

## REQUEST FOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR DECISION – ADD2506

### Title: Centre for Excellence for London's parks and green spaces

#### Executive Summary:

This ADD seeks approval for grant funding to progress the implementation of the Mayor's [London Green Spaces Commission](#) recommendation to create and resource a Centre for Excellence for London's parks and green spaces. This funding will enable the existing charity Parks for London to develop as a Centre for Excellence. It will draw in external expertise to leverage additional funding for work to address health inequalities through green space, seek out sector innovation and raise the profile of both the charity and the wider sector through improved communication. The funds will also cover the core costs needed to support Parks for London to develop as a Centre for Excellence and to evaluate its impact.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance of green spaces and their multiple benefits. However, it has also demonstrated the inequality of access and resulting health impacts. The need for a single independent focal point to unite cross sector stakeholders, champion investment in, and increase access to, green infrastructure has only become stronger since the Commission report publication. The proposed investment in Parks for London to support its development as a Centre for Excellence will directly contribute to delivering the objectives of the Green New Deal mission.

#### Decision:

That the Interim Assistant Director of Environment and Energy approves:

A £50,000 grant to support Parks for London's evolution into a Centre for Excellence.

#### AUTHORISING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/HEAD OF UNIT

I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

It has my approval.

**Name:** Elliot Treharne

**Position:** Interim Assistant Director  
Environment and Energy

**Signature:**



**Date:**

1 March 2021

## PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

### Decision required – supporting report

#### 1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 In the London Environment Strategy, the Mayor set out his ambitions to improve the management of London's green infrastructure and proposed a London Green Spaces Commission. This was established, with London Councils, in 2019 with the aim of recommending ways to support boroughs in the future funding and management of London's green infrastructure.
- 1.2 London's green infrastructure provides multiple valuable benefits. The 2017 Natural Capital Account for London estimates that Londoners avoid £950 million per year<sup>1</sup> in health costs due to public parks and that for every £1 spent on public parks Londoners enjoy at least £27 in value. However, as a non-statutory function parks services are underfunded. Over the last ten years spending on public green space has fallen by over 30 per cent to just £159m while London's population has grown by around 900,000 people (11.2 per cent)<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.3 The Commission published its [report](#) in August 2020. The report made two major recommendations. The first to establish and resource a Centre for Excellence to champion and secure investment (through a future Greenspace Investment Fund) for London's public parks and green spaces and the second to establish a Future Greenspace Skills Programme.
- 1.4 The Greenspace Investment Fund proposed as part of the first recommendation is being scoped through discussions with the Green Finance Institute and work with other strategic authorities and funders. There is growing interest in financing nature and nature-based solutions which this work aims to tap into. In developing this fund, officers are building on existing work to achieve a sustainable revenue model rather than following short term capital funding opportunities.
- 1.5 The second recommendation around a future skills programme is progressing as part of wider green recovery work, linking closely to both the Green New Deal and Good Work for Londoners missions. Recent research by Vivid Economics has shown that sector investment of £770 million in London's green infrastructure over 30 years would create around 5,600 temp jobs and 850 permanent jobs. Green space skills have been identified as one of four focus areas for further work by the GLA Skills team. In addition, work is taking place to explore ways of increasing access to the sector and diversity in the workforce through the successful [Future Gardeners](#) programme. We are working with this entry level programme, currently only active in Southwark, to expand it to other boroughs and offer additional support to the 76%<sup>3</sup> of its graduates who go into employment.
- 1.6 The remaining element of the Commission report recommendations and the piece that joins the other two is the development of the Centre for Excellence. The proposed funding of the Centre for Excellence is the subject of this ADD. The Commission report concluded that no single organisation has the resources to champion and provide city-wide support for London's 33 borough park services. The Commission identified that greater coordination was needed and recommended that a Centre for Excellence be set up to fulfil this role.
- 1.7 To achieve change quickly and efficiently the Commission recommended that the Centre for Excellence be formed by extending the remit of an existing body. The Commission proposed finding resources for, and giving a stronger mandate to, Parks for London so that it could assume this new role. Research during the Commission (further details in section 2 below) identified Parks for London as the only suitable entity to take on this role. The reasons for this are varied but include Parks for London already operating as a networking organisation within this sector in London. It is well

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<sup>1</sup> [Natural Capital Account for London](#)

<sup>2</sup> [London Green Spaces Commission Report](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Future Gardeners](#)

respected within the sector and currently receives financial support from the boroughs and other park management organisations. Evolution of an existing organisation operating within the sector rather than establishing a new body is a more financially efficient and effective way to deliver the objectives that the Centre for Excellence would provide. These factors, together with the lack of any other suitable competing organisations, are felt to be sufficient to grant this funding in accordance with the Contract and Funding code. Parks for London is an independent charity (registered as London Parks and Green Spaces Forum) supporting London's landowners and managers to share and develop good practice, improve standards and maximise resources. It currently has an operational focus and supports most London boroughs and other landowners such as the Royal Parks. It has two staff and twelve trustees, including the three new trustees appointed recently to support its transition to a Centre for Excellence.

- 1.8 The Commission recommended that resources, including funding, be made available by the Mayor, London Councils, boroughs and other partners, to help Parks for London evolve into a Centre for Excellence. Currently GLA, London Councils and the London Environment Directors' Network (LEDNet) provide regular staff time to support the existing two members of staff. This ADD proposes to bolster this staff time with funding to enable Parks for London to develop further to fulfil its new role, and in time, have a fully resourced, self-funding Centre for Excellence. This seed funding is needed to kickstart the initial phases of the Centre for Excellence set up.
- 1.9 The following areas of work were identified by the Commission as adding the most value:
- championing the economic, social, health and environmental value of high-quality green and accessible space;
  - driving innovation and new thinking to bring wider expertise into the parks sector so that they can play a more prominent role in planning and managing the wider public realm; and
  - promoting approaches that directly address a more inclusive and extensive use of parks and understanding of their value by all sections of London's diverse populations.
- 1.10 The COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened the importance of these work areas, particularly the value of green spaces and the need to address inequality in access. One in five households in London have no access to a private or shared garden and in England, [Black people are nearly four times as likely as White people](#) to have no access to outdoor space at home. While access to public parks is more evenly spread the pandemic has made clear that not all people feel comfortable or able to use parks. Addressing inequalities in provision is a cross cutting principle across recovery streams while providing better and more inclusive green space is a core part of the Green New Deal recovery mission. The funding proposed in this ADD will support this work and is targeted at areas identified as having the most impact and where, without support, Parks for London will be unable to develop into the Centre for Excellence.
- 1.11 Since the Commission report was published significant progress has been made. The recommendations were endorsed by the London Councils Transport and Environment Committee, London Environment Directors Network (LEDNet) and the Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association (CLOA). An advisory group formed of GLA, London Councils, Parks for London, LEDNet and CLOA meet regularly. A work plan was created in close collaboration with existing supporters and the advisory group. A new website was launched in November framing Parks for London as a Centre for Excellence<sup>4</sup>. Three new trustees were recruited bringing expertise on health, sport & culture and housing and an independent impact evaluation of the [Good Parks for London report](#) was commissioned for completion by end March 2021.
- 1.12 However, to accelerate action and enable the Centre for Excellence to play a more active role in the recovery missions, particularly the medium and long-term objectives of the Green New Deal, it is now necessary to provide the funding recommended by the Commission. The lack of a single independent

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<sup>4</sup> <https://parksforlondon.org.uk/about/parks-for-london/>

strategic focal point for the sector has been a challenge for many years and building the capacity of an organisation to take on this role will bring significant opportunity to catalyse cross sector work on green infrastructure that will enable the Green New Deal recovery work.

## 2. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 2.1. The proposed expenditure is through a funding agreement in line with the Contracts and Funding Code. Parks for London was specifically identified as the best organisation to take on the role of the Centre for Excellence in the London Green Spaces Commission report following extensive stakeholder engagement and research undertaken by Social Finance to inform Commissioners. *'The Commission propose increasing resources for, and giving a stronger mandate to, Parks for London so that it can assume this new role. Parks for London already provides a service to most London boroughs and could readily expand its remit.'*<sup>5</sup> It is felt that this demonstrates the lack of competing entities needed to award grant funding directly to Parks for London in this instance. The GLA is supporting an activity that aligns with the Mayor's priorities, but which is the initiative and activity of Parks for London. The proposed funding would support the following elements of the Centre for Excellence:

### *Expert panel development*

- 2.2. The proposal is for the existing staff team skillset and capacity to be supplemented by subject matter experts recruited and appointed as part of an expert panel. These experts would be on the pay roll of Parks for London to provide support when needed over the year which could be supplemented by the charity's core budget or external fundraising when extra work (over and above the original agreed amount) is required. This is an efficient way of bringing in the additional expertise needed and enables access to a wide variety of additional resource, flexible to the needs of the organisation. The initial phase of the expert panel will focus on health (incorporating access and inclusion), research and communications. Expert panel members would be employed by Parks for London on a year's contract and would be reviewed at year end to assess whether support in these areas is still needed. The areas covered are detailed below:

- Health: There is a significant body of work on the mental and physical health benefits of green spaces and across London there are examples of project work in this area e.g. Parks for Health in Camden and Islington. However, to date there are no strategic pan London programmes on health and green space that draw these strands together with a focus on tackling health inequalities. Parks for London and officers from the GLA would host an initial roundtable with health experts to gather views on existing challenges and opportunities and create a brief. Following this, an expert consultant would be employed to develop a programme and produce funding bids to health foundations (e.g. Wellcome Trust, Kings Fund), focusing specifically on communities worst hit by the pandemic. This consultant support has been costed at £26,000 based on recent commissions.
- Research: There is a steady stream of new research and innovation being produced on the benefits, use, access, improvement and management of green spaces. As a Centre for Excellence Parks for London will need to increase its capacity to identify opportunities for further funding, dissemination and collaboration. It is proposed that a member of the expert panel is recruited to support on research relevant to green spaces and sector innovation. This has been costed at £5,000 based on match funding being provided by Parks for London. This support will enable Parks for London to build its leadership, profile and coordinating role in the sector as a Centre for Excellence and single port of call for green space in London.
- Communications: To successfully champion the multiple benefits of green space and to enable Parks for London to evolve from an organisation that has a focus on park services to become a cross sector Centre for Excellence for green space, professional communications support is required. This sits outside the skillset of the existing staff. It is proposed that part time expert

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<sup>5</sup> [London Green Spaces Commission report \(pg28\)](#)

support on communications is sought and a small monthly fee is paid to provide advice to the existing staff team. This expert support has been costed at £5,000 based on match funding being provided by Parks for London. This support will enable Parks for London to build its visibility and profile as a Centre for Excellence.

### *Measuring success*

- 2.3. The capital has over 3,000 parks of varying sizes designated by the boroughs as 'public open space' these form part of the network of green infrastructure that covers almost 18 per cent of London. Evaluating and defining clear and robust criteria for success is essential as Parks for London evolves into a Centre for Excellence.
- 2.4. Exact success criteria are to be agreed. However, we expect these to focus on increasing investment (i.e. additional investment secured from public, private and other sources) in the thousands of parks and green spaces across the capital. The aim being to reverse the fall in revenue and capital spend on publicly accessible green space. We also expect an increase in pan-London programmes working across boroughs. These will enable a more strategic approach to cross borough boundary challenges and help secure additional funding in green space (for example, through a more integrated approach to promoting physical activity for public health). Other success measures are likely to include increasing the number of Londoners employed as part of the skilled work force involved in the development and management of London parks and green spaces as well as increasing the diversity and inclusivity of existing spaces.
- 2.5. An application has been made to UCL's Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose for student placements to help develop success criteria and draft a consultant brief for this work. A consultant will be procured by Parks for London to undertake this review of impact against the criteria each year over a three year period. This work has been costed at £9000. This annual review will provide detail on the additional impact that the Centre for Excellence is providing and will be crucial in not only improving its work but in bringing in additional funding.

### *Core costs*

- 2.6. The GLA played a key role in establishing the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum in 2001. The GLA provided free accommodation, including desk space, and use of GLA facilities for meetings, as well as hosting the forum's IT infrastructure. This arrangement was in lieu of the GLA providing direct financial support. In 2012 the Forum became a registered charity and was rebranded as Parks for London. This operational arrangement within the GLA has recently ended as we prepare to move out of City Hall. Parks for London has now migrated away from the GLA IT system and has launched a new website. These two elements combined with a need for digital support to improve communication systems are required for Parks for London's evolution to a Centre for Excellence. Core costs have been identified at £5,000.
- 2.7. Funding for these core services is now incurred directly by Parks for London. The GLA funding contribution will help offset these new costs. These new systems will help create the framework on which the Parks for London Centre for Excellence can be built to enable the organisation to provide cross-sector resources, serve existing and engage new supporters and showcase its work more effectively with the long term aim of drawing in additional funding.

### *Overall outcomes*

- 2.8. To become a Centre for Excellence for greenspace Parks for London needs additional capacity, skills and resources. The proposal above outlines an approach which targets funding to priority areas, grows capacity quickly and flexibly and is aimed at delivering tangible outcomes. The grant is a one off providing the framework and core support needed to ensure Parks for London has the resources for this evolution and can be sustainable in its new role. With this funding Parks for London can build on the coordinating role it developed during the pandemic to grow its supporter base and raise its profile as the Centre for Excellence – the focal point and single voice for the sector. The Lottery and City Bridge Trust have already indicated that they are interested in working with the Centre for Excellence

and alongside the proposed work on tackling health inequalities through green space it is expected that significant additional funding can be leveraged as a result of this proposal. Although it is difficult to outline the exact impact in terms of parks and green space at this stage there is no doubt that this funding will deliver on the ground action to benefit all Londoners in the medium and long term.

### 3. Equality comments

- 3.1 Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, as a public authority, the Mayor of London must have 'due regard' of the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation as well as to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who have a protected characteristic (race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment) and persons who do not (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010).
- 3.2 Each of the areas covered by the proposed Expert Panel will have inclusion as a core focus. We know that greener neighbourhoods benefit everyone but disproportionately benefit disadvantaged groups<sup>6</sup>. This is particularly striking in relation to socioeconomic-related inequalities in health which are lower in areas with greater access to greenspace. The main focus of the proposed funding will be around developing the Centre for Excellence's leadership on mitigating health inequalities through green space but the additional expertise on communications and research will also help bring together the sector in a more strategic approach to creating a greener city for the benefit of all.
- 3.3 When recruiting new trustees to Parks for London significant effort was made to attract a diverse range of candidates including advertising on sites targeted at underrepresented groups, directly inviting individuals to apply and drafting wording that positively welcomes those from diverse backgrounds. A similar approach will be taken in the procurement of the Expert Panel and consultants, both areas where GLA staff will be supporting Parks for London to reach beyond established sector providers.

### 4. Other considerations

*Link to Mayoral strategies and priorities*

- 4.1 This programme links to the London Environment Strategy, The Mayor's Strategy for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (A Great Place To Live, strategic objective 12) and the Health Inequalities Strategy (objective 3.3 Healthy Places & Healthy Communities). The primary mission focus of this work is the Green New Deal but it is also relevant to Good Work for Londoners, Building Stronger Communities, Health Food and Weight and Mental Health and Wellbeing.

*Risks and Issues*

Risk description	Likelihood of the risk occurring	Impact if the risk occurs	Mitigating action
Lack of high quality applicants for expert panel	Low	Medium	GLA staff and advisory group will support the promotion of expert panel roles and consultant opportunity through GLA and partner networks  Relevant external networks will be identified and positions promoted through these to reach specialist groups

<sup>6</sup> Improving Access to Greenspace, Public Health England  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/904439/Improving\\_access\\_to\\_greenspace\\_2020\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/Improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf)

Parks for London trustees disagree with direction of work	Low	Medium	Trustees have been involved and consulted throughout the process of Parks for London evolving into the Centre for Excellence and will continue to be involved in decision making. The CEO of Parks for London has delegated authority and is in agreement with these priorities.  Funding will be for 1 year after which there is an opportunity to review priorities
Priorities for expert panel support areas change during the year	Low	Low	The areas identified are based on the Commission report, current evidence and the experience of Parks for London, including through feedback from their annual supporter survey
Costs exceed those outlined	Low	Medium	Parks for London are match funding the expert support panel posts  Consultant and staff workplans will include clear deliverables, linked to agreed fees / salary. Regular meetings and delivery reports will ensure any budget issues are highlighted early  External funding can be sought if there is a shortfall

#### *Conflicts of Interest*

- 4.2. Although he has not been directly involved in the Centre for Excellence advisory group it should be noted that Head of Green Infrastructure Andrew Jones is a trustee of Parks for London. He is not part of the decision chain for this work and will not be involved in the funding agreement or delivery. There are no other conflicts of interest to declare from any of those involved in the drafting or clearance of this Decision Form.

## **5. Financial comments**

- 5.1. Approval is sought for the awarding of grant funding to create a Centre for Excellence on recommendation from the Mayor's London Green Spaces commission. This Centre of Excellence will address health inequalities through green spaces and seek out innovation within the sector. In doing so, the Centre for Excellence will achieve strategic objectives in line with the Green New Deal mission. The selected grant recipient is Parks for London, an independent charity and the grant award is valued at £50,000. This will be sourced from the 20-21 Urban Greening budget held within the Environment unit.
- 5.2. Programme delivery for the Centre of Excellence will take place during the 21-22 financial year, and it has been proposed to front-load the grant payment to Parks for London in order to safeguard the success of the programme and minimise risk of service delivery. Therefore, the grant award will be paid in advance (March 2021) once a funding agreement has been entered into in line with the Authority's Contract and Funding code.

## 6. Planned delivery approach and next steps

Activity	Timeline
Expert panel - Health consultant support	
Health stakeholder workshop	March 2021
Consultant brief issued for health work	April 2021
Consultant appointed	June 2021
Health programme funding bids developed	Summer/Autumn 2021
Expert panel - Communications and research support	
Expert panel recruitment for communications and research support begins	March 2021
Expert panel support on communications and research in place	June 2021
Success Criteria	
UCL placement students to develop success criteria and consultant brief	May – June 2021
Consultant brief issued	July 2021
Consultant appointed	September 2021

### Appendices and supporting papers:

None.



### Public access to information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and will be made available on the GLA website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** This form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

### Part 1 - Deferral

**Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO**

If YES, for what reason:

Until what date: (a date is required if deferring)

### Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

**Is there a part 2 form – NO**

### ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION:

Drafting officer to  
confirm the  
following (✓)

#### Drafting officer:

Ruth Knight has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures.

✓

#### Corporate Investment Board

This decision was agreed by the Corporate Investment Board on 1 March 2021.

### ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF FINANCIAL SERVICES:

I confirm that financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this report.

**Signature**



**Date**

1 March 2021