sup>1</sup>	-18.2%	4 <sup>1</sup>	-22.8%	5 <sup>1</sup>	-26.4%
Northern Ireland Unitary	2 <sup>1</sup>	-6.0%	2 <sup>1</sup>	-25.0%	2 <sup>1</sup>	-0.5%
Scotland Unitary	20	-7.8%	18	-10.4%	12	-9.8%
Wales Unitary	9	-15.9%	7	-18.0%	5 <sup>1</sup>	-13.0%
<b>Averages</b>	132	-11.0%	120 <sup>1</sup>	-13.2%	99 <sup>1</sup>	-14.8%

Notes <sup>1</sup> The sample size for this this response is below 30%

**Table 5.3** Expected changes in operational, management and development staff for each type of local authority over the next three years (2017-19)

The analysis indicates that unitary, and to a lesser extent metropolitan councils, are expecting some of the highest levels of average staff cuts over the next three years compared to the majority of other types of local authority. For unitary authorities the expected level of cuts is above average for all three staff groups. Wales is also reporting a higher than average level of cuts to operational and management staff. Whilst they have a small sample size that precludes them from firm conclusions, County Councils similarly record some of the highest percentage cuts across all staff types and development staff in particular. An illustration of this trend is Nottinghamshire County Council's proposals to change their staffing structure for country parks. A 2015 Nottingham County Council Culture Committee report<sup>86</sup> included a proposal to delete three posts for interpretation, events and community liaison in country parks and replace these with a single community support officer. In saving £600,000, the report acknowledges that there will be a loss of in-house expertise and the capacity to develop and manage events, although this will in part be offset by the new post.

<sup>86</sup> Nottinghamshire County Council (2015) Report to Culture Committee, Changes to the Staffing Structure in the Country Parks Service, 13 January 2015, p2.

Region	n	Average Operational staff change	n	Average Management staff change	n	Average Development staff change	Combined Average Staff Change
North West	15	-11.3%	11 <sup>1</sup>	-9.2%	7 <sup>1</sup>	-13.9%	-11.5%
North East	8	-15.8%	8	-18.3%	8	-25.3%	-19.8%
Yorkshire & Humber	8	-10.8%	11	-13.2%	18	-18.8%	-14.3%
West Midlands	18	-12.3%	16	-17.1%	12	-16.9%	-15.4%
East Midlands	11 <sup>1</sup>	-8.5%	9 <sup>1</sup>	-3.6%	10 <sup>1</sup>	-10.2%	-7.4%
East	10 <sup>1</sup>	-15.4%	11 <sup>1</sup>	-17.4%	10 <sup>1</sup>	-17.8%	-16.9%
London	13	-8.9%	11	-10.1%	9 <sup>1</sup>	-14.6%	-11.2%
South West	8 <sup>1</sup>	-15.8%	8 <sup>1</sup>	-13.1%	7 <sup>1</sup>	-7.1%	-12.0%
South East	9 <sup>1</sup>	-6.1%	7 <sup>1</sup>	-17.3%	8 <sup>1</sup>	-21.0%	-14.8%
England	101 <sup>1</sup>	-11.0%	93 <sup>1</sup>	-13.0%	80 <sup>1</sup>	-16.0%	-13.3%
Northern Ireland	2 <sup>1</sup>	-6.0%	2 <sup>1</sup>	-25.0%	2 <sup>1</sup>	-0.5%	-10.5%
Scotland	20	-7.8%	18	-10.4%	20	-9.8%	-9.3%
Wales	9	-15.9%	7	-18.0%	5 <sup>1</sup>	-13.0%	-15.6%
<b>Averages</b>	132	-11.0%	120 <sup>1</sup>	-13.2%	99 <sup>1</sup>	-14.8%	-13.0%

Notes <sup>1</sup> The sample size for this this response is below 30%

**Table 5.4** Expected changes in operational, management and development staff for each region and country over the next three years (2017-19)

It is harder to make clear comparisons on the level of staff cuts across each region and country as the number of individual responses for each staff type is relatively small, although some observations can be made from the analysis:

- For UK countries, Wales has faced the highest average level of staff cuts (-5.6%) whilst Scotland has faced the lowest (-9.3%)
- For English regions, the North East has faced the highest average level of staff cuts (-19.8%) followed by the East (-16.9%) and then the West Midlands (-15.4%)

For the North East, East and West Midlands an assumption (drawn from table 5.3) suggests that unitary and metropolitan authorities in these regions are likely to face a higher percentage of average staff cuts over the next three years. The results also suggest that, on average, a higher proportion of development staff will face a reduction in numbers compared to management and operational staff. This follows the findings from the 2014 study that found a higher proportion of cuts to management staff compared to operational staff working on the front line. There are no other sources of information on levels and specific types of parks staff that can provide a comparison to these figures, although APSE’s State of the Market surveys do collect figures for staff numbers, they are less specific on particular skills. In comparing results from the past two APSE surveys, published in May 2015 and April 2016, the trend shows there has been a fall in the number of councils reporting higher percentage cuts. In 2015, 21.3% of respondents expected to lose 11% or more of their staff; this has fallen by around half to 11.2% of authorities in 2016. Around half of respondents expect to achieve staff reductions through voluntary redundancies, recruitment freezes and natural wastage, whilst almost a quarter of authorities will implement compulsory redundancies<sup>87</sup>.

<sup>87</sup> APSE (2016) *State of the Market Survey 2016, Local Authority Parks and Green Spaces Services*, Briefing 16-15, p9-10

## Spotlight on Birmingham - developing a parks-based social service



Image: Kings Heath Park, Birmingham © Peter Neal

In comparison to other large industrial cities that initially created parks through direct purchase, subscription or via gifts, Birmingham gained its earliest public parks, such as Adderley Park and Calthorpe Park, by first leasing them in the early 1870s. The initial development of the city centre saw little provision for green space, although such shortage has since been addressed by building new spaces, including the City Centre Gardens and, most recently, Eastside City Park. In comparison, Victorian investment in the growing neighbourhoods and suburbs included a generous provision of parks and green spaces. Today, there are around 470 individual spaces totalling some 3,200 hectares<sup>88</sup> that serve a population of just over 1.1 million, making this the largest city outside London.

Whilst Birmingham greatly values its parks, the advent of Compulsory Competitive Tendering in the 1980s had a major impact on the quality of green spaces. More recently, with the substantial downturn in public spending, the parks service has had to absorb 30% cuts and lost a large number of staff at the start of decade. Since then, the parks budget has been relatively resilient when compared to many other large cities. Much of this can be attributed to strong advocacy from residents and local community groups who vocally defended the service during consultation on setting the city's spending budgets. The Birmingham Open Spaces Forum has been particularly active, operating with good political judgement and building constructive relationships between officers, members and friends groups.

Birmingham's finances continue to come under immense pressure and it will have to find a further £90 million in savings this financial year (2016/17) and £250 million

<sup>88</sup> The Future of Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces, SPD. Birmingham City Council, 2006, p14.

over the next four years. The parks budget, currently totalling around £12 million, is not immune and will face over £1 million in further cuts equating to around £300,000 in savings for each of the next three years. Part of this will be offset by increasing income along with a target to dispose of around eight acres (3.2 Hectares) of unwanted or underused land per annum which will be used by the housing service to build new council homes<sup>89</sup>.

#### *Sweating park assets for social benefit*

The council fully realises it cannot now do everything itself and is starting to change the way it operates. In adopting an open door policy, it is increasingly working in partnership with communities and local businesses. Channelling limited resources into a broad range of social initiatives jointly with other organisations is starting to make a big difference. One popular scheme is the Active Parks programme<sup>90</sup> that is run with Birmingham Public Health in Cotteridge Park and Ward End Park, amongst others. Whilst there is a fairly balanced distribution of parks across the city, the youth service is not so well spread. So parks are more frequently being used as outdoor community and young people's hubs to deliver a range of social services.

In collaborating with youth workers, The National Trust and Groundwork, the parks service has supported programmes for the long-term unemployed and those 'not in education, employment or training' (NEETs). This in part looks to build a work ethic that can lead into more regular employment. Public health, the police and youth services are also using parks to tackle smoking and drinking cultures, as these spaces are considered to be a less threatening neutral venue to regularly engage with participants and those in need of help.

The Green Academies Project, led by the National Trust and part of the Big Lottery funded Our Bright Future programme, is using some of the city's parks to develop volunteering programmes for young people. These provide formal conservation training and qualifications. The knock-on benefit is that the standard of park management improves significantly in the process and at no greater cost.

#### *Communication is central to the process*

A lot of time is invested in openly communicating the benefits of the city's parks and this is achieved in a number of ways. Both the Parks Service and Rangers Service have started to publish annual reports that clearly set out their vision, targets, activities, performance and achievements<sup>91</sup>. This improves public accountability, justifies expenditure and explains to senior officers, members and the general public exactly what the parks budget delivers for them each year.

For many years the service has exhibited at the Chelsea Flower Show and, last year, was the only local authority to do so. It is seen as a valuable opportunity to raise the profile of the service and promote the perception of Birmingham as a green, rather than grey and industrial, city. Financially, it is a good investment as

<sup>89</sup> Birmingham City Council (2015) Council Business Plan and Budget 2016+ Consultation, p34 and 37.

<sup>90</sup> For Birmingham Public Health Active Parks, see: <http://www.birminghampublichealth.co.uk/news.php?id=23&mid=1> [accessed 16/05/16]

<sup>91</sup> Copies of Birmingham Parks Service Annual reports are available at: <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/cs/Satellite/parksurvey?packedargs=website%3D4&rendermode=live> [accessed 17/05/16]

much of the funding comes through sponsorship and each exhibit is returned and reused within the city, a process which often generates further income. An independent analysis undertaken in 2014 of the return on investment in exhibiting at Chelsea calculated this to be £723,000 – a good return on the £4,000 contribution from the city and £55,000 in overall costs.

The service has also started to develop a natural capital account<sup>92</sup> to provide a different means to calculate value. This is part of an increasing ability to assess the multiple benefits that parks deliver which uses both iTrees analysis and a growing research literature on health benefits. The work is being undertaken jointly with the University of Birmingham, although it is considered too premature to publish initial results before various assumptions can be refined and improved.

When updating the city's parks and open space strategy in 2013, the service chose to move on from the more traditional approach that analysed the quantity, quality and accessibility of parks and open spaces. The Green Living Spaces Plan<sup>93</sup> seeks to reposition parks as a more strategic asset that is a central part of Birmingham's green city vision. This aligns closely with its active membership of the international Biophilic Cities Network that is implementing new and practical measures to tackle the impacts of climate change and promote greater health and wellbeing of urban communities. Having benefited greatly from past Victorian investment, Birmingham sees this as a means to provide for the needs of future generations.

### 5.3 Quality - returning to a cycle of boom and bust

**Fewer park managers report their parks are currently in a good condition since the last report in 2014. There is also an increase in the proportion of managers across most of the English regions who expect their parks will be in a declining condition over the next three years.**

The current condition and future trend in condition of parks reported by managers provides a useful barometer of the changing quality of parks across the UK. Nationally, park managers report a falling proportion of good parks and an increasing number of fair parks whilst the percentage reporting poor parks is stable. Looking forwards, whilst there is little change in the figures since the last survey, in 2013, slightly fewer managers expect their parks to be improving and marginally more report them to be declining. In analysing the results for each region, more distinct changes to the quality of parks has occurred in the past three years. Sample sizes for each region are generally good and this gives confidence to the findings.

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<sup>92</sup> For Natural Capital Accounting see: <http://www.naturalcapitalcommittee.org/corporate-natural-capital-accounting/> [accessed 17/05/16]

<sup>93</sup> Birmingham City Council (2013) *The Green Living Spaces Plan*, see: <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/greenlivingspaces> [accessed 17/05/16]



### 5.3.1 Current condition

Region	n	2016 Good	2016 Fair	2016 Poor	n	2013 Good	2013 Fair	2013 Poor
North West	20	45.0%	50.0%	5.0%	17	64.7%	35.3%	0.0%
North East	8	62.5%	37.5%	0.0%	6	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%
Yorkshire & Humber	12	41.7%	58.3%	0.0%	5 <sup>1</sup>	20.0%	80.0%	0.0%
West Midlands	24	45.8%	54.2%	0.0%	22	59.1%	40.9%	0.0%
East Midlands	15 <sup>1</sup>	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	20	60.0%	40.0%	0.0%
East	19	42.1%	57.9%	0.0%	16	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%
London	18	88.9%	11.1%	0.0%	20	85.0%	15.0%	0.0%
South West	14	35.7%	57.1%	7.1%	18	33.3%	61.1%	5.6%
South East	20 <sup>1</sup>	45.0%	55.0%	0.0%	24	58.3%	33.3%	8.3%
England	150	52.0%	46.7%	1.3%	148	59.5%	38.5%	2.0%
Northern Ireland	4	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%	4 <sup>1</sup>	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%
Scotland	24	54.2%	41.7%	4.2%	14	64.3%	35.7%	0.0%
Wales	10	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	10	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%
<b>Averages</b>	188	52.9%	45.5%	1.6%	176	59.7%	38.6%	1.7%

Notes <sup>1</sup> The sample size for this this response is below 30%

**Table 5.5** Comparison of the current condition of parks reported by park managers for each region for 2016 and 2013

In comparing the current condition of parks across the English regions park managers in the East Midlands, London and the South West report the greatest stability. Here there has been a modest increase in the proportion of good parks. There has been no change to the number reported to be in a poor condition in the East Midlands and London (remaining at 0%) and a negligible increase in the South West (rising by 1.5%). Returns across each country also appear relatively stable with Scotland reporting the largest change. Here the proportion of good parks has fallen by 10% and a small percentage of managers (4%) are now reporting poor parks in comparison to none in 2013.

Elsewhere there appears to be greater volatility in quality since the last survey with some regions stating a marked increase in the proportion of good parks whilst others report an equally marked decline. The greatest increase in the proportion of good parks is reported by the North East (from 33% to 63%) and Yorkshire and The Humber (from 20% to 42%) whilst a larger percentage of managers in the East, the North West and the West Midlands report a smaller proportion of good parks since last surveyed.

### 5.3.2 Trend in condition next 3 years

Region	n	2016 Improving	2016 Stable	2016 Declining	n	2013 Improving	2013 Stable	2013 Declining
North West	20	0.0%	45.0%	55.0%	17	11.8%	41.2%	47.1%
North East	8	12.5%	25.0%	62.5%	6	33.3%	16.7%	50.0%
Yorkshire & Humber	12	16.7%	25.0%	58.3%	5 <sup>1</sup>	0.0%	20.0%	80.0%
West Midlands	24	8.3%	50.0%	41.7%	22	18.2%	45.5%	36.4%
East Midlands	15 <sup>1</sup>	40.0%	33.3%	26.7%	19	26.3%	47.4%	26.3%
East	19	21.1%	52.6%	26.3%	16	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%
London	18	33.3%	44.4%	22.2%	20	25.0%	55.0%	20.0%
South West	14	0.0%	57.1%	42.9%	18	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%
South East	20 <sup>1</sup>	40.0%	50.0%	10.0%	24	25.0%	41.7%	33.3%
England	150	19.3%	44.7%	36.0%	147	21.1%	44.9%	34.0%
Northern Ireland	4	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3 <sup>1</sup>	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%
Scotland	24	16.7%	33.3%	50.0%	14	14.3%	28.6%	57.1%
Wales	10	0.0%	30.0%	70.0%	10	20.0%	10.0%	70.0%
<b>Averages</b>	189	19.6%	41.8%	38.6%	174	21.3%	41.4%	37.4%

Notes <sup>1</sup> The sample size for this this response is below 30%

**Table 5.6** Comparison of the trend in condition of parks reported by park managers for the next three years (2017-19) for each region for 2016 and 2013

In analysing the trend in the anticipated condition of parks over the next three years, there are a number of distinct changes since the last survey. For each country, the greatest increase in the proportion of parks expected to be improving is reported by Northern Ireland, although this can only be considered an indicative assessment with the small sample size. In Wales, in 2013, 20% of park managers expected their parks to improve; in 2016 none now expect their parks to improve.

Within the English regions, Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands, London and the South East all show an increase in the number of park managers expecting their parks to improve between the two surveys. In comparison, the largest fall in the proportion of parks expected to improve between the two surveys is reported by the North East (from 33% to 12%) and the South West (from 16.7% to 0%). No managers in the North West, the South West or Wales expect their parks to be improving over the next three years.

### 5.3.3 Public opinion on the quality of local parks

The public opinion poll also gauged views on the changing condition of specific aspects of parks to understand what has changed the most over the past three years. In general, around half of people consider the condition of individual elements to have been stable over the past three years - children's play areas (46%), seating and furnishings (51%), horticultural features (50%), general standards of maintenance (57%), wildlife and nature areas (50%), sports facilities (49%) and anti-social behaviour and vandalism (42%) are all seen as stable. This is shown on the following table.

For each of the following aspects of your local park, please state whether its condition has been improving, stable or declining over the past three years.	Improving	Stable	Declining	Don't know
Children's play areas	23%	46%	10%	21%
Sports facilities (eg. Football pitches and tennis courts)	12%	49%	11%	28%
Horticultural features (e.g. variety of plants, shrub beds and flower borders)	15%	50%	15%	21%
Wildlife and nature areas (e.g. ponds meadows and woodlands)	13%	50%	12%	25%
Seating and furnishings (e.g. benches, bins and lighting)	16%	51%	15%	18%
Anti-social behaviour and vandalism	8%	42%	21%	29%
General standards of maintenance (e.g. grass cutting, litter collection and dog fouling)	15%	57%	12%	16%

**Table 5.7** The public's view on the changing condition of a variety of park elements over the past three years

The condition of children's play areas (23%) is most widely perceived by the public as having improved in the past three years. By contrast, anti-social behaviour is shown to be the aspect that has been increasing the most since 2013 as a higher proportion of adults believe it has become worse (21%) than think it has improved (8%).

A more detailed analysis of public opinion on the condition of various park elements across the English regions shows few significant differences but does indicate some modest variations. For example, the greatest proportion of people reporting improving play areas is in London (28%), South East (27%) and the North West (26%). Anti-social behaviour appears to be improving the most in the North East (23%) whilst it is reported to be getting the worst in the East Midlands (25%), South West (24%) and South East (24%).

In terms of public concern about the impact of spending cuts on parks, a majority of UK adults (55%) are very or fairly concerned about reductions in council budgets having a negative impact on the condition of their local park, with 14% being very concerned. This is barely changed from the last survey, where concern was at a similar level. Those who already consider their park to be in a poor condition are most likely to be concerned about the impact of council budget cuts on the condition of their local park: in total this is 78% of people who are fairly or very concerned. Frequent users are more concerned with the potential impact of budget cuts than infrequent or non-users but significant minorities of infrequent and non-users also express concern - 66% of those who use their local park at least once a week are concerned, compared with 49% who last used their park six months ago or more, whilst 30% of non-users are concerned.

A further perspective on this comes from a survey by the public service union UNISON<sup>94</sup> on the effect of public spending cuts in June 2014. This analysed 334 Freedom of Information responses from councils across the UK and surveyed over 7,500 women (mostly UNISON members). It found that 87% of women said that they use local parks and open spaces but there is concern that the condition of these spaces is changing. 'Over 60% of women who use

<sup>94</sup> UNISON (2014) *Counting the cost: how cuts are shrinking women's lives*, see: <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/06/On-line-Catalogue224222.pdf> [accessed 06/06/16]

local leisure centres, parks facilities and open spaces said that services had got worse, and many were worried about their own or their family’s safety when using them’. The study also calculated that parks and open spaces budgets have lost £41.8million between 2010 and 2014.

### 5.3.4 Trends in Green Flag Awards across the regions

Records for the Green Flag Award provide a useful comparative benchmark for the changing quality of parks across the UK. The growth in the spread of awarded sites and their regional distribution provides an indication on how the quality of parks has changed and increased over this time. In its inaugural year, in 1997, seven sites received an award, growing to 55 sites in 2000, 1,066 sites in 2010 and 1,400 sites by 2015<sup>95</sup>. Figures recently published for 2016 indicate a further increase to 1,466 green flag sites across the UK. These numbers predominately include public parks, around 95% in total, but also include a number of cemeteries and crematoria, university campuses and for this year two shopping centres and a National Health Service site. Whilst the number of awards will be driven by a variety of factors, including the choice by some councils to withdraw from the scheme because of the cost of applying, the figures have shown a year-on-year increase in numbers over the last seven years.

Information provided by Keep Britain Tidy for this study is set out in the following table which provides a regional breakdown of Green Flag Awards for the past seven years:

Region	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
North West	245	256	252	217	210	217	198
North East	55	64	65	59	60	62	61
Yorkshire & Humber	59	69	66	62	58	57	59
West Midlands	67	76	87	89	100	108	109
East Midlands	68	63	76	89	98	105	122
East	92	90	96	107	108	120	133
London	223	228	262	287	297	323	351
South West	73	82	89	92	83	85	91
South East	112	116	135	135	139	145	144
England	994	1,044	1,128	1,137	1,153	1,222	1,268
Northern Ireland	5	11	15	20	35	43	51
Scotland	26	34	44	50	58	65	69
Wales	41	49	57	61	65	70	78
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,066</b>	<b>1,138</b>	<b>1,244</b>	<b>1,268</b>	<b>1,311</b>	<b>1,400</b>	<b>1,466</b>

Source: Supplied directly by Keep Britain Tidy (July, 2016)

**Table 5.8** Total numbers and distribution of Green Flag Awards from 2010-2016

In comparing each country, Northern Ireland has seen the greatest percentage increase whilst England has seen the largest rise in total numbers over this period of time. Across the English regions, London has seen the greatest rise in numbers (from 223 in 2010 to 351 in 2016), although the East Midlands, followed by the West Midlands, record the greatest percentage rise in numbers (79% and 63% respectively). The North West has seen a reduction in the total number of awards falling by 47 awards, down by 19%, over the past seven years.

<sup>95</sup> Total number of Green Flag Awards is given on their website, see: <http://www.greenflagaward.org.uk/about-us/winners-history/> [accessed 06/06/16]

## Spotlight on Edinburgh - calculating and capturing the value of living landscapes



Image: Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh © Peter Neal

Over the past five years, the city's parks and green space budget has come under growing pressure. In 2011 Edinburgh began to implement a three year £90 million programme of savings across the council that initially included a £363,000 reduction for parks<sup>96</sup>. Over this time, and following several rounds of voluntary redundancies, staff numbers have fallen by a quarter. The greatest impact has been a £1million annual capital funding allocation that has now all but disappeared. This is beginning to directly affect park infrastructure - walls, gates, fences, buildings, land stabilisation, the city's stock of trees and the machinery and equipment that is used for everyday maintenance. Such spending is now solely focused on addressing health and safety issues and the city is becoming increasingly reliant on HLF investment for its park regeneration and development work.

Edinburgh initially chose to salami-slice their revenue budgets on an annual cycle to implement savings. Further cuts, which are yet to bottom out, alongside ever increasing competition within the council for funding, demands a more strategic and transformational response. Whilst these challenges are considerable, the city also sees them as opportunity. They are having to rethink their management style and develop a more tactical approach to identifying and capturing value and income for the service.

<sup>96</sup> The Guardian, Edinburgh Council's £90m cuts budget passes by one vote, 11/02/16, see: <http://www.theguardian.com/edinburgh/2011/feb/11/edinburgh-council-budget-cuts-services-spending> [accessed 05/05/16]

### *The Living Landscape Programme*

In 2012 the city agreed to formally collaborate with the Scottish Wildlife Trust through a Living Landscape Programme. Whilst savings formed part of the agenda, the main objective was to increase biodiversity and create healthier ecosystems by changing approaches to land management. The partnership was purposefully extended to include Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust, the University of Edinburgh University, the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and GreenSurge (a green infrastructure alliance between 24 academic partners in 11 countries funded by the EU) to provide robust research within the programme. The city is now three years into the ten year project.

The work began with an extensive audit of the city's parks and green space assets. This took over two years to complete and now provides an interactive Living Landscapes Map<sup>97</sup> that sets out a framework for locating and assessing new management regimes. The audit showed that whilst there is limited scope for establishing new areas of woodland there are significant opportunities to vary grassland management. By changing grass cutting in selected areas there is a growing mosaic of flower rich meadows in spaces that previously offered minimal amenity or recreational value. Initial technical advice and support was provided by Green Estate<sup>98</sup>, a Sheffield based social enterprise that pioneered the development of pictorial meadows<sup>99</sup> in partnership with the University of Sheffield, Department of Landscape. Public communication and messaging has been an essential part of the programme.

Early in the process there was some resistance, particularly from officers and elected members rightly concerned about the Councils' ability to maintain longer grasslands in a visually attractive manner. In response some sites have reverted back to more traditional management. Research from the University of Edinburgh and other project partners records a wide variety of biodiversity benefits including increasing numbers of pollinating insects<sup>100</sup>. In addition, social impact surveys demonstrate that if well maintained there is a greater public preference for ecologically managed grasslands. The cost savings in management have yet to be assessed in detail although a key dividend has been the geographic mapping resource. This now provides an increasingly valuable tool in coordinating and overlaying a number of management and maintenance activities across the city.

Edinburgh greatly values the support of community groups that contribute, in partnership with the parks service, to improving the quality and activity of individual parks. It has worked hard at building the number of active Parks Friends Groups that now total over 50. It also actively promotes the Green Flag Award scheme, which in 2016 gained 30 awards for individual sites. Furthermore the City undertakes individual Park Quality Assessments each year for every park which has greatly helped to improve site quality during this period of austerity.

<sup>97</sup> For information on Edinburgh's Living Landscape programme and an interactive map see: [http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20064/parks\\_and\\_green\\_spaces/1160/edinburgh\\_living\\_landscape](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20064/parks_and_green_spaces/1160/edinburgh_living_landscape) [accessed 05/05/16]

<sup>98</sup> For further information on Green Estate see: <http://greenestate.org.uk/> [accessed 05/05/16]

<sup>99</sup> For further information in Pictorial Meadows see: <http://greenestate.org.uk/business-pictorial-meadows> [accessed 05/05/16]

<sup>100</sup> Hicks DM. et al (2016) *Food for Pollinators: Quantifying the Nectar and Pollen Resources of Urban Flower Meadows*, see: <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0158117> [accessed 23/08/16]



### *Social Return on Investment*

In positioning green space services and making the case for funding, parks have found it difficult to demonstrate their value and return on investment. All too often funding decisions are based simply on what delivers the greatest financial return which commonly overlooks many of the social and less immediate benefits of parks. In response the city commissioned a study<sup>101</sup> to calculate the value of its parks and the social return on investment that they provide. This looked at four sample parks along with an analysis of the Pentland Hills Regional Park that was previously undertaken by Greenspace Scotland. When combined with findings from 5,000 face-to-face interviews the city has been able to scale up and estimate the value of services delivered by all of Edinburgh's 142 parks.

Whilst the methodology acknowledges a number of assumptions it demonstrates that for every £1 invested in Edinburgh's parks, approximately £12 of benefits are delivered. The cost benefit ratio varies from 1:7 for a natural park, to 1:17 for a large city-centre park. Included within the many returns that parks provide it is estimated that individuals gain health and wellbeing benefits worth around £40.5 million and local business benefit from additional income from visitors to parks in the region of £51 million per annum.

Edinburgh is a big visitor destination and historically the city has often given the use of its parks for free. In drawing on research from other destination cities including London, Paris and Rome, it is now adopting a much more commercial approach to charging. Whilst many charitable and community events are still supported for free, a more competitive procurement policy has secured a threefold increase in rental income for key sites. A growing diversity of income now includes rental for telecom masts, commercial lets and charging fees for filming and commercial photography. Where administration costs outweigh the level of income generated, charges are simply collected through the My-Park-Scotland<sup>102</sup> crowd-funding site. Set up by Greenspace Scotland with a Nesta Rethinking Parks development grant, this provides an efficient means to capture and ring-fence income for the parks service. This, alongside other crowd funding models, offers a simple and time-efficient model that could be adopted for many parks and park services across the UK.

## 5.4 Inequalities - growing differences across the regions

**Park services across the UK have been affected by austerity in different ways. For both the 2014 and 2016 studies a higher than average proportion of park managers in the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber and the North West report reductions to revenue budgets and anticipate their parks will be declining.**

There is a growing perception that changes in the funding and staffing of parks services is having a greater effect in some parts of the UK compared to others. This follows inequalities that have already been highlighted in past research. The last two studies commissioned by CABE Space and published in 2010 looked at the state of England's urban green space and its

<sup>101</sup> City of Edinburgh Council (2014) *Calculating the Value of Edinburgh's Parks*, see: [http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20064/parks\\_and\\_green\\_spaces/1300/the\\_value\\_of\\_city\\_of\\_edinburgh\\_councils\\_parks](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20064/parks_and_green_spaces/1300/the_value_of_city_of_edinburgh_councils_parks) [accessed 05/05/16]

<sup>102</sup> For further information on My Park Scotland see: <http://www.mypark.scot/why-myparkscotland/> [accessed 05/05/16]

impact on people's health and well-being. *Urban green nation*<sup>103</sup> and *Community green*<sup>104</sup> found that the provision of parks in deprived areas was worse than in affluent areas and that people from minority ethnic groups tended to have less local green space and that which they had was of poorer quality. This past research found strong north-south and urban-suburban patterns in green space quality indicators - 'Quality is better in the South West, followed by the East of England and South East, and poorer in the three northern regions, particularly in the North West'.

The government's Natural Environment White Paper<sup>105</sup> published in 2011 concurred with this view, noting that 'while many people enjoy pleasant green spaces near where they live, this is not the case for everyone. People in deprived areas are nearly six times less likely than those in affluent ones to describe their area as 'green'. Those living in deprived areas, minority ethnic communities, elderly people and those with disabilities have less access to green spaces or tend to use them less'.

Recent green space surveys in Scotland<sup>106</sup> identify similar issues of environmental equality. The gap between expectations of parks and green spaces as good places (for children to play; safe and attractive places for physical activity and relaxation) and the reality of people's local spaces is much wider for respondents living in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland. Results also highlight several other potential equalities issues in relation to the use and quality of green space. For example, people living in council housing; the most deprived areas of Scotland; and/or, those in DE social grades are more likely than average to perceive that the quality of their local green space has reduced in the last five years.

In analysing the results from the last park managers' survey in 2013, the data suggested that 'parks within urban authorities and particularly those in the Midlands and the North of England have generally faced the greatest reductions in revenue funding and staffing'. A further analysis of regional results from the current park managers' survey has looked at the cumulative effect of funding and staffing cuts alongside the expected proportion of declining parks to identify which parts of the country are being affected disproportionately to others. The following table compares figures for average revenue cuts, average staffing cuts and the proportion of park managers who expect their parks will be in a declining condition over the next three years.

<sup>103</sup> CABE Space (2010) *Urban Green Nation: Building the evidence base*, p4 and 18, see: [http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/urban-green-nation-summary1\\_0.pdf](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/urban-green-nation-summary1_0.pdf) [accessed 21/06/16]

<sup>104</sup> CABE Space (2010) *Community green: using local spaces to tackle inequality and improve health*, see: <http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/community-green-full-report.pdf> [accessed 21/06/16]

<sup>105</sup> HM Government (2011) *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*, p51 para 4.26

<sup>106</sup> Greenspace Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage (2015), *Scotland's People and Nature Survey 2013/14*, see: <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=133&mid=129&fileid=482> [accessed 23/08/16]

Region	% Average Revenue Cuts	Rank	% Average Staffing Cuts	Rank	% Average Declining Parks	Rank	Total	Rank
North East	-19.3%	3	-19.8%	1	62.5%	1	5	1
Yorkshire & Humber	-17.8%	4	-14.3%	5	58.3%	2	11	2
North West	-20.5%	2	-11.5%	7	55.0%	3	12	3
West Midlands	-15.1%	5	-15.4%	3	41.7%	5	13	4
East Midlands	-23.2%	1	-7.4%	9	26.7%	6	16	5
South West	-14.8%	6	-12.0%	6	42.9%	4	16	5
East	-13.7%	7	-16.9%	2	26.3%	7	16	5
South East	-10.7%	9	-14.8%	4	10.0%	9	22	8
London	-11.8%	8	-11.2%	8	22.2%	8	24	9
Wales	-22.2%	2	-15.6%	1	70.0%	1	4	1
England	-15.9%	3	-13.3%	2	36.0%	3	8	2
Northern Ireland	-23.0%	1	-10.5%	3	0.0%	4	8	2
Scotland	-10.3%	4	-9.3%	4	50.0%	2	10	4
<b>Averages</b>	-15.9%		-13.0%		38.6%			

**Table 5.9** Combined ranking of revenue cuts, staffing cuts and declining parks expected in the next three years (2017-19) compared across the UK countries and regions

In ranking the order of cuts from highest to lowest it is possible to calculate a cumulative figure for the three criteria. On a country level, Wales has been affected the most with nearly the highest level of revenue cuts, the highest level of staff cuts and expects to have the highest proportion of declining parks in the next three years. Across each of the English regions:

- The Northern regions continue to face a higher proportion of funding and staffing cuts and expect the largest percentage of declining parks.
- The cumulative impact appears to be the greatest in the North East, followed by Yorkshire and the Humber, the North West and the West Midlands.
- The East Midlands reports the highest average revenue cuts and ranks alongside the East and the South West as having a similar cumulative impact.
- The North East has faced the highest average level of staff cuts and is also expecting to have the highest proportion of declining parks.
- London and the South East appear to have faced the lowest cumulative impact of revenue and staffing cuts and expect the lowest proportion of declining parks.



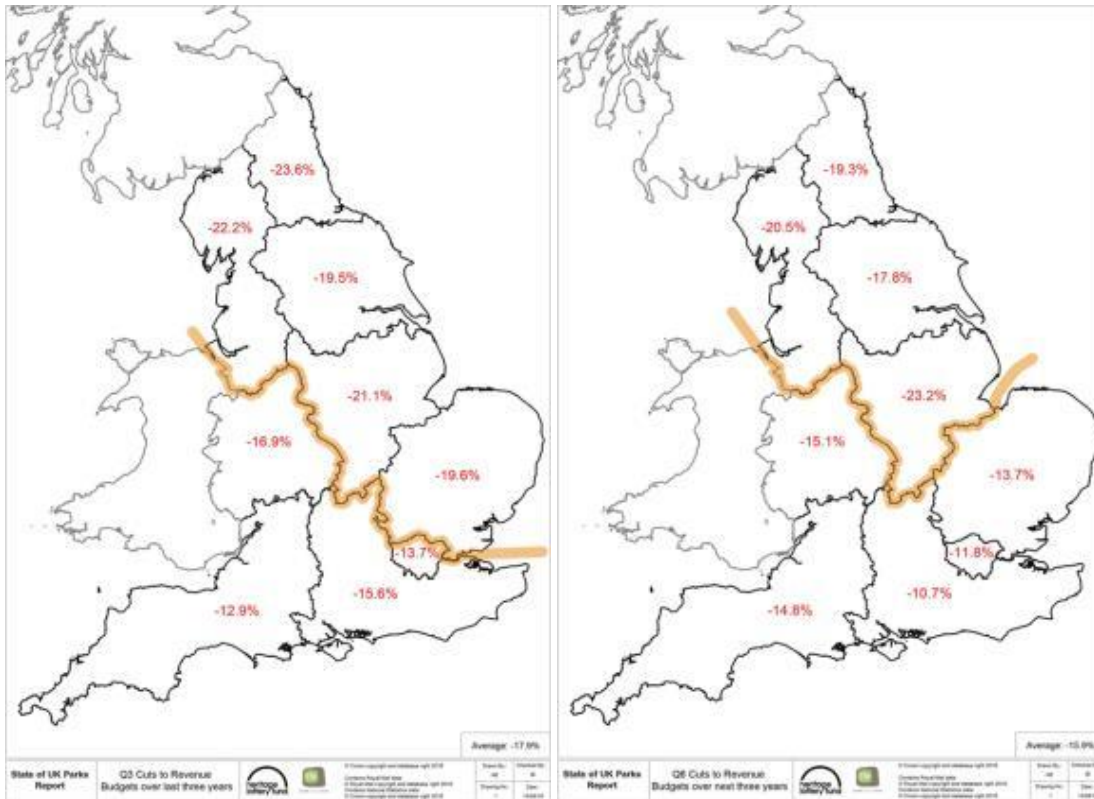
Image: A boarded up building in a park © Peter Neal

The series of maps on the following page illustrate the division between the English regions that report a higher and lower than average proportion of revenue cuts and declining parks:

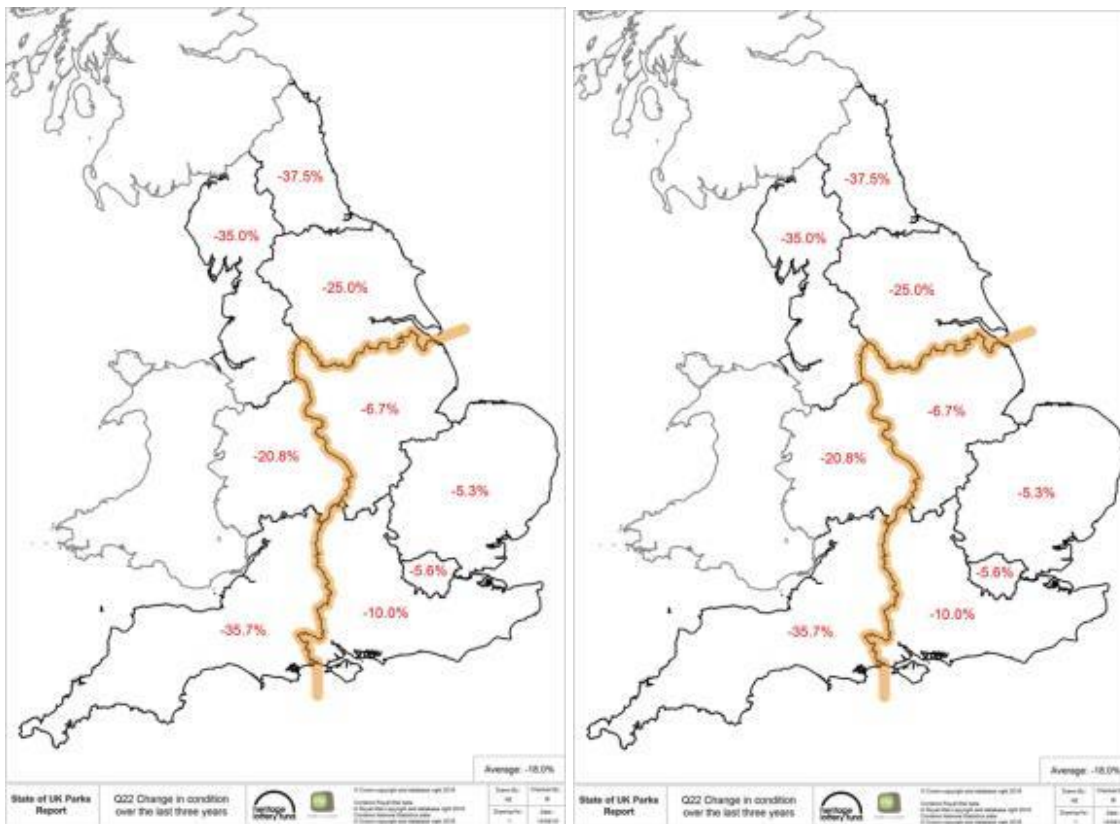
- Cuts to revenue budgets over the last three years (England average: 17.9%)
- Cuts to revenue budgets over the next three years (England average: 15.9%)
- Proportion of declining parks over the last three years (England average: 18.0%)
- Proportion of declining parks over the next three years (England average: 38.6%)

This pattern restates the conclusions from the last survey and indicates that the Midlands and Northern regions are facing the greatest reductions in revenue and staffing and expect to have the highest proportion of declining parks. Whereas previously there was a clear distinction between the north and south, there is now a middle band that comprises the West Midlands, East Midlands and South West. London and the South East and East are also facing considerable cuts to funding and staffing and (with the exception of the South East) anticipate an increasing percentage of declining parks in the next three years these are at a proportionately lower level to other parts of the country.





Cuts to revenue over the past three years (Av -17.9%) Cuts to revenue over the next three years (Av -15.95)



Declining parks over the past three years (Av -18%) Declining parks over the next three years (Av -38.6%)

**Figure 5.1** Regional analysis of revenue cuts and proportion of declining parks over last and next 3 years © CFP

## Spotlight on Liverpool - a strategic review of the city's parks and green spaces



St Georges Gardens, Liverpool © Peter Neal

History has endowed Liverpool with a wealth of parks and green spaces. The rapid expansion of the docks fuelled by the industrial revolution and burgeoning transatlantic trade brought with it the means to invest in the fabric of the city – its waterfront, municipal buildings, streets, gardens and parks. This positioned Liverpool in the premier league of municipal park-making in the mid-1800s and, today, the city retains one of the largest and most important collections of Victorian parks in the UK. Over a thirty year period, it built Prince's Park, Wavertree Park, Newsham Park, Stanley Park and Sefton Park to create a network of green spaces that encircle the city centre. In total, seven are recognised and registered by Historic England as having particular cultural significance including Sefton Park, registered at the highest Grade I.

These great parks, along with dozens of other neighbourhood parks and green spaces, are now facing an increasingly uncertain future. Since the start of the decade, Liverpool has had to make extensive and deep cuts to its finances, totalling £173 million in just five years. Furthermore, the city will need to find an additional £156 million in savings over the following three years that cumulatively represent a reduction in real terms of around 58% of the total city budget since 2010/11. Future projections suggest there will be no money for non-statutory and even some statutory services before the end of the decade. In addition to earlier savings, the budget for parks maintenance, which is delivered in partnership with a private contractor, has been cut by 35% in the last four years. Now the expectation is that there will be no core funding for managing the city's parks and green spaces from 2017/18 onwards.



### *A parks review board*

In response, the Mayor has commissioned a Strategic Green and Open Spaces Review Board<sup>107</sup> to examine how the city can continue to maintain and invest in its parks and green spaces. Simon O'Brien - actor, environmental activist and resident from birth - was appointed as an independent chair along with a small panel of councillors, officers and local experts to guide an eighteen month programme of work. The interim report, circulated in December 2015, is to be followed by a final report expected in autumn 2016.

The terms of reference for the board focused on aligning the provision and management of parks and green spaces with the Council's principle priorities for the city. This includes contributing to a strategic land review process that allocates new sites for housing; the development of Liverpool's local plan policies; and, guidance on future models of funding, management and ownership. Through the work of its chair and council officers, the review has amassed a considerable evidence base. It has undertaken a large number of site visits, consultation events, workshops and presentations with many stakeholders and community groups across the city during much of 2015.

### *Inequalities in provision*

The interim report set out a series of provisional recommendations for equality and accessibility, finance, health and planning. A key observation was the imbalance in accessibility and quality of parks between the north and south of the city. There is a poorer provision of parks in the north and this perceived 'north-south divide' became a recurring issue at meetings and workshops. It closely follows levels of deprivation in the city which are particularly high in the north where virtually all of the neighbourhoods are ranked within the most deprived 10% nationally.

This also correlates with public health data that shows a greater concentration of neighbourhoods with a high prevalence of co-morbidity (people living with two or more long-term health conditions)<sup>108</sup> towards the north of the city. This is particularly apparent in the Norris Green and Clubmoor wards which have a cluster of health issues related to sedentary lifestyles and this is becoming a particular focus for health funding. These areas are home to around 20,000 people and the Review Board found that they have some of the worst provision of amenities and do not have a fully equipped public play park.

### *Future funding and management*

The most pressing task for the board has been to identify alternative ways to fund the service in the future. In 2013/14 the city spent around £12 million in managing its parks and green spaces including the extensive Croxteth Hall. For 2016/17 this has fallen to just over £8 million of which around £2.2 million is spent on parks specifically. The long-list of options include raising an additional council tax charge, calculated to be £4.50 per head to cover park costs; the use of development levies

<sup>107</sup> All documents relating to the work of the Review Board are available at: <http://liverpool.gov.uk/mayor/mayoral-commissions/strategic-green-and-open-spaces-review-board/> [accessed 12/05/16]

<sup>108</sup> Liverpool's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Statement of Need, Update 2014, p26. see: <http://liverpool.gov.uk/media/102582/jsna-statement-of-need-update-2014-v2-1.pdf> [accessed 12/05/16]

to create green corridors; and, redirecting income from the council's parking charges. The board's favoured approach is a blended financial model that pools different sources of income into a single revenue stream.

A central element would be to place the city's six or seven strategic parks into a trust set up with an endowment of around £27 million funded by the council, health, planning gain and other sources. Additional income would be generated through events, concessions and charges to supplement the annual dividend generated by the endowment. Preliminary calculations suggest that the model would provide enough resources to fund the management of the city's 139 parks collectively. The appeal of the model is that it has the potential to protect and manage these parks in perpetuity.

Ownership of the parks would remain with the city but, once successfully up and running, the trust would lease the parks in the long-term from the city and incrementally take on responsibility for all the city's parks. It is currently planned that sports pitches, cemeteries and crematoria would remain outside the trust as they are capable of operating on a cost-neutral basis with fees and charges providing the income needed for their maintenance. The next stage of work will be to develop a detailed business plan for the trust alongside a thorough review of all legal constraints, existing leases and covenants that initially relate to the city's principal parks.

## 5.5 Commercialisation - increasing programmed uses, activities and events

**Local authorities are increasingly looking at commercial ways to generate additional income from their parks. Whilst over half of people support this approach, the most popular way to supplement income is via the National Lottery; increasing charges for facilities has the least support from the public.**

With growing pressure on budgets, a larger proportion of councils plan to increase their income from external sources. In the next three years, around a third of income for parks and green spaces is expected to be generated this way and this is likely to have an impact on the character, quality and use of some parks. Concern about the level of commercial events and concerts hosted by the Royal Parks is raised regularly in the press and 'the issue of the creeping commercialisation of Hyde park' was debated in Parliament<sup>109</sup> five years ago. More recently, this issue gained significant national attention when Stoke Gifford, a small parish council near Bristol, voted to charge Parkrun a fee for the use of Little Stoke Park<sup>110</sup>. For more than a week, the issue generated prominent headlines and substantial coverage in the media and over 50,000 people signed up to an online petition against the proposal.

The different ways councils across the UK are looking to secure external funding from charges, commercial enterprises and events can be analysed using responses from the park managers' survey. The results are set out in the following table although it should be noted that individual sample sizes are particularly small and only general assumptions can be made from this analysis.

<sup>109</sup> House of Commons Hansard (2011) Royal Parks, 19 July 2011, Volume 531, see:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2011-07-19/debates/11071995000002/RoyalParks> [accessed 21/06/16]

<sup>110</sup> For further information on Park Run in Bristol see: <http://www.parkrun.org.uk/littlestoke/news/2016/01/22/keep-little-stoke-parkrun-in-little-stoke-park/> [accessed 21/06/16]

Region	n	Charging for services	n	Commercial enterprises	n	Events and festivals	n	Health organisations
North West	15	75.0%	8	40.0%	14	70.0%	6	30.0%
North East	6	75.0%	3	37.5%	5	62.5%	3	37.5%
Yorkshire & Humber	6	50.0%	5	41.7%	9	75.0%	6	50.0%
West Midlands	15	62.5%	11	45.8%	10	41.7%	9	37.5%
East Midlands	10	66.7%	8	53.3%	9	60.0%	6	40.0%
East	11	57.9%	9	47.4%	8	42.1%	2	10.5%
London	14	77.8%	13	72.2%	15	83.3%	3	16.7%
South West	8	57.1%	7	50.0%	3	21.4%	1	7.1%
South East	12	60.0%	10	50.0%	7	35.0%	1	5.0%
England	97	64.7%	74	49.3%	80	53.3%	37	24.7%
Northern Ireland	3	75.0%	1	25.0%	1	25.0%	0	0.0%
Scotland	17	70.8%	8	33.3%	9	37.5%	2	8.3%
Wales	9	90.0%	4	40.0%	6	60.0%	1	10.0%
<b>Totals</b>	127	67.2%	88	46.6%	97	51.3%	40	21.2%

Note The sample size for the majority of responses is below 30%

**Table 5.10** Comparison of external sources of income across the UK regions over the past three years (2013-15)

Whilst the approach to raising income from different sources varies significantly across the UK, some general and indicative patterns can be identified. London appears to be adopting the most commercial approach to generating income from its parks when combining figures for charging, commercial enterprises and events. This is generally followed by the Midlands and Northern authorities who have also faced a higher percentage of cuts to their revenue funding in recent years. A lower proportion of authorities in the East and South generate external funding in this manner. A similar pattern is seen for authorities that have secured funding from health organisations where the largest proportion is those in the Midlands and the North. For individual countries, it appears that Wales has adopted the most commercial approach to generating external income whilst figures for the other countries are relatively similar.

The increasing commercial use of parks can become a contentious issue and has generated much debate. This is particularly the case when the hosting of events, and particularly ticketed events, occurs during peak times of park use and in the summer months. The Open Spaces Society has highlighted the issue in a recent edition of their magazine<sup>111</sup>, arguing that ‘the current fashion for festivals in city parks has been spurred by local authority funding cuts and a need for councils to raise cash in any way they can’. Many councils host large festivals in their parks over the summer months, including the V Festival in Hylands Park, Chelmsford (attended 270,000 people) and Parklife in Heaton Park, Manchester (attended by 140,000 people). The recent staging of Formula E motor racing in Battersea Park London has faced considerable opposition and threatened legal action. Following agreement with objectors<sup>112</sup>, proposals to host future events have been shelved.

<sup>111</sup> Open Spaces Society article referenced by BT Online - Is local councils' grab for festival cash turning our parks into mud baths? 24/04/16. See: <http://home.bt.com/news/uk-news/is-local-councils-grab-for-festival-cash-turning-our-parks-into-mudbaths-11364047770679> [accessed 21/06/16]

<sup>112</sup> For further information the Save Battersea Park campaign see: <http://savebatterseapark.com/news/> [accessed 21/06/16].

### 5.5.1 Public opinion on various approaches to funding

The challenge of securing new, and publically acceptable, sources of funding remains a challenge. With this in mind a question on this issue was included in the public opinion survey to gauge people’s view: ‘In addition to council funding, there are a number of ways to supplement the funding of parks from other sources. Please indicate the extent to which you support or oppose the use of each as a way to fund your local park’. The results are set out in the following table.

Ways to supplement the funding of parks (n = 2,130)	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Neither support or oppose	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	NET Support
Greater funding from the National Lottery	39%	40%	15%	1%	1%	79%
More sponsorship of parks by businesses (e.g. funding of planting areas, features and facilities)	30%	45%	17%	2%	1%	75%
More funding from planning and local development (e.g. developer contributions from new housing)	32%	42%	18%	2%	2%	74%
Greater fundraising by local communities and park user groups	19%	46%	27%	3%	1%	65%
More commercial use of parks (e.g. ticketed events, fairs and shows)	18%	41%	25%	8%	3%	60%
Increasing charges for using park facilities (e.g. tennis courts or car parks)	4%	16%	23%	29%	24%	20%

**Table 5.11** Public opinions on options to supplement the funding of parks (May 2016)

The results show there is a clear distinction in the level of public support for different approaches to generate income. The most favoured is funding from external and commercial organisations including the National Lottery, local businesses and development. The raising of additional revenue through fees and charges for the use of park facilities is opposed the most strongly.

From the choices given, the most popular way to supplement park funding is through the National Lottery, receiving support from 79% of respondents. Complimentary evidence for this comes from HLF’s recent research into the impact and reach of its lottery investment. *20 Years in 12 Places*<sup>113</sup>, described earlier in section 2.2, highlights the particularly prominent impact of lottery funding for public parks across almost all of the places studied. Parks register as some of the most recognised HLF funded projects reaching all sections of the community. They are shown to both contribute to a sense of collective civic pride and provide direct personal benefit for many users and, in consequence, a significant number of National Lottery players.

There is also a good level of support for more commercial sponsorship from local businesses alongside funding generated through planning and development, which is already seen to be a

<sup>113</sup> Heritage Lottery Fund (2015) *20 Years in 12 Places: 20 years of Lottery Funding for Heritage*, BritainThinks, see: <https://www.hlf.org.uk/about-us/research-evaluation/20-years-heritage> [accessed 26/05/16]

particularly important source of income for park managers. Greater fundraising by local community and user groups also benefits from a relatively high level of support from 65% of respondents. The more commercial use of parks through ticketed events, fairs and shows which has recently generated a lot of press coverage also receives a comparatively high level of support from 60% of the public. Increased charging for facilities is markedly the least popular choice. A closer analysis of the results indicates that the greatest opposition to charging for facilities comes from those aged between 16 and 24 years old and those with children aged 11-15 years old. Respondents who state their local park is currently in a poor condition also register a relatively high level of opposition, suggesting that people are less supportive of paying for facilities in parks that in a state of neglect.

### Spotlight on Nottingham - a balancing act between income and expenditure



Image: The Forest Recreation Ground, Nottingham © Peter Neal

Breathing Space, Nottingham's open and green space strategy<sup>114</sup>, provides a ten year strategic framework for the investment and management of the city's parks and green spaces. Whilst Nottingham is relatively dense and compact, around a quarter of the city is made up of accessible open space. Nearly 130 parks totalling over 770 hectares, represent more than half of this open space which is complemented by a large number of natural and semi-natural green spaces, sports grounds, play areas, allotments and cemeteries.

This variety of green space is seen by the park service as its greatest asset. It includes several large parks - Nottingham Arboretum, Colwick Country Park, the Forest Recreation Ground and Highfields Park - along with a 200-berth marina at Colwick Country Park and several facilities located close to large sports venues that include Nottingham Forest Football Club and Trent Bridge Cricket Ground.

<sup>114</sup> Nottingham City Council (2010) *Breathing Space, revitalising Nottingham's open and green space 2010 - 2020*, adopted in 2007 and revised in 2013, see: <https://nottinghaminsight.org.uk/f/63761/Library/Environment/General/> [accessed 31/07/16]



Over the past five years, Nottingham has faced a £150 million reduction to its budget and has had to find a further £30 million in savings for this financial year. At the same time, demand for its adult social care and children in care services is increasing, which places further pressure on the remaining budget. This includes funding for parks which is facing a cut of around £300,000 in this financial year, representing around 10% of the total budget.

The parks team has worked hard to protect staff posts as they provide many of the skills and expertise needed to drive the service forward. Without this resource it is difficult to develop the service and have the capacity to innovate. This needs development officers to write bids, architectural and design teams to promote schemes and marketing staff to grow income. These skills, and many others, are essential to evolve and reposition the service in the future.

#### *Pooling funding and resources*

One successful strategy has been to pool funding, including allocations for individual ward budgets to be able to focus investment on particular areas of need. Probably the best example of this has been the extensive restoration and development programme for The Forest Recreation Ground<sup>115</sup>. Over £7 million has been combined from a wide variety of sources including HLF and BLF, Play Pathfinder, NHS and s106 planning gain. Through this, the council has been able to totally redevelop children's play areas, establish a new sports facility, completely refurbish the historic lodge and restructure the layout for on-site parking. A newly restored café with a vastly improved and locally-sourced catering offer now enjoys high ratings on both Trip Advisor and Facebook, adding a further draw and appeal to the park.

The Forest Sports Zone has significantly improved opportunities for sport and active recreation with 3G pitches and multi-use games areas. The project has been delivered in partnership between the City Council and Nottingham Forest in the Community, the outreach arm of Nottingham Forest Football Club that operates as a charitable trust. This completes a full circle by restoring the historical link with the football club which was established at The Forest 150 years ago. With greatly improved facilities, young people are now really engaged in sport and fitness activities, crime statistics are down and levels of anti-social behaviour much improved.

#### *Additional sources of income*

As a more attractive and constructive alternative to finding increasingly challenging efficiency savings, the parks service has placed a great focus on generating a larger proportion of revenue funding from alternative sources. Cafes and concessions are being completely overhauled to improve their offer and extend their market. The service has entered the horticultural retail market by commercialising the city's nursery production. The Woodthorpe Nursery<sup>116</sup> has been producing award winning

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<sup>115</sup> For further information on the Forest Recreation Ground see: <http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/events-markets-parks-and-museums/parks-and-open-spaces/find-your-local-park/forest-recreation-ground/> [accessed 04/07/16]

<sup>116</sup> For further information on the Plant Nursery see: <http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/events-markets-parks-and-museums/parks-and-open-spaces/plant-nursery/> [accessed 04/07/16]



plant stock for more than 20 years and now grows material for six other local authorities and sells direct to the general public.

Several sites are now charging for parking which particularly benefits from the association with large sporting venues. In 2015, the city joined the national ParkLives programme that is delivering a wide variety of sports and physical fitness activities in 20 parks. This year it includes open water swimming in the lake at Colwick Country Park alongside health walks, rounders, archery, pilates, yoga and even stand-up paddleboard yoga.

Highfields Park is a Grade II\* historic park adjoining the University of Nottingham. It is owned by Highfields Leisure Park Trust, a charitable trust of which the city is sole trustee. It operates with an endowment and the Trust provides an additional vehicle to capture capital funding and further grants and sponsorship for the service. The park has secured a £3.2 million grant from HLF and BLF that forms a substantial part of the parks £4.64 million regeneration programme.

The goal by the end of the decade is to be a self-funded service able to balance revenue costs with sustainable income streams. The service has purposely adopted a mixed economy approach rather than implementing a wholesale shift in delivery. It promotes and champions the importance of park specialists who continue to play a key role in reshaping and repositioning the service. It has also invested much energy into building political backing which is an essential part of protecting resources for the service and supporting opportunities for innovation and change.

## 5.6 Promoting sport - encouraging health, exercise and more active uses

Parks are increasingly being used to stimulate more active lifestyles to deliver a variety of public health benefits. However, increased charging along with the sale or transfer of sites to community groups may work against this objective.

The health benefits of public parks are well understood and were one of the principal motives that initially motivated the Victorian park movement. In highlighting the value of this great inheritance 'built to a large extent to promote public health' the Centre for Public Health at Liverpool John Moores University undertook a strategic study into the relationship between parks and public health in the North West of England. *Returning urban parks to their public health roots*<sup>117</sup> noted that 'physical inactivity, the main sign of which is obesity, is one of the ten leading causes of death in developed countries'. Suggesting in the North West that 'there has been limited implementation of health schemes in urban parks, and the opportunities for 'green exercise', both formal and informal, are not being maximised'.

UK Active has assessed this issue in further detail in *Turning the Tide of Inactivity*<sup>118</sup> which emphasises the scale and implication of this 'physical inactivity epidemic in the UK' - 12.5 million people in England fail to achieve 30 minutes of moderately intense physical activity per week. In proposing a range of solutions the study suggests that 'open spaces help remove barriers to participation, reduce health inequalities and can lead to long-term savings if

<sup>117</sup> Liverpool John Moores University, Centre for Public Health (2007) *Returning urban parks to their public health roots*, see: <http://www.nwph.net/Publications/ReturningUrbanParks.pdf> [accessed 02/08/16]

<sup>118</sup> UK Active (2014) *Turning the Tide of Inactivity*, see: [http://ukactive.com/downloads/managed/Turning\\_the\\_tide\\_of\\_inactivity.pdf](http://ukactive.com/downloads/managed/Turning_the_tide_of_inactivity.pdf) [accessed 02/08/16]

developed appropriately'. This observation is directly relevant to delivering Sport England's ambitious new strategy that sets out a new direction for sport policy in the country. *Towards an Active Nation, Strategy 2016-2021*<sup>119</sup> places particular emphasis on reaching people that are inactive, children and young people from the age of five and encouraging those that are active to remain so in a more sustainable and self-sufficient way.

In Scotland the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework<sup>120</sup> looks to encourage: the inactive to become more active; and, for people to develop physical confidence and competence from an early age. In promoting increased levels of activity the framework is principally about getting people moving, whether it is through 'daily walking, playing in a park, going to a gym or training with a team'. To facilitate this it identifies the need for active infrastructure for people and places that include a 'Greenspace Accessibility' measure, drawn from the Scottish Household Survey. This notes that 'those living in more deprived areas tended to have further to travel to the nearest usable greenspace', whilst 'adults who live within a five minute walk from their local greenspace were more likely to use it than those who live further away.



Image: Heaton Park, Manchester © Peter Neal

Initiatives to promote more active use of parks is on the increase with a growing emphasis on the delivering wider social benefits and capturing new sources of funding from health bodies and organisations. Exercise and fitness equipment has become a familiar feature in many parks and green spaces and there are a growing number of personal trainers and fitness classes operating across large number of parks in the UK. Examples, which may either be publicly funded or privately operated, include yoga and tai chi classes, boot camps, buggy fit and pramactive for young parents, park walks and green gyms. Our Parks<sup>121</sup>, launched two years ago and initially backed by the Sports and Leisure team at Waltham Forest Council, puts individuals in touch with fitness classes primarily located across parks in greater London. Park

<sup>119</sup> Sport England (2016) *Towards an Active Nation, strategy 2016-2021*, see: <https://www.sportengland.org/media/10629/sport-england-towards-an-active-nation.pdf> [accessed 02/08/16]

<sup>120</sup> For further information on the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework, see: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/ArtsCultureSport/Sport/Outcomes-Framework> [accessed 23/08/16]

<sup>121</sup> For further information on Our Parks, see: <http://www.ourparks.org.uk/> [accessed 02/08/16]

Lives<sup>122</sup>, has teamed up with at least ten city councils across England and Scotland to provide a wide range of free park-based activities, listed on an online calendar, for people of all ages to participate in. Whilst these programmes can all positively contribute to increasing activity and personal fitness, conflicts have emerged in relation to the perceived free use of parks. Personal trainers are increasingly being charged for a licence to operate in parks and the recent outcry over Stoke Gifford's plan to charge Park Run being the most prominent recent example.

Research for this study provides some important trends on how parks can contribute to delivering this strategy but also identifies a number of potential risks. Findings from the public opinion poll emphasise the high levels of park use and particularly for children and young people, who are a key focus for Sport England's strategy. Playing featured as the most prominent favourite memory of park users which included children's play areas, playing various games and playing football. "Just seeing the simple things like kids playing football and other sports in a time where most kids seem to be looking at phone screens" was one particularly pertinent comment although 'playing sports and running around on the grass playing games' was a common memory for many people.

Increased charges, budget cuts, declining quality, the reduction in park development staff and the disposal or transfer of sports facilities are likely to have a detrimental effect on the ability of parks to promote more active lifestyles. The trend to increase charges for pitches and sports use is considered to be the highest priority for park managers, alongside charging for the use of park facilities, for generating income. However, this approach to generating income is also shown to have the least support from the general public. There is clear conflict between the need to encourage people to be more active and the risk that increasing charges will make it harder to achieve.

The park managers' survey identified further, and more substantive, trends for sports facilities. Outdoor sports facilities are the most common open space assets to be transferred by local authorities to community groups and this trend is expected to continue over the next three years. APSE concurs<sup>123</sup>, finding that 64% of local authorities have already transferred playing fields to community management or ownership. Individual responses from park managers provide further detail, stating "sports pitches sold for housing, leisure facilities leased to private companies"; "hand back more sports facilities to clubs to maintain"; and, "this will see cuts in many areas, including annual bedding, sports pitch provision, staffing numbers and volunteer programmes ...we will look at self-management of sports pavilions as well as community interest in sports pitches and allotments". It is less likely that community groups will be equipped, resourced or motivated to fulfil the broader public health benefits of sports facilities that often require wider strategic planning and coordination.

## **5.7 Supporting innovation - developing new business models to sustain investment**

**The Rethinking Parks Programme has encouraged several local authorities to look at opportunities for innovation. Increasing relationships with businesses, crowd funding and investment from public health are increasingly being used to develop new business models that generate additional funding and resources.**

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<sup>122</sup> For further information on Park Lives, see <https://www.parklives.com/about> [accessed 02/08/16]

<sup>123</sup> APSE (2016) *State of the Market Survey 2016, Local Authority Parks and Green Spaces Services*, Briefing 16-15, p18

The continuing reduction in funding for local authority park services remains the most significant challenge for most park managers. This study finds that, over the past three years, the level of cuts is similar, if not worse, than those recorded by the last survey. Looking forward to the next three years, a higher proportion of managers expect to face cuts of up to 20% than the last survey, although those anticipating cuts above 20% are fewer.

Park managers were asked to look back and consider whether the level of cuts since the last survey were better or worse than anticipated, a quarter considered they were worse than expected (47/189 - 24.9%). 60% of managers considered the level of cuts to be as expected (114/189 - 60.3%) and 15% considered them to be better (28/189 – 14.8%). Recent research from APSE<sup>124</sup> finds that 78% of respondents agreed or agreed strongly that ‘the squeeze on public service resources is affecting parks and green spaces disproportionately to other service areas. Nearly all (93.8%) agree that the ‘lack of investment in parks and green spaces will have health and social impacts’.

Many councils have already had to find considerable savings and most continue to adopt increasingly challenging efficiency measures which many consider will not be sufficient to bridge the growing funding gap. The park managers’ survey asked ‘what do you feel the impact of this challenge will be?’ Several replies stated that quality standards will drop, there will be less replacement of equipment and infrastructure, less support for friends groups and less staffing for events and volunteer programmes. They also state that there will be an increase in the closure of facilities, greater commercialisation, more asset transfers, more reliance on volunteers and greater pressure to generate income. Such measures are also described in the APSE survey, for example:

- Rethinking staffing levels by reducing management tiers, cutting administrative staff and increasing seasonal staff
- Shared contract procurement with neighbouring authorities
- Reductions in services, such as play area provision
- Increased commercialisation, increasing business sponsorship and targets for income generation

The park managers’ survey clearly concurs with this position where 95% of local authorities report that, over the next three years, financial management skills will be very, if not extremely, important whilst 92% state the same for sourcing external funding. This increasing drive to develop new business models and alternative sources of funding was at the heart of Nesta’s Rethinking Parks programme. Launched in early 2014, as the last State of Parks study was being completed, it has been the most prominent initiative for the parks sector in recent years. The programme gave the opportunity to test a variety of business and income generating models. These have formed part of an increasing move to enable parks to capture and monetise wider economic, social and environmental benefits.

### **5.7.1 Connecting with businesses**

There is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates different ways to measure the economic value of parks and green spaces in increasing detail. This includes an analysis of the way parks support economic growth and investment, improve the attraction and competitiveness of places, increase land and property values, enhance labour and land productivity and promote tourism. In addition to research compiled for this study one such example is the recent economic

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<sup>124</sup> APSE (2016) *State of the Market Survey 2016, Local Authority Parks and Green Spaces Services*, Briefing 16-15, p3



analysis of Manchester's green infrastructure<sup>125</sup> that draws on the evidence that businesses will pay a premium of between 3% - 15% to be located near attractive green spaces. A conservative estimate for Manchester calculates that proximity to green space adds £3.3 million per year in rateable value to properties in the city, highlighting the potential for developing Green Business Improvements Districts to enhance tax revenues for the council.

A Rethinking Parks project run by Camden Council has looked to develop this strategy further. Drawing on a model developed in the United States, Bloomsbury Squared<sup>126</sup> looked at the potential for establishing a Parks Improvement District, or PID, to co-fund the management of nine squares and green spaces in the heart of Bloomsbury. The business model is built around Business Improvement District legislation that would allow for both voluntary contributions and a compulsory levy to be charged on businesses of a certain size following a successful ballot of the proposal. The additional funding that would be generated would contribute to both new investment in the squares and support seasonal programmes of events and activities. Both measures would increase visitors and improve the commercial potential of the district for businesses. Whilst this project did not progress to a formal ballot with businesses it remains a viable option for other local authorities to explore.

Park Hack<sup>127</sup>, another Rethinking Parks project, was run as a partnership between Groundwork London, Gensler and Hackney Council to engage businesses to develop and implement local park improvements. A central feature was the creation of the Tree X Office, a temporary workspace in Hoxton Square that could be rented by individuals and local business. Additional income was generated through events, although sponsorship was seen as a critical ingredient of the business plan.



Image: Bee keeping in Townley Park, Rethinking Parks Project, Burnley © Simon Goff

<sup>125</sup> BDP, eftec and countryside (2015) *Manchester Green Infrastructure Strategy, Technical Report*, March 2015, p59-88

<sup>126</sup> For further information on the Bloomsbury Squared Rethinking Parks Project see: <http://www.nesta.org.uk/we-rethought-parks-bloomsbury2-squared-project-guide> [accessed 23/06/16]

<sup>127</sup> For further information on the Park Hack Rethinking Parks Project see: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/rp-parkhack.pdf> [accessed 23/06/16]



### 5.7.2 Fundraising and Crowdfunding

There is increasing interest in the potential to collect what are often small contributions from a large number of people through online funding platforms. In the United States the National Recreation and Park Association has established Fundyourpark<sup>128</sup>, the first dedicated crowdfunding platform for parks. In the UK Spacehive has raised over £4.9 million for civic projects to fund both park facilities and park-based events. Recent projects include fundraising for a Skatepark in Portleven, Cornwall, and plans to run a three day outdoor cinema in Hamworthy Park, in Poole, Dorset.

Two Rethinking Parks projects have looked to formalise this model in particular areas. The Bournemouth Parks Foundation<sup>129</sup> was established by the council's parks department and formally registered as a charity at the start of 2015. It provides a vehicle to promote and collect sponsorship and gifts from local individuals and organisations for the benefit of parks and green spaces in the town. An initial financial forecast projects that the foundation could secure around £90,000 per annum in subscriptions and donations. Alongside other commonly available crowdfunding vehicles, MyParkScotland<sup>130</sup> provides a dedicated crowdfunding platform for Scottish parks that has been developed by Greenspace Scotland. Registered as an independent Scottish charity it provides a means for individuals and businesses to give directly to a wide variety of local parks and green spaces. In addition the platform is becoming a useful information hub to promote park-based events and help people find their nearest local park.

### 5.7.3 Capturing health funding

The long established relationship between public health and parks is starting to draw greater funding into the service. Over a fifth of park managers now report that they have secured funding from health organisations over the past three years (40/189 – 21.2%). In parallel the majority of APSE respondents state that 'supporting healthy living' is the greatest social priority for their service (89.9%)<sup>131</sup>. Recent coverage in the professional press has also highlighted the substantial funding Newcastle City Council has secured from the public health department to underpin its emerging plans to establish a parks trust within the city.

There has been significant new research into the relationship between parks, green space and health commissioned and also published this year. Findings from the biggest ever study into green spaces and health was released in April 2016 by the Department of Epidemiology at the Harvard Chan School<sup>132</sup>. Focussing particularly on the health of women, the study found strong associations between increased exposure to greenness and lower mortality rates and better mental health. In the UK, Beyond Greenspace<sup>133</sup> is an initiative led by the University of Exeter Medical School to understand the relationship between nature, health and wellbeing.

Natural England has published an exploratory study into the potential increase in health costs caused by a decline in greenspace<sup>134</sup> whilst the Department of Landscape at the University of

<sup>128</sup> For further information on Fundyourpark see: <http://www.fundyourpark.org/campaigns/view/archive> [accessed 23/06/16]

<sup>129</sup> For further information on the Bournemouth Parks Foundation see: <http://www.bournemouthparksfoundation.org.uk> [accessed 23/06/16] and <https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/bournemouth-md.pdf> [accessed 23/06/16]

<sup>130</sup> For further information MyParkScotland see: <http://www.mypark.scot/> [accessed 23/06/16] and <http://www.nesta.org.uk/myparkscotland-greenspace-scotland?qclid=CLGZrp2Dvs0CFQoTGwodTFQLbw> [accessed 23/06/16]

<sup>131</sup> APSE (2016) State of the Market Survey 2016, Local Authority Parks and Green Spaces Services, Briefing 16-15, p 5.

<sup>132</sup> Environmental Health Perspectives (2016) *Exposure to Greenness and Mortality in a Nationwide Prospective Cohort Study of Women*. James, P et al., 14 April 2016, see: <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/15-10363/> [accessed 23/06/16]

<sup>133</sup> For further information on Beyond Greenspace see: <https://beyondgreenspace.wordpress.com/> [accessed 23/06/16]

<sup>134</sup> Natural England (2016) *Investigating the potential increase in health costs due to a decline in access to greenspace: an exploratory study* (NERR062) 23 February 2016, see: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6213889835401216> [accessed 23/06/16]

Sheffield is embarking on a £1.3 million programme of research<sup>135</sup>. This will look at how parks and green spaces throughout Sheffield affect the health and wellbeing of residents in a bid to improve the quality of natural spaces in towns and cities.

Sheffield was also the focus for the most ambitious Rethinking Parks projects. Led by the National Trust and working in partnership with the City Council the 'Endowing public parks in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' project<sup>136</sup> sought to investigate the potential of an endowment to provide a sustainable income source for all parks across the city. This is described in further detail in the following case study.

### **Spotlight on Sheffield** - seeking to endow parks and protect them in perpetuity



Image: Norfolk Heritage Park, Sheffield © Peter Neal

For more than a century Sheffield has been known as Steel City. Now, through deliberate rebranding, it is repositioning itself as the Outdoor City, promoting its unique location and identity. This is a tactical move to diversify and extend its business, academic and tourist economies and capitalise on being one of the greenest cities in Europe. With almost 4,000 hectares of open space, Sheffield has 11 major parks, 66 community parks and many nature conservation sites, woodlands and allotments.

The city's twenty year green and open space strategy, deliberately named Sheffield's Great Outdoors, underpins this rebranding but there is one significant flaw - austerity. The parks department finds itself right at the centre of an increasingly challenging programme of cuts. As with many other cities Sheffield has had to implement a more and more demanding programme of budget reductions and cost savings. Just this year (2016/17) the city needs to find around £50 million

<sup>135</sup> The University of Sheffield, £1.3m health check for Sheffield's green spaces, 28 April 2016, see: <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/landscape/news/improving-wellbeing-through-urban-nature-nerc-iwun-1.571819> [accessed 23/06/16]

<sup>136</sup> For further information on the Endowing Public Parks in the 21st century, see: <http://www.nesta.org.uk/endowing-public-parks-21st-century> [accessed 23/06/16]

of savings which comes on top of over £300 million of cuts made since 2011/12<sup>137</sup>. Whilst the total budget for the city is around £1.4 billion much of this funding comes in the form of dedicated grants for statutory services. In reality only 30% of the budget has the flexibility to make savings. As a result non-statutory services tend to be affected the most and Sheffield's parks budget is no exception. It has already been cut by 40% since the start of the decade.

Over the coming three years, funding pressures will continue on the city's arts, sports and public parks - all elements that Sheffield considers are 'what makes a city a city'. There is now real concern that the parks service is reaching a tipping point. Initially hidden from the untrained eye, such rapid disinvestment in parks and green spaces across the city will become increasingly apparent, for decline at this scale will not be a steady and linear progression. Out of necessity, several cities like Sheffield are having to consider developing and testing a number of alternative approaches to managing, funding and structuring the service in the future.

### *Urban Nature Parks*

One initiative introduced at an early strategy to make savings has been the Urban Nature Project<sup>138</sup> that shifts the balance between traditional maintenance practices to a more naturalistic approach. In many ways it is a similar strategy to that which has been adopted in Birmingham and Edinburgh. It is planned to convert around 300 hectares of green space into urban nature areas across almost two dozen sites over a three year period. However savings that were initially projected to be around £1,000 / hectare on annual management costs have been harder to deliver in reality as some sites have proved more adaptable to new management practices than others.

Transferring the management of some sites to third sector organisations and local community groups has seen some success. Green Estate, a social enterprise working in some of the more disadvantaged areas in the east of Sheffield, has been managing a number of green spaces within the Manor and Castle wards. This includes maintaining Manor Fields Park with a local workforce for over ten years. The Sheffield Wildlife Trust has an active and long-established role in looking after several nature and conservation sites and the National Trust has recently taken on a long term lease on land on the periphery of the city. The role of volunteers is greatly valued and community groups will play an important part in supporting the management of several spaces, but this is not seen as the solution to the funding crisis.

### *Endowing Public Parks in the 21st Century*

In 2014 Sheffield was selected as one of the 11 Nesta Rethinking Parks projects. With funding from HLF and BLF England the city has worked with the National Trust to look at the potential for developing a dedicated endowment for the parks service. Seen as the most ambitious and far reaching of the Nesta projects, the goal is to

<sup>137</sup> Sheffield City Council, Budget Event Presentation, 28/01/16, see: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/your-city-council/finance/council-budget.html?useHighContrastCss=true> [accessed 06/05/16]

<sup>138</sup> For further details on Sheffield's Urban Nature Project, see: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/out--about/parks-woodlands--countryside/parks/urban-nature-project.html> [accessed 06/05/16]

establish a capital fund that would be large enough to provide an annual income stream to resource the entire parks service. Additional funding would be generated by events, charging and fundraising to supplement the endowment which would be projected to grow over time, to keep pace with inflation and the changing needs of the service.

The National Trust has an established track record in securing and building endowments for managing its estates and they are a central part of its business model. For many years the Trust has used a system known as the Chorley Formula<sup>139</sup> to determine the capital required to fund a property in perpetuity. The initial target for Sheffield was set at £100 million to generate annual revenue of around £4-5 million. This would come from a variety of sources including public bodies, utility companies, health trusts and businesses. All would have a direct relationship with and interest in maintaining the wellbeing of Sheffield's parks for their own business activities and objectives. Discussions about the potential for the endowment are progressing along with modelling an indicative business planning to fix the size of the endowment, calculate future management costs and identify income from a variety of other sources. A possible delivery model associated with the endowment could be the creation of an independent parks trust. A number of cities, including Sheffield, are in the early stages of considering the merits or otherwise of such an approach.

As part of the Rethinking Parks project the National Trust undertook some focused research with residents to explore the model in further detail. Using a questionnaire and a structured focus group; this gauged people's concerns and appetite for change. A number of participants acknowledged that as a result of financial pressures it was important to explore other approaches to the way green spaces are looked after in the future. The main principles overriding any change should ensure a fair distribution of green spaces that are safe and contribute to the health and wellbeing of residents. There was strong support for involving the local community and that any future management of parks should be not-for-profit. In generating additional income, charges and levies were least favoured whilst the commercial use of green space received the greatest level of support. In considering future management, whilst there was continued support for council ownership, it was appreciated the present approach was not sustainable in the long-term. An endowment model overseen by some form of charity or trust working in partnership with the council, local businesses and residents was considered to be the most ideal structure and gained the most support. It is understood that Sheffield City Council, along with a number of other cities, is currently making a final evaluation of the study and associated research.

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<sup>139</sup> A description of the Chorley Formula is given in: An opportunity for change: Exploring the Trust option for parks and green space services, Greenspace, 2013, p40

## 5.8 Enhancing nature - adapting traditional management regimes

**As a means to improve biodiversity and potentially save on management costs parks are increasingly adopting more naturalistic approaches to managing parks and in particular grasslands. This will require technical and environmental skills that are in decline are expected to continue to fall over the next three years.**

The natural capital contribution that public parks can make to biodiversity in urban areas is being increasingly valued as a means to provide habitats and refuge to species. They are also an important way to establish more productive ecosystem services in urban areas. *Benefits of Urban Parks*<sup>140</sup> referenced in State of UK Public Parks 2014 highlights that there is strong evidence that parks are acting as ‘biodiversity hotspots in the cityscape, being the most species-rich types of urban green spaces for all species groups that have been studied’. However, the recent update to the UKNEA<sup>141</sup> emphasises that management can directly affect ecological quality and value. Neglected sites can become undervalued, regardless of location whilst ‘good site management results in the smallest of sites becoming desirable and valued wherever they are located, and people may travel further to enjoy them’.

The Government’s Natural Environment White Paper<sup>142</sup> places a particular focus on reconnecting people with nature. With an increasingly urban population, one of the principles was to engage a large proportion of the population in understanding the value of nature to their lives is in urban parks and green spaces. With this in mind the White Paper included a commitment ‘to continue to support the Green Flag Award scheme in promoting quality space management as an ambition for all green space managers and to create more opportunities for wildlife to flourish in our green spaces, contributing to local biodiversity and enriching the experience of people spending time there’.

It is clear from the public opinion poll that people greatly value access to and contact with nature. Alongside playing and spending time with families and friends the presence of wildlife and nature in local parks featured as the third most prominent memory for those questioned. “To see nature as it should be, plants and animals living and growing as they should. Not lots of concrete and fences. Parks and woodland should be for wildlife” was one particular response. When asked what should be the priorities for councils to maintain when funding is increasingly short, wildlife and nature areas featured as the second most popular site after local neighbourhood playgrounds for children. In asking ‘what environmental issues are a priority for your park and green space service’, respondents to the recent APSE<sup>143</sup> survey include Biodiversity (66.7%), Climate Change (36.5%) and Water Management (33.3%). All have increased since the previous survey in 2015. The survey also notes that 76% of councils expect there will be reduced maintenance, or frequency of maintenance of sites, in the future.

As part of this change in the rate of maintenance, a number of local authorities have been adopting new approaches to land management in part as a means to deliver more cost effective management but also to enhance the biodiversity of their parks. Most focus on changing grassland management by adopting more ecologically driven and climate resilient practices, others are more simply about cutting grass less often. One manager noted that “we will be

<sup>140</sup> IPFRA (2013). *Benefits of Urban Parks, A systematic Review*, compiled by the University of Copenhagen and Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

<sup>141</sup> National Ecosystem Assessment (2014) *The UK National Ecosystem Assessment Follow-on: Synthesis of the Key Findings*, UNEP-WCMC, LWEC, UK, see: <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx> [accessed 28/07/16]

<sup>142</sup> HM Government (2011) *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*, DEFRA

<sup>143</sup> APSE (2016) *State of the Market Survey 2016, Local Authority Parks and Green Spaces Services, Briefing 16-15*, p4



leaving more areas 'for nature' therefore only maintaining them periodically". Where the objective is to improve biodiversity, ecological management practices can prove to be technically demanding and as labour intensive, particularly in the short-term, as more traditional horticultural practices.

One early pioneering project was the Big Lottery funded Great Outdoors project launched by Landlife in the North West in 2008. This included the trial planting of wildflower meadows in several parks in Knowsley. More recent examples include Edinburgh's living landscapes programme and Sheffield's urban nature parks which are described in the individual case studies for each city. Edinburgh's park services have teamed up with the University of Edinburgh to undertake a more detailed and rigorous assessment of the biodiversity benefits of the initiative. The Urban Pollinators Project<sup>144</sup>, named as one of the Telegraph's ten ground breaking research projects in the UK<sup>145</sup>, has published a policy and practice note and series of films on the potential of urban habitats to act as reservoirs of pollinator diversity.

'Work with nature to protect cash-strapped UK parks' ran the headline in the Guardian<sup>146</sup> in its review of the end of the Rethinking parks programme. In a shift from controlling nature to working with natural processes, it highlights the achievements of Burnley's 'Go to the Park' project. This has established meadow management within the town's heritage parks, started to generate timber products from woodlands and shifted from annual bedding displays to perennial planting. A more detailed description is given in Nesta's closing report on the project<sup>147</sup> which calculates the savings in the first year amounted to over £65,000 and projected to rise to £117,000 by 2020/21.

Beyond Nesta's programme a number of other parks have been refining the process of establishing more ecologically driven grassland meadow rich management regimes. Green Estates, a Sheffield based social enterprise has pioneered the development of pictorial meadows in their management of the 24 hectare Manor Fields Park<sup>148</sup>. Brighton has adopted a similar approach in Preston Park where it has addressed the over-provision of bowling greens and converted two into wildflower meadows.

One particular threat to enhancing biodiversity within urban areas is highlighted by the park managers' survey where natural and semi-natural green space sites are increasingly likely to be sold in part or in entirety over the next three years. Whereas just 5.6% of managers responding to the question stated that these types of site had been sold in the past three years, this increases to 13.8% who are considering this in the future. Park managers also report that the management of a number of sites have already been transferred to local wildlife trusts and they are increasingly likely to be transferred to community groups as well.

A further concern is the changing structure of staffing and skills where over a fifth, 21.2%, of park managers already report a decline in ecological skills within their service. This is expected to exceed a quarter, 27.5% of all managers who anticipate these skills to fall over the next three

<sup>144</sup> For further information on Edinburgh's Urban Pollinators Project and the Insect Pollinators Initiative see: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/biology/research/ecological/community/pollinators/> [accessed 02/08/16]

<sup>145</sup> The Telegraph (2015) *Ten ground breaking university research projects*, see: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationpicturegalleries/11750796/Ten-groundbreaking-university-research-projects.html?frame=3381411> [accessed 02/08/16]

<sup>146</sup> The Guardian, Work with nature to protect cash-strapped UK parks 23/02/16, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/feb/23/work-with-nature-to-protect-cash-strapped-uk-parks-charity-urges> [accessed 24/06/16]

<sup>147</sup> Further information on the Burnley Rethinking Parks project is at [https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/rethinkingparksburnley\\_0.pdf](https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/rethinkingparksburnley_0.pdf) [accessed 24/06/16]

<sup>148</sup> Information on Green Estate and Manor Fields Park see: <http://www.manorfieldspark.org/> [accessed 14/07/16]

years. Looking forward, park managers also ranked ecological skills as the second least important skill area after landscape design. With the growing potential for the management of sites to be transferred to local wildlife trusts and other nature conservation bodies, the role of these third-sector organisations to supplement or replace the ecological skills being lost by local authorities will become increasingly important.

**5.9 Diversify management - an increasing role of partnerships and communities**

**Local authorities increasingly plan to transfer the management of parks and other green spaces to community groups, the voluntary sector or a park trusts. However most park friends groups prefer informal annual arrangements and few express a desire to take on a more formal and long-term management role.**

It is clear from both this study and other recent research that approaches to the management and maintenance of parks and green spaces are changing and the delivery of these services is expected to become more varied and diverse in the future. Results from the park managers’ survey, APSE and the University of Sheffield all point to an increasing mix of service delivery models. APSE<sup>149</sup> also records very similar figures for community ownership. ‘When asked during the past two years whether your council transferred any off its parks assets to community management / ownership, 27.8% said yes and 29.6% said their council is looking at this’. Park managers report that, in addition to an increase in the potential disposal of entire sites and a reduction in the partial sales of sites, the transfer to community groups, the voluntary sector and trusts is expected to increase this year and over the next three. The proportions of these responses are combined in the following table:

Have you disposed / transferred the management or ownership of any green space? (n=189)	Sold entire site	Sold part of site	Transfer to community group	Transfer to voluntary sector	Transfer to a trust	Other	Total
Changes to public parks and gardens in the past three years (2013-15)	1 2.4%	9 22.0%	10 24.4%	3 7.3%	6 14.6%	12 29.3%	41
Changes to public parks and gardens in the current and next three years (2017-19)	5 6.3%	12 15.2%	24 30.4%	14 17.7%	13 16.5%	11 13.9%	79

**Table 5.12** Local authority disposal or transfer of management of public parks and gardens over the last and next three years

Individual responses from park managers provide further information about these changes: a significant number of allotments and bowling greens are being transferred to community groups; fishing pools are being taken on by angling clubs; leisure facilities leased to private companies; more spaces are being transferred to local town and parish councils; visitor centres are being offered to businesses, environmental charities or community groups on a lease agreement; and, part of a country park has been purchased by a local wildlife trust. In Scotland, the Community Empowerment Act extends and simplifies community ownership of land and assets and will provide greater opportunities for community groups to take a more active role in decision making and management.

<sup>149</sup> APSE (2016) *State of the Market Survey 2016, Local Authority Parks and Green Spaces Services, Briefing 16-15*, p18

Whilst the majority of local authorities participating in the current APSE survey operate an in-house service delivery model, this is expected to fall from 81% to 64% in the next two to three years. Over the same time, there will be an increase from 10% to 25% of authorities that will adopt a mix of models including trusts and external organisations.

### 5.9.1 Green Space Management Research

The University of Sheffield has been looking at the increasing diversity of management models in significant detail through a focused and comparative research project that includes partners in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. The INOPS project began in autumn 2015 with a UK-wide survey, receiving 103 responses from individual local authorities, representing a 25% valid return rate. Within the wealth of data collated by the study, key trends in the provision of maintenance services were captured. These are set out in the following two tables:

Who carries out maintenance work for your department?	n Returns	% Current	n Returns	% Increased in past 5 years	% Decreased in past 5 years	% Stayed the same in past 5 years
Private contractors	122	54.9%	64	23.4%	25.0%	51.6%
In-house provider	122	69.7%	84	16.7%	31.0%	52.4%
Public-private venture	122	5.7%	6	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%
Local social enterprise	122	6.6%	7	71.4%	0.0%	28.6%
Other public authority	122	2.5%	2	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
National/local third sector	122	20.5%	22	31.8%	4.5%	63.6%
Community groups	122	41.8%	50	58.0%	2.0%	40.0%
Other (not specified)	122	5.7%	7	71.4%	14.3%	14.3%

Source: University of Sheffield INOPS Data, provided directly

**Table 5.13** Parks and green space management arrangements and change in past five years

Expected change in contribution of different organisations in next 5 years?	n Returns	% Increase in next 5 years	% Decrease in next 5 years	% Stay the same next 5 years	% Don't know
Private contractors	79	25.3%	26.6%	36.7%	11.4%
In-house provider	77	13.0%	41.6%	35.1%	10.4%
Public-private venture	72	45.8%	5.6%	18.1%	30.6%
Local social enterprise	76	56.6%	1.3%	15.8%	26.3%
Other public authority	71	14.1%	14.1%	36.6%	35.2%
National/local third sector	74	51.3%	4.1%	24.3%	20.3%
Community groups	80	75.0%	5.0%	10.0%	10.0%
Other (not specified)	43	18.6%	2.3%	16.3%	62.8%

Source: University of Sheffield INOPS Data, provided directly

**Table 5.14** Park and green space management arrangements and change in next five years

The results indicate that the highest proportion of maintenance contracts in the UK are provided in-house (69.7%) followed by private contractors (54.9%). However community groups and national or local third sector groups are also seen to contribute to a high proportion of maintenance activities for parks and green spaces. Taking sample size into account, over the past five years the greatest increase has been seen from community groups and this is set to continue over the next five years. Social enterprises and national or third sector organisations are also expected to play an increasing role in maintenance of parks and green spaces. The detailed findings from the study are described in a research paper published in the International Journal of Public Sector Management<sup>150</sup>.

Specific examples of this trend to diversify future delivery comes from a number of local authorities who have been actively exploring Alternative Delivery Models (ADMs) for a variety of services including the management of their parks and green spaces. These include Cardiff, Knowsley, Kent County Council, Newcastle City and Staffordshire. ADMs can include shared services, joint commissioning teams, shared management arrangements, outsourcing, joint ventures, and the establishment of trading companies, trusts and spin offs such as mutuals.

### 5.9.2 Shared and traded services

The Local Government Association tracks the number of councils adopting shared services and presents this information on an interactive map<sup>151</sup>. This includes a small number of parks and open spaces services in the Midlands and South West. Northampton and Daventry have been sharing an environmental services contract for their parks and open spaces since 2011. Cheshire East set up ANSA Environmental Services, its own local authority trading company, in 2013 which undertakes street cleansing, waste collection and parks maintenance. Luton Borough's own trading arm, Luton Traded Services, includes a Green Space Solutions division providing grounds maintenance services for parks and gardens. One of the largest initiatives is Ubico that was established by a consortium of six councils in the South West to deliver a variety of integrated environmental services including waste collection, recycling, street cleansing and grounds maintenance.

### 5.9.3 Town, community and parish councils

Town, community and parish councils have long established responsibilities to maintain parks, recreation grounds, allotments and other types of open space. In Scotland there are currently around 1,200 Community Councils that were created through the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and provide the most local tier of statutory and democratic representation. Several park managers report an increasing trend to transfer land and assets to local town, community and parish councils as a means to offset costs. This is also being reported more widely in the press<sup>152</sup> where a new breed of urban parish councils is being established. Queen's Park Council, London's first Community Council was established following a vote in 2014. Part of its remit is to oversee the maintenance of local green spaces including the award of a twelve month management contract for Queen's Park Gardens to a local community gardens association<sup>153</sup>. Shrewsbury Town Council is responsible for various small parks and gardens

<sup>150</sup> Dempsey, N, Burton, M and Selin, J (2016) *Contracting Out Parks and Roads Maintenance in England*. International Journal of Public Sector Management, Vol. 29 Issue 5, online access <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1108/IJPSM-02-2016-0029> [accessed 22/06/16]

<sup>151</sup> For the Local Government Association shared services map see: <http://www.local.gov.uk/shared-services-map> [accessed 24/06/16]

<sup>152</sup> The Guardian, Parish councils suit city dwellers too, not just rural Britain, 11/05/16, see: <http://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2016/may/11/urban-parish-councils-city-dwellers-control-local-issues> [accessed 24/06/16]

<sup>153</sup> For further information on the Queen's Park Gardens Management Contract, see: <http://www.queensparkcommunitycouncil.gov.uk/projects/queens-park-gardens-management-contract-awarded>

within the town alongside Quarry Park, which is its largest open space that has also benefitted from substantial Parks for People funding from HLF. High Wycombe District Council has recently offered to transfer the maintenance of its green space to its local town and parish councils. Marlow, Hazlemere and Princes Risborough have already taken up the offer and several more are expected to follow. Swindon Borough Council is also in the process of transferring grounds maintenance responsibilities to its existing parish councils.

**5.9.4 Community management and ownership**

A recurring theme in all surveys is the expectation that community ownership of parks and green spaces will increase over the next three years. Whilst the Friends Group survey records that a high proportion of groups are formally constituted and over a quarter are registered charities, their appetite to take on greater responsibilities for management and maintenance is limited. When asked if they would be interested ‘in taking on a more active role in the management of your green space(s)’ 32% said they would, whilst 41% would not (Yes: 115/361 - 31.9% / No: 148/361 - 41.0%). The survey also gauged the level of responsibility the groups would consider. This is described in the following table:

If you would be interested to take on a more active role in management, which approach do you consider may be appropriate? (n=105)	n	%
‘Informal annual arrangement with the council’ e.g. your group agrees with the Local Authority to undertake certain maintenance activities each year.	72	68.6%
Short term agreement (approximately 2-5 years) e.g. this may take the form of a service level agreement where the Local Authority remains responsible for buildings and large equipment maintenance along with some aspects of health and safety whilst your group would be responsible for day to day management, staffing and other activities.	17	16.2%
Long term lease (up to 25 years) e.g. the Local Authority would remain responsible for building maintenance whilst your group would be responsible for maintenance of equipment, health and safety and all day to day management and activities.	7	6.7%
Full Asset transfer e.g. your group takes on ownership of the site and has a formal structure, such as a charitable trust, that is fully responsible for all management and maintenance of the site.	9	8.6%

**Table 5.15** Approaches to taking on a more formal role in management that Friends Groups may consider.

Just under 70% of groups would consider establishing informal annual arrangements with their local council whilst less than 10% would consider taking on formal and long-term responsibilities for management and maintenance. The recent APSE survey<sup>154</sup> has also looked at the extent sites have been transferred to community management or ownership. APSE found that 28% of local authorities have transferred green space assets in the past two years, of which 64% were playing fields, 29% allotments and 14% play areas. No parks had been transferred during this period.

One of the Rethinking Parks projects in Liverpool looked to trial this process in detail. The Land Trust has worked with the Friends of Everton Park<sup>155</sup> to help increase their capacity to take on a more regular management role. The strategy has been to transfer ownership of the park to the Land Trust via a long term lease. The sale of land within and adjacent to the park will generate enough capital to establish an endowment to fund future management in perpetuity. Following

<sup>154</sup> APSE (2016) *State of the Market Survey 2016, Local Authority Parks and Green Spaces Services, Briefing 16-15*, p 18  
<sup>155</sup> For further information on the Everton Park Project, see: <http://www.nesta.org.uk/everton-park> [accessed 24/06/16]



on from the end of the Nesta project the friends group is starting to increase its capacity to take on a more formal role in management and now operates as a community interest company. Whilst detailed negotiations often take longer than initially expected, phased land sales are planned to build the endowment fund to a level that will be sufficient to fund the cost of management over the long-term.

### **Spotlight on Cardiff** – adopting new and collaborative ways of working



Image: Bute Park, Cardiff © Drew Bennellick

Cardiff began building its public parks in the 1890s following a period of rapid urban expansion. The city established a Parks and Open Spaces Committee in 1887 to guide the development of its parks with its first, Roath Park, opened in 1894. This was soon followed by Cathays Park and Llandaff Fields, although the city had to wait a further 50 years before Bute Park was presented to the council and designated a public park. Today Cardiff has over 350 parks and gardens which form part of the 1,600 hectares of public open space the city manages.

Continuing to properly fund the management of these parks is becoming much harder as Cardiff faces on-going reductions in its public spending and in light of growth and demand. Over this financial year the council's budget shortfall is around £47 million and this is expected to rise to more than £115 million over the next three years. At the same time Cardiff has become the fastest growing capital city in Europe with a projected increase of public open space linked to the Council's Local Development Plan of up to 20% through to 2026.

#### *Savings and efficiencies*

At present the revenue budget for parks is around £5.2 million which in real terms has fallen by more than a third over the past decade. A consultation on the city's 2016/17 budget outlined a number of measures and service-specific actions to reduce costs. For parks, a savings target of £650,000 included; a reduction in

managerial and back office administrative staff, optimising income, and the reshaping of grounds maintenance activities. But going forwards it will be increasingly hard to protect the frontline service. This year around 11,000 person hours have been lost resulting in reduced maintenance regimes. A move to a more integrated neighbourhood service delivery model combining parks, highways and street cleansing is currently being explored in order to exploit efficiencies and the synergies that exist within this group of services.

#### *Income generation*

Increasingly, the strategy is to offset budget savings by growing income streams and developing new opportunities to sell or trade services. Income generation is not the panacea; however the service continues to generate income from concessions, cafes, outdoor leisure and sponsorship. Increased charging for outdoor sport provision is a sensitive area. In terms of outdoor sport the service has been active in developing alternative delivery models for such provision through collaboration with governing bodies, local leagues, sporting clubs and the Council's joint venture partner, Cardiff Metropolitan University.

The Council has also recently explored a variety of alternative delivery models that could be adopted for a group of services which include Waste Management, Facilities Management, Highway Operations, Street Cleansing, Fleet Management and Parks. Options included an arms-length wholly owned trading company, public / public and public joint ventures, outsourcing, trusts, mutuals, co-operatives and a modified in-house model. The latter model has been adopted; as a result, Cardiff Commercial Services has been established seeing the Waste Management, Facilities Management and Central Transport Service functions combining to form a new service grouping with the aim of expanding into new markets developing new business, enhancing income generation. At present the Parks Service remains in the City Operations Directorate, under the Neighbourhood Services umbrella.

#### *Volunteering, apprenticeships and skills*

The parks service has built a good relationship with local communities and friends groups that have contributed over 25,000 volunteering hours in the last year. A Volunteer Development Partnership Group was established in 2015 which co-ordinates activities with third sector partners including the RSPB, the Probation Service, Vision 21 and Keep Wales Tidy. This forum compliments the Friends Forum that brings together the Council's 28 constituted Friends of Groups on a quarterly basis to share best practice, exchange information collaborate on projects and socialise. The service is committed to training and development and has, over time, developed a comprehensive People Programme which saw 45 individual opportunities for apprentices, trainees, industrial placements, work experience for the long term unemployed and individuals with special needs provided in 2015/16.

#### *External Funding*

Despite the challenging financial environment the council remains ambitious in terms of the development of its historic parks. A Parks Partnership Programme designed to lever in funding from external sources is well established. The

programme has already seen the completion of the largest public parks project in Wales, the Bute Park Restoration Project, and in July 2016 HLF confirmed further funding for the Parc Cefn Project. This will see investment in infrastructure, access improvements, restoration of historical features, improvements in interpretation and educational opportunities for this park in the north of the city. Proposals for further projects over the next five years are in development.

#### *Community asset transfer*

Reshaping of the grounds maintenance function has been undertaken over time seeing a more simplified structure of management and supervision. A new regime for mowing was introduced for the 2016 season which saw a reduction at approximately 100 general amenity sites where a one cut, end of season, regime has been adopted. It is difficult for this approach to be adopted more widely as many sites have specific covenants or heritage designations, including those placed in trust for recreational use or holding Green Flag Awards. These still require an appropriate level of maintenance and particularly those that are income generating for the service. The number of bowling greens under management has been reduced from thirteen to just five, with clubs now engaged in a 'buy back' arrangement. Those that are considered surplus to requirements are either cut once a year or converted to other uses that include a volleyball court and a community garden. So far the transfer of parks community assets has been limited as many groups are reluctant to take on the formal responsibility for premises related management, notwithstanding such alternative delivery models are being explored.

To conclude, there is a general feeling that the parks service has worked hard to absorb the impact of savings and efficiencies. It remains ambitious, recognising the importance of its provision in social, economic and environmental terms. It is adopting new ways of working, increasing the participation of communities, developing constructive partnerships and delivering modern and dynamic training and apprenticeship programmes.



Image: Waterloo Park, Norwich © Peter Neal

## 6.0 Key themes for action

In reviewing the overall findings of this study, it is clear public parks and local authority park services are facing many significant challenges. Central to this is the on-going reduction in public spending that is placing additional pressure on non-statutory services. At present it is unclear whether the government's programme of austerity will continue with recent political changes but it is clear from this study park managers expect the funding for parks and green spaces will continue to reduce. A higher proportion of local authorities are facing budget cuts since the last survey and it is particularly salient that none report either having increased their budget over the last three years or plan to increase them over the next three years.

Over the last five years, most cost-cutting and direct efficiency measures have been implemented and many councils are now having to adopt more commercial approaches to securing external income in an attempt to try and fill the widening funding gap. In some places, this is inevitably generating clear and well-publicised conflicts between different uses and will increasingly raise questions about what aspects of public parks should remain free to use and what may incur an additional charge. For some local authorities, competing and rising demands from other statutory services is likely to test the viability of their park services unless there are significant changes to the way they are funded and delivered in the future. The case studies from a number of the core cities illustrate that this process of restructuring and reforming services is on the increase and as yet the outcomes are unclear.

The significant reduction in parks staff is the most prominent consequence of falling budgets and, in an attempt to protect frontline services, managerial and administrative posts have until now been declining at a higher rate than operational staff. Around three quarters of all local authorities report the loss of staff over the past three years and this is expected to continue at a similar level to that recorded in the last survey. It is striking that no authorities report they are planning to increase staff over the next three years. This survey finds that both development and operational staff are now at increasing risk with horticultural, ecological and landscape skills expected to decline the most over the next three years.





Image: Myatt's Fields Park, London © Peter Neal

Until now the quality and condition of parks appears to have been holding up and around half of the general public consider their local parks to be in a good condition. Certainly the proportion of park managers who currently report their parks to be in a good condition is much higher than that recorded at the start of the century. But, going forwards, the expected trend in condition of parks raises significant concern. Park managers, friends groups and the public all report a falling percentage of parks in an improving condition over the last three years. Looking forwards, park managers and friends groups also expect an increasing proportion of declining parks. Significantly, parks managers are now expecting both a lower proportion of improving parks and a higher proportion of declining parks than were reported by park managers in 2001. This evidence suggests the general condition of parks has reached a tipping point and many parks may now be heading back into recession.

No two parks and no two authorities are the same and this pattern of change varies considerably across the UK. A more detailed analysis of the survey results in the preceding chapter indicates the cumulative effect of cuts is disproportionate. Whilst there is no clear north-south divide it does appear to be affecting parks in more northern and more urban areas than those towards London and the south east. Certain councils have so far withstood the effects of austerity better than others, some have chosen to modify current practice whilst others are in the process of radically changing the way they will deliver park services in the future. There is, however, a concern that through austerity parks services may become increasingly polarised between the few better maintained flagship parks and the large number of small neighbourhood parks that may be starved of resources.





Image: Manor Fields Park, Sheffield © Peter Neal

There are an increasing number of local and national partnerships that are starting to pool resources and share responsibilities. The percentage of income from external sources is also on the rise with the proportion of park budgets funded from external sources expected to increase from a quarter to almost a third over the next three years. Friends and park user groups also report an increase in their members, the amount of fundraising and volunteering and the level of support they are giving to their local parks. However, this increase in external income and the growing level of community support will vary considerably across the country and is certainly not at the scale to offset the level of cuts faced by most local authorities.

It is clear from both this and other studies that parks enjoy a high level of public use which has been increasing year on year. They are particularly important to households with young children, younger adults, those living in urban areas and minority ethnic communities. The majority of UK adults are concerned about the impact that reductions in council budgets will have on the condition of their local park and this concern is particularly high for those that consider their local park is already in a poor condition. The public appears pragmatic about the need to diversify the way parks are funded in the future. They particularly support the use of National Lottery money for parks and also support more sponsorship, fundraising and the commercial use of parks, although more than half of people oppose increasing charges for park facilities.

The last State of UK Public Parks report in 2014 included a call to action structured around five themes and set of activities. Whilst some actions have now been completed, the key themes continue to provide a useful and relevant structure to focus future activity and action across the parks sector.

## 6.1 Continuing local authority leadership

Local authorities have a central responsibility for managing and maintaining parks and green spaces. Whilst they are facing growing financial challenges on how to deliver these services, it is essential that they retain the skills and resources to support the regular and increasing use of parks by the public. They are the primary landowner of the vast majority of public open space which has been purchased, transferred or bequeathed to them over decades, if not centuries, and this brings with it a number of ethical, social and legal responsibilities.

Councils have an obligation to create and maintain safe and secure neighbourhoods, to support the health and wellbeing of communities and provide a variety of services for public benefit. It is in their vested interest to protect and enhance the quality and resilience of neighbourhoods for both residents and businesses. This has a direct influence on inward investment, property values and business rates that all contribute in some manner to council tax levies. In an increasingly place-competitive environment green, attractive and pleasant locations count. The costs incurred by not looking after places can often outweigh the expense of efficient on-going management and maintenance. The following measures to support local authority park services are informed and shaped by the findings of this study and wider evidence.

### 1A: The value of strategies

Parks and green space strategies provide a framework and structure for investment and management. It is shown they can have a positive influence on the condition of parks although an increasing number are out of date. Councils should consider the benefit of maintaining and updating park strategies that guide investment and address funding, staffing, skills, community engagement and management challenges.

### 1B: Elected park champions

Where parks are a corporate priority and have an elected member to act as their principal champion, this is shown to have a positive effect on the condition of parks and green spaces. Councils should consider including parks and green spaces within corporate strategies and programmes and appoint a local elected champion if they do not currently have one in place.

### 1C: Financial information

Decisions on how to make the most of increasingly limited resources needs to be based on clear, up to date, and accurate financial information. An increasing number of local authorities do not know the total area of parks they manage or their total budgets. Councils should consider implementing or updating their register of park assets and compiling robust and more detailed financial information for their parks services. This would help demonstrate the value for money the service represents and aid future business planning.

## 6.2 Promoting active partnerships

Evidence from this study and other research that has been referenced indicates that there will be an increasing diversity of organisations responsible for managing parks. Mixed models of park management will include public, private, third sector and community based partners either working collaboratively with local authorities or at arms-length through formal agreements. Greater collaboration and coordination is needed between partners to share funding and maximise the efficient use of limited resources.

## 2A: Local networks

Local and regional networks already support individuals and organisations in particular parts of the UK (Scotland, West Midlands and London) and have been of direct benefit to this study. Regular meetings, on-line information and the sharing of good practice across local authorities, friends groups and wider stakeholders is essential to avoid wasting resources or duplicating activities. There is an increasingly urgent need to find additional ways to better share learning, continue to support existing networks and establish and fund fora in those areas where they don't currently exist.

## 2B: Park trusts

This study includes a direct survey of park trusts that was not included in the previous State of UK Public Parks 2014 report. From the relatively concise information available, it appears they perform well and could take a more active and higher profile role within the sector. Many local authorities are considering establishing new trusts in the absence of wide-ranging and detailed evaluation of their effectiveness or viability over the long-term. Further research on the structure, funding and operation of park trusts across the UK is needed to provide a better understanding of their practice and future potential.

## 2C: Parish, community and town councils

There is an increasing move to transfer the management and maintenance of parks and green spaces to local parish, community and town councils. There would be clear benefit in understanding this trend in greater detail alongside information on how this approach works financially and in practice. There is the risk that greater diversity in the range of bodies responsible for parks and green spaces could in future make it more difficult to establish and deliver strategic environmental and policy objectives such as those relating to landscape-scale biodiversity enhancement and climate change adaptation and mitigation.

### **6.3 Supporting communities to play a more active role**

Whilst communities already play an important role in supporting many of their local parks and green spaces, this study highlights that local authorities expect this to increase significantly in the next few years whilst also reducing development staff able to support such groups. It is important that friends groups and other voluntary and community groups are properly supported and equipped and really do have the appetite and ability to take on a greater level of responsibility. Many groups already actively participate in management and fundraising activities but most state they would prefer this to continue in an informal manner and on an annual basis. Local authorities and third sector organisations could improve the types of support and assistance that is given to these groups to make the most of their participation and ensure this is of mutual benefit.

## 3A: Skills and training

A number of park departments and pilot projects have focused on improving the skills and formal qualifications of volunteers and individuals enrolled in work programmes. This could be expanded to provide recognised accreditation and a more formalised structure for developing the skills of community groups and volunteers in light of future needs.

### 3B: Organisational structures

More detailed information and resources on the variety of business structures and processes that are appropriate for community groups should be made available. Recent publically funded programmes have facilitated this process for individual sites and the knowledge and information from this should be shared more widely.

### 3C: Sharing responsibilities

Currently less than one in ten friends and park user groups express an appetite to take on a formal long-term role in the management and maintenance of sites. There could be clear advantage for both local authorities and community groups to split and share obligations in a way that is fair, balanced and of mutual benefit to local residents and volunteers. The public sector may be better placed to retain responsibility and fund complex aspects of management such as insurance, health and safety audits, legal and financial administration.

## 6.4 Developing new models of management and funding

Austerity has brought many challenges and difficulties for public services but it also provides the opportunity to deliver services in a different way. Innovation and change is an integral part of successful organisations, products and systems but it does need time and resources to be properly developed. Over time there is often the need to adapt and develop to changing circumstances and park services need be no different. This study clearly shows the future management of parks will be more varied and mixed and this decade brings the opportunity to experiment, test and refine new and leaner models of management and funding. However, there is a concern that the pressures of rapidly reducing funding and resources are demanding immediate change that has not had the benefit of being developed strategically over a longer term. The Rethinking Parks programme has started to facilitate this process of change and further ways should be developed to promote, fund and support innovation across the sector.

### 4A: Alternative models

A number of local authorities have been exploring alternative delivery models for their park services. There would be clear benefit to share this information more widely and develop a resource that is accessible on-line. HLF has developed a Resilient Heritage programme which can provide support for this process but it is not exclusive to public parks and demand is high. Research and case studies are needed to help improve the understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different options and models. These may include local authority trading companies, public / private partnerships, social enterprises, cooperatives, mutuals and trusts.

### 4B: Income generation

Local authorities are looking to increase the proportion of external funding they can secure from a variety of sources. The Rethinking Parks programme provided a limited opportunity to test and trial some of these approaches. Continuing lessons from this programme should be captured and shared and there is a need to further develop new funding and income generating models.

### 4C: Endowments

There is clear appeal to establish independent capital reserves in the form of an endowment to sustainably fund park services in the future. Current practice should be shared more widely. Techniques to model the potential structure and extent of endowments should be developed and made available to local authorities and other organisations that are considering taking on

formal and long term responsibilities for local parks and other green spaces. Support is needed to develop the skills associated with fundraising, creating and using endowments as well as understanding the sources of funding for endowments themselves.

## 6.5 Compiling, coordinating and updating data

Robust data is at the heart of all good planning and decision making. Whilst there have been some improvements in the collection of information, including the development of the long-awaited green space map, many local authorities still have a limited understating of the detailed workings of their service. The regular collection of comparable data, including that generated by new pilot projects, should be encouraged to benchmark and better understand national and local variations in the quantity, quality and funding of park services and the return on investment they provide.

### 5A: Asset management

There is a clear need to improve the audit and management of park assets including aspects of land ownership, legal restrictions, building inventories and the condition of individual park elements. This will help improve annual business planning and assess long-term costs for capital refurbishment. The release of the green space map should significantly improve the ability of councils to capture this information. Pilot projects and trials should be funded and commissioned to demonstrate how this mapping resource can best be developed and used by local authorities when it becomes available.

### 5B: Benchmarking services

A number of regional groups and national organisations compile benchmark data on the scope, extent and costs of park services. This includes APSE, the Core Cities, Improvement Service and the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum. There would be clear advantage to improve the robustness, regular collection, coordination and sharing of this information. The last State of UK Public Parks report described how a compendium of 'City Park Facts' would allow comparison of park and green space data from towns and cities across the UK could be established for the benefit of the sector and local communities, and this should be developed further.

### 5C: Valuing park resources

To build the case for investment and justify annual expenditure, there are clear advantages in calculating and capturing the real value that individual parks and collective park systems provide. Natural capital accounting and green infrastructure valuation methods provide useful basis on which to progress this advocacy and technical activity. Pilot studies and UK-wide agreed methodologies need to be developed and funded.