

London Assembly Environment Committee – 22 May 2019

Transcript of Item 10 – Green Spaces in London

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): That now brings us to today's main item for discussion on green spaces in London. Before I welcome our guests, please can I ask the Committee to agree the scope and terms of reference of the investigation as attached in Appendix 1 of the report?

All: Agreed.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Can I welcome today's guests? We have Peter Massini, who is the Principal Policy and Programme Officer for Green Infrastructure at the Greater London Authority (GLA); we have Helen Monger, who is the Director of the London Parks & Gardens Trust; we have Tony Leach, who is the Chief Executive of Parks for London; we have Dave Morris, who is Chair of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces; and we have Chris Whyte, who is the Operational Director for Environmental Services in the London Borough of Brent and Green Space Lead in the London Environment Directors' Network (LEDNet). Thank you to all of you. You are all very welcome this morning.

We now move on to our questions. I just want to open by asking each of you to set out how green spaces benefit local residents' quality of life.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): In London, green spaces are quite a significant feature. It has always been a green city and it is something that is a feature of London. Those green spaces have been planned, designed and managed for a number of different purposes over the years. The original green spaces, places like Victoria Park, were created to provide places for the urban poor to go and relax and get fresh air. That has been a common theme for parks and green spaces for many years. Post-war it has more focused on things like formal sport and recreation. Then in the 1980s and 1990s there was more of an ecological movement to allow people to have access to nature.

They provide a wide range of benefits directly to people but also other environmental services. Increasingly now, parks and green spaces are being managed to address issues like climate change adaptation and storing water. They can be designed to provide off-road transport routes, cycle routes and walking routes, so that people can avoid the more polluted areas.

They provide a very wide range of services. Something we are trying to do as part of the work at the GLA is to be clear about the much wider range of services they provide than perhaps people acknowledge or understand.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Thank you. Helen, for you, how do our green spaces benefit local residents' quality of life?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): I agree with everything that Peter has said. I would add that there is also a lot of stuff to do with social cohesion and community work. One of the things we do is we run a big event called Open Garden Squares Weekend, which celebrates the spaces that are not public parks - community allotments, roof terraces - where people get together and meet their neighbours.

There are very few places now in London where that is possible in the grand scheme of things. It is a good way of neighbours getting together.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): There are many benefits and I think we will cover a lot of them as we go around, but to me one of the major factors concerning public parks and green spaces is that they are free of charge. They are society's truly democratic spaces. In fact, I would say the remaining democratic spaces that we have. They are potentially usable by anyone from anywhere, no matter their age or background. The sad thing is that they are not necessarily always used.

Even if people do not physically go into them, many people benefit from them by walking past them or overlooking them. That too is known to be a benefit to people psychologically. More recently, picking up on the journey of the relevance of parks and green spaces to society today, it has come full circle from when they were first initiated, laid out and provided by our forefathers. It was the whole issue around public health. There are so many issues around that and parks and green spaces provide benefits for people's health.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Funnily enough, I agree with everything that has been said as well.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Wonderful. Very helpful.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Hopefully that will carry on throughout the whole session. On behalf of the community, if you like, and the Friends Groups movement, which I am here to represent, they are unique spaces for local communities. They are essential infrastructure in our local communities. They are free, multipurpose, flexible, attractive and open to all 24/7. As Helen [Monger] said, they are particularly important for developing social interaction and social cohesion, and also community empowerment. People are often very disempowered in our modern world and they are spaces where people can come together, act collectively, organise activities and have a say about this essential public service. Especially, of course, if people are organised in Friends Groups, they can be partners in the management of that space. They are absolutely essential, unique spaces.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors' Network): I probably get the job of summarising. Yes, the key issues are that they improve physical and mental wellbeing, they reduce issues around social isolation, they support community cohesion, particularly in deprived areas, but more and more they are becoming a green space that can support climate change resilience. Carbon capture in an urban setting is very important. The promotion of biodiversity in that urban setting is very important and it is now starting to flourish. For a local authority they also support economic regeneration and they provide work, training and volunteering opportunities, which again is very important.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): One more thing I ought to mention is the importance of a lot of these places in terms of heritage and culture. A lot of parks are fundamental to place-making in certain locations because they have this huge heritage and cultural value.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): You have covered off all the things I had prompts for, which shows what a solid briefing I have. Do you want to --

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Chris was talking about the contribution in terms of climate change mitigation and the support for biodiversity. I was at a meeting last night where people were saying that there were several varieties of bat in the local park and there was a Friends Group who were associated with that park. I just wondered if you could say a bit more about air quality mitigation as well, because it is not just climate, is it? It is very much around air quality. For us in London, the fact that we have so much green space must contribute to helping us with our toxic air problem.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors' Network): Absolutely right. It is not as narrow, obviously, as the climate change issue; it does extend into other environmental concerns, particularly air quality. Our green open spaces, foliage, shrubs and trees all contribute to mitigating the impacts around that. Those agendas are starting to be taken now very seriously by all local authorities across London and the group that I represent, LEDNet, is starting to promote new ideas and new ways of working around that whole agenda. One of the things that we are very keen to make happen is to see parks as very much the starting point, the nucleus of that approach, extending our green spaces from parks and creating corridors into the public realm to start to make a much greener extension of what we have already in place and well-established within our parks, which we feel is important.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Thank you. Yes, the element of joining up is something that I have spoken about many times with Peter Massini, the green infrastructure.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Before we go on, Shaun, you indicated you wanted to come in.

Shaun Bailey AM: Sorry, is this the point to bring up some biodiversity issues?

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): You could do, yes, if you wanted to.

Shaun Bailey AM: I just want to ask the question: what are Friends Groups doing and what are parks in general doing to support biodiversity? You see lots of parks that are very well manicured and they have magpies and crows and that is your lot. What are people doing to support biodiversity?

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): In terms of Friends Groups, a lot. It is one of the main things that Friends Groups are very keen on. They are keen on a whole range of things, whether it is sports and recreation or social cohesion, activities and history and all kinds of stuff, but improving biodiversity is very important. Peter [Massini] indicated that in the last 20 or 30 years that has become increasingly important. In my park, which is Lordship Rec in Tottenham, it was a traditional recreation ground, like you say, with manicured lawns for recreational purposes, and now it has a biodiversity status. The whole park has been transformed, basically led by the Friends Groups but supported by Haringey Council, into a biodiverse range of areas and features but maintaining its recreational value as well. You can get a lot of things out of a green space if you sit down and work together and work out a long-term vision.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): It is also about the patchwork of different environments that you can create. Not all green spaces are the same. In St James's Park the water in the ponds is cleaned through wild reed bedding in the centre of London and they now have lots of herons as well as the very carefully managed pelicans. It is a balance.

I think we take for granted the fact that wildlife will survive but if you look at the story of the sparrow, for instance, that was in London and it was a common theme, it was regarded almost as a pest, and now you see

virtually no sparrows. It is about offering a mixture. To look at one space and say, "This is the perfect space" is not right. A manicured park is right for some things, for amenity value and so on for humans, but perhaps not so good for certain types of biodiversity. It depends on where you are going.

Shaun Bailey AM: Thank you for your answer. I understand that, but I think what I am asking is: is anybody measuring how people are deliberately setting out to support biodiversity in London? Is anybody doing that? Are there Friends Groups for which that is their main focus? Are there local authorities that have made a decision to support that?

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors' Network): I can speak for the London Borough of Brent, where I am based. One of the consequences of funding pressures on local authorities has been a review of the spend around parks and park maintenance. We have been prompted to really address the spend on our parks, the different ways of managing and maintaining our parks, moving away in certain instances from a very manicured landscape to something that is maintained in a much more relaxed way, which allows grass in certain areas to grow much longer so that we have different and varying habitats across previously well-manicured park spaces. That is starting to encourage that biodiversity. That is supported by a stocking programme around wildflower seeds and the like as part of those new habitat areas. Very often, where there are funding pressures it has promoted new ways of working.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Thank you.

David Kurten AM: Just a quick one. I have heard that certain types of trees are especially good at improving air quality, mopping up carbon dioxide and mopping up pollutants as well. I am thinking of the London plane tree, and the willow tree is another one, I heard. Do you have any thoughts on that? Is that true? If it is, what are parks doing to improve the number and quantity of those trees?

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): Shall I answer that? Yes, different types of trees - but not just trees, all kinds of plants - have different abilities to filtrate the air. There is a lot of research that has gone on for years on that. It is not just the species, it is also the way they are grown. Take, for example, beech. It could be grown as a hedge as well as a tree and in terms of filtration next to roads a hedge is often more effective. It is a combination of all those different types of structures within the landscape, the microclimate that it creates and whether it channels and keeps pollution within a certain area or dissipates it. That can all be achieved by design and careful selection of different species. Yes, you are right, and it is using that science to the benefit of --

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Just to add to that, we are now working with Transport for London (TfL) and the University of Birmingham specifically to look at how you might include green infrastructure to provide barriers to air quality. It is that issue around thinking about how you might plant hedges along busy roads or green walls along small playgrounds to act as a physical barrier. You could construct hard physical barriers, but clearly a vegetative physical barrier is more attractive and can provide quite a significant reduction of air pollution close to the areas where air pollution is worse, which are busy main roads.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): I will get us back to looking at the quality of life aspects of parks and I will start again with Peter on this one but everyone is welcome to chip in. How are the benefits of green space distributed across London and across different sections of London's population?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): That is quite a complex question.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): It is. It is a big 'un.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): There is some uneven distribution of those benefits. That is partly a consequence of London's historic development. Central London has always been densely developed, ever since the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire. Tower Hamlets, parts of Newham, parts of Southwark and southern parts of Hackney have always been very densely developed with a limited amount of green space because it was only when the Victorians recognised the importance of creating public green space that set-piece parks were created and it was not really until post-war, after the [Sir Leslie Patrick] Abercrombie Plan for London, that we had the idea that the planning system should ensure a network of parks and green spaces.

If you think about post-war development in Barking and Dagenham, for example, there are extensive areas of green space because that was part and parcel of the philosophy of creating homes fit for heroes. In the 1960s, places like New Addington and Thamesmead were built as garden cities on the edge of London and they still have extensive areas of green space. It is not a truism that every area that is maybe more deprived is necessarily lacking in green space. It is true in places in central London, and parts of London like areas of Hounslow where green space is limited by industrial development and proximity to Heathrow. But in other parts of London, like Barking and Dagenham, New Addington, Thamesmead and other areas, areas that are still relatively deprived have lots of access to green space. It is a very complex and mixed picture, partly a consequence of the historical development of London.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Thank you. Does anybody else want to come in on that? Particularly I am thinking about disparities in income, differences in gender, age, ethnicity or disability and how the benefits are distributed among the population. Are there groups that are getting less access to parks than others?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): There is anecdotal evidence that for parks where there are less well-maintained areas and a sense of lack of security, women and particularly ethnic minorities opt not to go through those areas. I do not have evidence to prove that.

I did a project only last month with a group of refugees in Barnet where we introduced them to Kenwood and they did not even realise it was something they could go to for free. We then took them into Russell Square - it was based on the history of [Humphry] Repton [landscape designer] and his influence on London - and talked them through a bit of garden history, and they had the opportunity, thanks to the London Borough of Camden and the commissioners of Russell Square, to plant three rose bushes that we bought for them. We have never seen so much excitement. They went away feeling absolutely chuffed and they felt it was part of their history now, but they did not feel that way before we had done the project. However, that is very resource-intensive and sustaining that for every refugee in London would be very difficult. Certainly, talking to them, we discovered that they never realised that they could have access to those areas without some kind of expense.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): David, I will bring you in but, Chris, I just wonder if from a local authority perspective that is a kind of work that local authorities are trying to do to make sure that wider groups of people feel enabled to access those spaces.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors' Network): It is all about accessibility. One example would be the London Borough of Hounslow, who are undertaking a £1 million investment programme to link up different parks, creating bridges over rivers but also looking at the entrances to those parks, widening them and making them more accessible but giving a sense of them being much safer as well. I would cite the London Borough of Hounslow as being a very good example in that regard.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): In the 1980s and 1990s, because of the cuts to public services, parks went into decline. They did not have the resources. They became unsafe areas and perceived as unsafe by the communities and their usage dropped dramatically. When the renaissance started in the 2000s with the growth of the Friends Groups and some interest at Government level in putting more resources into green space, that was turned around.

I can say for my own park - I do not want to big up my own park, but it is something I am very knowledgeable about, obviously - it was virtually unused. It is 26 hectares in the centre of urban Tottenham, next to Broadwater Farm, and hardly anybody went in there. Thanks to a long-term vision, partnership working between the Friends and the Council, and Lottery funding, we had an £8 million regeneration of our park. We have trebled the usage of the park, the diversity of people using it and the diversity of activities, and people stay longer as well because we have a building in the park that we run as a community building with a café. You have to have the facilities and you have to have the management to make parks attractive. You cannot just have an abandoned green space and expect people to go in there. They need facilities. They need toilets, they need staffing and they need the range of features that people would expect.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): You said that since your Friends Group got involved and you had all this investment there is a wider range of activities. Can you just slightly scope out what those are? Just give us a flavour of what sort of activities are going on.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): One of our strategies as the Friends Group was to encourage the development of autonomous use groups. We developed a wildlife group, a sports and activities consortium, a walking group, a gardening group, an arts collective, a women's group and a whole range of different groups. As well as the Friends Group we have a range of groups that organise activities and engage different sections of the community.

In terms of activities it is dramatic, the change in the use of the park from what it was traditionally 15 or 20 years ago and longer, but I do say that when it was created these traditional recreation grounds used to be absolutely packed out at weekends. There is still a great deal of potential to attract more people into parks with more activities, but you have to have facilities. Do not forget that in Haringey up until the 1980s we had 300 park staff and now we have 29, I think. If you are going to attract people into parks you have to have the staff on the ground, the resources, the facilities, the will and the community involvement. As a whole package, that is what our parks need.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): You listed a whole list of different autonomous groups covering a whole range of different people. Are you working with your local Clinical Commissioning Group, with the health groups, in terms of addressing the mental health and wellbeing benefits that you could be getting from the park?

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Not specifically in our park but we are aware of the health agenda. There is a walking group that used to be funded by public health. I think now the Health and Wellbeing Board funds the training of the walk leaders.

I think there should be more resources coming from the health sector to support parks on the ground with features like outdoor gyms, which we have - I think every park should have outdoor gyms; they are really popular - or other forms of financial support. Parks cannot provide those facilities without financial support.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): You would be surprised how expensive outdoor gyms are. Ours cost £120,000 for about 15 pieces of kit.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Just in terms of the link to public health, there is a major initiative about to launch which is embargoed so I cannot say much about it right now. Next week, I think, it is going to be announced. That will look at how you might recommission parks as public health assets. That is quite a big, significant movement towards that and it has a lot of funding from central Government, the National Trust and the Heritage Lottery Fund to explore that very issue, how you recommission parks as public health assets. That is about retraining staff to engage more in the public health agenda as well as managing parks.

Public Health England are about to review their guidance on access to green space and the role of parks for managing public health. That is something that is quite a significant sea change and it goes back to the original intention of public parks, to provide public health assets. We have almost come full circle in that respect.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): I know certainly in Islington that there is a lot of work being done around mental health, wellbeing, gardening groups and green spaces.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): I am conscious that it comes up a bit later - a lot of these things intermingle - but last week we launched a Parks Health Toolkit that I will give you details of, which is an audit tool that anybody can use. There is a free section of it. It is to empower community groups to go out and do an audit of their green space, measuring the potential for improvements to make them healthier. The outcomes are very much linked to health outcomes of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. That is useful and it is both a bottom-up and a top-down thing, which you will come on to later, I think.

I just wanted to go backwards slightly to what has changed dramatically in terms of access to spaces. The technology has moved on. Access and biodiversity are now mapped. Peter might want to say a bit more about this in a minute but there is an organisation called GiGL, Greenspace Information for Greater London. Going back to the biodiversity, volunteers go out and record loads of different types of plants and animals and that is all mapped, and it is now being combined with a lot of other data that I will let Peter explain more. Together with knowing about where the need is in terms of, say, health and wellbeing, and the opportunity, you can do much more targeted interventions. I think we all know that there is going to be no new money to invest a substantial amount of money in parks --

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): At least for a week.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): -- but it will help people use their resources much more intelligently. Maybe that would be the point for Peter just to briefly explain the map.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Why not? Yes, please go on.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): The Mayor and the GLA published what we have called a Green Infrastructure Focus Map. Essentially it is a set of datasets or data layers which identifies all the open space in London, the green cover, the canopy cover, and then matches that with a range of other issues: flood management, demographic information, health information and information about where air quality is worse. It is a decision support tool looking at where your parks are and where the greatest need is in terms of addressing particular issues, helping you to target where you might want to invest in improving a park or invest in other green infrastructure.

It is effectively a decision support tool that boroughs can download. They can download the data and they can augment it with their own data or data from the London Datastore. There is a huge amount of data out there now free to use via the London Datastore, and people are beginning to download, analyse and help to make informed decisions to make best use of the available resources and address particular needs.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): I would just say that it is slightly different from data available to the general public on where their nearest green spaces are and so on, and getting them involved, say, in planning decisions. My organisation has been creating, through 25 years of volunteer effort, a catalogue of the history of as many green spaces as we can throughout London. We make that publicly accessible online as London Gardens Online. There are other tools that the Campaign to Protect Rural England are beginning to develop to do with trying to bring all the Friends Groups data into one portfolio so that the general public can go, "I fancy going to a park today. Where is my nearest park? What does it offer? How do I get there?"

Caroline Russell AM: "What is its history?"

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Yes, exactly.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors' Network): I think the whole social prescribing concept, where people are being referred to make use of parks and open spaces for health and wellbeing benefits, certainly provides a great opportunity. I think the link between general practitioners and parks providers, the people responsible for the stewardship and maintenance of parks, can be established very easily but the challenge and the work that needs to be done is around broadening those linkages so that there is a more uniform offer across the whole of London around those particular issues. That is the challenge. That is the work that remains.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Just before I bring in Léonie [Cooper AM] and then Shaun [Bailey AM], who has also indicated, I just wanted to pick something up with Peter. I know that in the *Park life [Ensuring green spaces remain a hit with Londoners]* report that this Committee did when Léonie was Chair back in 2017, one of the first reports the Committee did in this term, we asked the Mayor to appoint a Green Infrastructure Commissioner. I have noted that a Green Infrastructure Commission has just started very recently and is due to report back next year [2020]. Can you just let us know if part of their brief is looking at the distribution of green space and access and these more social elements of access?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): It is a Green Spaces Commission. We have brought together a number of experts in the field to particularly look at how park services can be transformed. It picks up on the point that Chris [Whyte] made about how local authorities reconfigure their services so that you have better relationships between the public health team and parks teams. A lot of the data and information around parks is out there in various forms and

boroughs have huge amounts of data about their parks. The Commission is looking more at the structure and function of the park service rather than looking into details around data issues.

The idea is to work with a number of local authorities and this big initiative that is going to be announced this week, which I cannot talk about – it is not our initiative, it is a national initiative – to see how park services can be integrated into local authorities' statutory functions. One of the issues that park services have suffered from is that they have been slightly isolated within the local authorities. Because it is not a statutory service and because they are seen as a 'nice to have' while local authorities focus their attention on statutory duties like child protection, public health and housing, park services need to understand how they relate to those statutory services. There is lots of good work going on in boroughs. We have brought the Commission together to try to provide an overarching framework for that and identify where there is best practice so boroughs can learn from each other.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): That has teed up very nicely the first area that I wanted to explore. There is a bit of an elephant emerging in the room that is to do with the fact that in the past, parks and green spaces had been massively underfunded and we have now moved back into an area where there has been more funding, but not necessarily directly through the statutory services for the reasons that you have just been outlining, Peter. It has come through things like the Heritage Lottery Fund.

We have had exactly the same thing with my local -- it is not a park, it is a common. We have been talking a lot about parks and gardens but let us make sure that we mention that there are some really big commons and I do think we need to focus on their biodiversity. We had a Heritage Lottery Fund grant for 97 hectares of Tooting Common. That tells you also that it happens a lot later and the Heritage Lottery Fund is making smaller grants, capital grants, for larger spaces. £8 million for 26 hectares is a lot better than £3 million for 97 hectares, and it was all on the heritage features as well.

One of the issues is about the money and we have not really touched on the fact that there are a lot of leisure opportunities, particularly in parks, some of which are now starting to be charged for. I just wondered if you feel that local authorities should then hypothecate any money that comes in from, I do not know, outsourcing all their tennis courts to someone who runs tennis courts and then gets money coming in from that, back into the parks. It is if they are charging for people using cafes, if they have franchised cafes, that sort of thing. Is that an additional source of money or do you feel that all of those things should still be free? I am going to start with Tony first.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): We do an audit of London borough park services. We look at a range of ten different criteria with a view to encouraging them to improve their services. On the issue of fees and charges, be it from sports and recreation or from events, dare I say, it is a political decision at the end of the day, borough by borough.

Some boroughs have made the decision that they will hypothecate the money and it will go back into the park, or sometimes the park and the surrounding parklets and green infrastructure. There are a variety of ways of dealing with it. Some boroughs do not know where their money goes, though I suspect it goes back to the corporate pot. Some make a distinct decision that it or a proportion of it will go back to the corporate pot. That worries me a bit because then the parks can become a bit of a cash cow for council services and that is treading on dangerous water.

In terms of trying to develop and encourage good practice, we would encourage that income is brought back into the park and reinvested. Again, it is different in different parks because of the different sizes, what they

can do and the opportunities that they have. There is another issue that is new, which is where fees and charges are being introduced for, for example, professional dog-walkers, personal trainers and the like, who in many cases will come in, use a public park for free, run a business and make a living - nothing wrong with that - but nothing comes back to the park. We have looked across what the different boroughs do and what the Royal Parks do, and we have developed a template for boroughs to follow and adopt to save them having to reinvent the wheel and to try to encourage a degree of consistency.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): You have some good practice that you have developed?

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): Yes.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Would that be something you could provide to us? That might be one of our recommendations that comes out of this second look at parks and open spaces.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): Yes.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Dave, I wondered if you had any thoughts on this as well. Do you also think that local authorities should charge Friends Groups to run events? I am guessing the answer might be no --

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): I am not sure if that is the right question.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): -- but I thought I would ask.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Obviously funding, as you say, is the elephant in the room. Basically, we have an underfunding crisis nationally for parks and green spaces because of cuts to public services, huge cuts to all public services, but obviously the non-statutory services are suffering greatly even though they are providing a range of statutory outcomes that all the other services need.

Can I take this opportunity to refer to the documents that I have circulated, to get them on the record?

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Sure.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): This is the statement that the London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network, which I am the Chair of, put to the Committee at the end of 2016. There is a whole range of relevant information in there which I will not refer to. I would quote the Mayor though on the front page. He said about funding for green spaces, Mr [Sadiq] Khan:

"I will continue to highlight the adverse impact of [local authority underfunding of] this and lobby Government to ensure local authorities are adequately resourced to deliver a full range of necessary and important local services."

There is a recognition from the Mayor of London that in this issue of the funding of green space, central Government is the cause and the solution to the problem of underfunding. I am also a representative on the national body, Parks Action Group, which is liaising with Government. National green space organisations and Government departments are working together to address this underfunding crisis.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): So, in sum, you would say it should come --

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): We are trying to put pressure on the Government --

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): -- in central support to local authorities rather than individual charges. That seems to be what you are saying.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Yes, because the public pay taxes and they expect public services to flow from that in a fair way.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Sure. I understand the argument. Can I just ask --

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): There are a lot of resources available to central Government. The Government is committed to funding essential infrastructure that they deem essential, such as High Speed 2 (HS2) or nuclear warheads --

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): We have to spend £60 billion on HS2. Tony [Arbour AM] will tell us we are going to spend on expanding Heathrow Airport with a third runway, which none of us support. But, Dave, I just want to move on to --

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Can I --

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): No, sorry. I want to move on to Helen. I just wondered if there is a conflict also between the funding that goes to the larger flagship parks and the smaller parklets, gardens, heaths, commons and all the rest of it. From your perspective, is there a solution?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): I agree with Dave. The solution is that you need quite a lot of central funding because parks contribute to greater wellbeing good, as we have discussed already this morning.

Going on to the thing about individual charging, there are local authorities, as Tony [Leach] said, where, say, the tennis courts go to a particular group such as Greenwich Leisure Ltd, who are famous for doing various things. They charge money. That becomes a barrier for people to get healthy through playing tennis. Not only that, they need to make a certain amount of money so it does not go back into the park. Alternatively, they decide that they are not going to make any money from it, so they do not bother to monitor. Then what happens is the tennis court gets degraded and then you get antisocial behaviour. Either way, I do not think that individual financing model works.

Also, there is an over-reliance on commercialisation of parks through events. A lot of big events are happening. There was an example in the West End where there was a proposal for very small park, Victoria Embankment Gardens, to be shut for nine months to put in a cinema. I would argue there are enough cinemas in the West End that you do not need another one that takes up a park.

Then you go on to what I call 'creeping memorialisation', where everybody wants to put up a physical memory of something. The one that I am particularly involved with is Victoria Tower Gardens and the United Kingdom (UK) Holocaust Memorial, but either way it is all about taking space and changing its use. The park becomes a

dumping ground for everything that nobody can think of nowhere else to put. The park becomes a dumping ground for things that nobody knows where to put. that detracts from the wellbeing. Yes, I think parks are quite contemplative places but in that particular example of Victoria Tower Gardens you are going to have a national memorial, with all the security that comes with that, juxtaposed against a playground. Who wants to get their kids to roll down a hill over the UK Holocaust Memorial? Nobody.

There are other examples of that. At Hampstead Heath there is now a proposal for a memorial there. That is an area of wilderness and that memorial, in my opinion, will then detract from the sense of wilderness. There is a creeping sense that parks can fulfil so many other functions without the need for money.

Just to come back to you about the financing point again, there is also a misconception that parks look after themselves. Parks are a costly business. It takes a lot, whether it is to manage for biodiversity or whether it is to manage for amenity value, and relying on haphazard funding through fees does not really cut the mustard.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Thank you. I do not know if you want to add anything to all of that, Chris, or whether we have an “I agree with everyone else” situation.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors’ Network): I do agree with others. In terms of the borough I represent, fees and charges have been a long-established element of the overall budget to manage our parks. Honestly, it is not new. It is not something that has been brought in recently to account for funding shortages. It is an important means of sustaining the work that we do in our parks.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): The important point that you just made is that the fees and charges are there to help you fund the parks. That was the issue that I was raising at the beginning. Do you think that is where the money that comes in should go to? Having football pitches all over Tooting Common annoys me because they are a biodiversity wilderness and it is a common, but they are not going to go away because of the amount of money that comes in from those football pitches. The Council needs it.

The argument then becomes: can there be some free hours on the football pitches for teams of children? The same with the tennis. All Star Tennis runs all the tennis courts now across Wandsworth, everywhere. Can we have some free hours for small children to play tennis rather than always having to pay £6 an hour?

Does it come back in?

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors’ Network): It certainly comes back in. Our parks budget has two very clear elements, an expenditure element and an income/revenue element. That is all part of the one package that helps us provide the parks.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Does LEDNet have a line for its membership, the London Environment Directors’ Network that you are part of? Does it have a line to its members to say, “Please hypothecate the funds that come in towards parks, commons and parklets”?

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors’ Network): That is the view. The balancing of making our parks accessible but also affordable is a very key consideration with my colleagues across London, that is for sure.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Perhaps that is one of the things.

I just wondered if I could turn to you, Peter, with something slightly different that relates back to some of the things we were talking about earlier on. As you know, I have pressed you quite hard on the All London Green Grid guidance and when we might see the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), and I understand that that is going to be after the examination-in-public of the London Plan is completely finished. Is that in some way going to ensure, through that SPG, that the benefits of green spaces are distributed across the whole of London, bearing in mind that still lots of people are paving over their front gardens and actually now putting plastic grass in their back gardens because it is obviously too much trouble to look after grass, particularly if you have children? Can you give us any kind of update on when the SPG might arrive?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): First of all, yes, the SPG is Supplementary Planning Guidance to the London Plan policy. It cannot be published until the new London Plan is formally published and that will not be until spring 2020. SPGs cannot be published before that date.

The SPG, because it is strategic planning guidance, cannot get into detail about front gardens or individual householders putting plastic grass down. Those are decisions by individual householders. What it does do is try to identify how the network as a whole can be planned, designed and managed better to provide those benefits citywide. Individual positions are down to local authorities, local green space managers, the National Trust or Royal Parks. It is trying to set a framework to say that if you manage this in a more coherent, holistic way, you optimise those benefits, but the local benefits and the local need has to be a decision taken at a local level because that is where it is best understood and also where a local authority is able to identify the trade-offs.

I think one of the things we forget is that parks and green spaces, because they are public spaces, are contested spaces. Commonly it is contested between those who want more biodiversity and those who want to play football. You cannot have a biodiverse football pitch.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): It is quite hard. I have found that.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): You have to find ways in which you can accommodate both. The green infrastructure approach is attempting to do that.

It goes back to a point I think Chris [Whyte] made, not thinking about the park network as a network of isolated, fenced off spaces. How does that park network encroach into the public realm? How do you start thinking about Healthy Streets green walking and cycling corridors that connect up and link those spaces so that the benefits which are provided by a set-piece park begin to be realised in other parts of the public realm?

We are heading in that direction, partly because we are reducing traffic in parts of London. The public realm is largely streets. Streets are becoming more public realm as fewer people drive cars, more people walk and more people cycle, and that provides opportunities for that parkland environment to spread out into the streets. Chris [Whyte] touched on that and he probably has some examples in Brent where that is happening.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Sorry, if I --

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Can I just make one other point --

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): I was just going to say that brings me on to my last question as well.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): -- about charges and fees? That is really complex. All boroughs have to think of blended finance models about core funding and funding they bring in through revenue generation, through sports facilities or events. The one area that is currently untapped and is something which we are exploring through policy and through trying to influence Government policy is how parks and green spaces can be planned and managed to provide wider benefits, for example flood management.

A good example is in Lewisham. Lewisham town centre is one of the town centres in London that has had quite intensive development, quite dense development, to meet housing needs and meet all the other needs we have in London. Lewisham town centre used to flood regularly. That flooding has been abated by upstream interventions in a number of parks along the Quaggy and along the Ravensbourne. That was funded by Environment Agency money and some European funding, largely public funding, enabling the development of Lewisham town centre.

One of the things we need to think about in the future is how you capture some of that land value from development to fund the management and maintenance of those upstream interventions. That is quite a complex thing to do but capturing land value to pay for long-term management of parks is something that we need to think about as London grows and becomes denser and those parks become even more vital for people's health and wellbeing.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Can I pick up on that --

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): I think that is part of the overall work that the Environment Agency is doing around the concept of natural capital --

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Exactly, yes.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): -- and trying to develop the whole concept, seeing how valuable nature is and how much we overlook it in terms of that capital value.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Government are trying to think this through as well. It is quite complex.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): I was just going to pick up on that there is a temptation for local authorities, through planning, to rely on the private sector to deliver public realm and therefore to maintain it. The temptation is then to go for the cheapest option. The Community Investment Levy (CIL) becomes public art rather than green space, it becomes hard landscaping and the quality goes down. In effect, what you are creating are hostile environments within the public realm rather than green space.

A relatively good example of that is the Vauxhall, Nine Elms, Battersea Opportunity Area, where there was supposed to be 8 hectares of green space and in fact now there is a linear path that is hardstanding rather than

a park, where the private developers have put up barriers so that you cannot get in, where half of it is a moat for the United States (US) embassy and so on and so forth.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Helen, this is not a temptation. This is Government policy that has restricted funding in the way that Dave [Morris] was suggesting through a programme of austerity since 2010, announced by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer as such. Everything in the public sector is to be funded through developers. When a housing developer comes into an area, they will be funding the schools, the infrastructure, in some cases the doctors' surgeries, and absolutely everything else.

Tony Arbour AM: What is new about that?

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): This is not a temptation; this is Government policy.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Yes, but the small element that goes to public space becomes --

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): We are operating in that context. Tony, if you support that, then that is fine.

Tony Arbour AM: I am simply saying: what is new about it? Your Governments did it. Section 106.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, but that was in addition to money coming in from other sources. Anyone would think that there was an election happening in this building in about nine months' time.

I just wanted to ask one final question which speaks to the whole thing about green infrastructure, the joining of the different areas and the benefits of having fewer, smaller parks and lots and lots of smaller green spaces versus having large areas. Obviously, I really enjoy living next to the 97 hectares of Tooting Common but we also have the Furzedown Recreation Ground and a number of other smaller spaces. There are some areas that do not have those big areas but do they have sufficient of the small and do the small compensate for not having the big? Or are they better?

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): That is another complex question because it depends on who you are and what you want to do or not do. Turning it on its head, what we have in London are over 3,000 parks and green spaces of a variety of sizes. Every single one of them is unique and the communities around them are unique. The answers to many of these questions are going to involve a diversity of solutions, also down to funding as well. It is not going to be one thing. Most of the boroughs I am talking to have been told that their park services needs to be cost-neutral by next year, so they have to bring money in somehow. That is the challenge we have.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): To pick up on your question about smaller spaces, if you look at a map of access to green space in London there are clearly parts of London, largely in central London but not exclusively, where there is a lack of access to traditional parks and open spaces of a certain size.

Some of those areas, as I mentioned before, have always been densely developed. It is not possible to insert a new three-hectare park into Tower Hamlets because it is already built. The issue there is how you provide the benefits or some of the benefits of a traditional park in different ways, and that is about how you green new developments and how you make streets playable, so there is less traffic and children can play in the streets.

The new London Plan policy about urban greening and the Urban Greening Factor is saying that all new development needs to contribute in some way to providing additional greening, not necessarily green space but different forms of greening to provide some of the benefits that you would otherwise get from a park.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Obviously I am very fond of the Urban Greening Factor because I did my own rapporteurship on that.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Léonie, you have taken us neatly into the next section of questioning, which is going to be led by Shaun, on providing green space.

Shaun Bailey AM: Let me start by saying that my first question will be: what are the main challenges in providing green space in London? Of course, London already exists and the idea of new green space is a massive challenge, so it is about the green space we have. Of course, on the outskirts of London there is lots of green space that is inaccessible. What are the main challenges, as you would see it, of providing green space in London?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Cost is the simplest: land costs, maintenance costs and capital costs for creating it, whether it is a living wall or a green roof, etc. Obviously, there is an initial outlay that can be compensated. If you have a green roof then that helps with insulation, flood mitigation and so on so long-term the public gains, but initially it costs to create that sort of space and that obviously becomes a barrier.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors' Network): There is an issue also around the availability of skilled, experienced labour in parks and open spaces. The generally low wages that are associated with that work do not lend themselves to meeting the cost of living in this area, so the pool of skilled and available labour to maintain our parks in the right ways is a particular challenge.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): I would like to pick up on a couple of issues. I mentioned that in already densely developed London you need to think differently about how you provide that space. As I said, you cannot create a new three-hectare park in the City of London but you can provide alternative forms of some sort of public open space. In a very recent development in the City of London, one of the new tower blocks - there are many of them being built - they have actually created the public open space at roof level and it is free to use. It is not a private roof garden but a public open space.

Shaun Bailey AM: Can members of the public who do not live in a block access it as well?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): It is a commercial block. It is an office block. At ground level there is a lift that goes straight to the top of the roof and anyone can go up there. It is now being used by people on their lunch break to have their lunch. It is providing a small space but obviously in the City of London you cannot provide a big space.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): That is a rare example because there are lots of places where they have roof space but it is only accessible to the residents.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Yes, it is rare but that is now changing because there is a recognition that that is the only way you can provide that public open space. Obviously, you need to negotiate with the building owner.

The other opportunities are where you have existing open space that is not public. Again, there are some really good examples, perhaps the best example being Walthamstow Reservoirs. It is a huge area of open land between Haringey and Waltham Forest, operational reservoirs, unavailable to the public for hundreds of years. Partly through the Heritage Lottery Fund money but also partly through a lot of work between Waltham Forest Council and Thames Water, Thames Water have now said, "OK, that is now publicly accessible". It is completely open to the public now. It took a long time to negotiate with Thames Water because it is an operational reservoir. They have lots and lots of restrictions on public use of that space and there are significant health and safety issues. The site is now free for public use.

Shaun Bailey AM: Are there many sites like that across London?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Yes. Another example is Beckenham Place Park in Lewisham. It was technically available to the public but no one used it because it was not formally public open space. The local authority has now taken ownership of that. It used to be a golf course. It is no longer a golf course. They have Heritage Lottery Fund money to make it publicly accessible.

Another good example is Burgess Park. Burgess Park was a series of discrete spaces, not properly joined up. Again, with funding from Heritage Lottery Fund and the GLA and a lot of money from regeneration funding, that is now a continuous space and probably one of the most well-used spaces in southeast London, a huge success.

There are ways in which you can make existing space better-used and more accessible. It is quite complex because you are stitching things together and you are bringing together lots of stakeholders, private landowners, developers, local authorities and community groups to come up with a solution, but it can be done. There are some fantastic examples where that has happened.

Just finally about the Green Belt, there is lots of private land in the Green Belt that is not publicly accessible. There have been issues in the past like Thames Chase Community Forest, where areas of land have been turned into publicly accessible woodlands. We are hoping to fund a project with Enfield next year [2020] to do a similar exercise, taking areas of land that is currently farmland owned by Enfield Council and turning it into a woodland that is publicly accessible rather than farmland.

There are some significant barriers. Even with the current policy about not developing the Green Belt, if you are a private landowner and you own land on the edge of a city, you can sit on it for years and hope for the time when it will be developed and, clearly, if it is developed, it is worth a fortune. There is a reluctance to release that land for public use.

Again, the Government is now trying to think about how it might fund schemes that allow more public use and pay the landowners for the use of that land by the public, but the landowners retain ownership. If in 20- or 30-years' time there is a need for expansion, then the landowner still realises the value of that land for development.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Going quickly back to your question about how to create parks, you do need some sort of strategic authority to create a substantial new park in London. The last example was the Olympic Park. If you leave it to land to be developed willy-nilly by individual developers, then unfortunately everybody pushes the green envelope down the line to somebody else. You need to take a strategic view of where you need parks.

Shaun Bailey AM: There is a tension in London between our housing need and our need to generate an economy, but when we redevelop places what is the feeling there? Is delivering green space anywhere near the top of the agenda? Is there any example where it is done?

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): I do not know if it is at the top of the agenda, but it should be on the agenda. It should be an essential prerequisite for any development that it creates some green space. The policies in the London Plan are there promoting it, but it is a question of whether they are strong enough - that debate is happening in the London Plan hearings - and whether they are enforced at the local level and development level. Everybody agrees that this is essential infrastructure. The more housing you build the more green space you need and so it absolutely really should be an imperative for developers to ensure they are creating some public green space.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors' Network): The consideration thereafter is that that space that is provided does not simply serve the purpose of enhancing the look and feel of that development but is actually accessible and available for people to make use of, for children to play and for people to sit out. That is an important consideration beyond that for sure.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Can I just quickly give some examples of where the planning system has worked? The planning system provides a framework for discussion and negotiation and sometimes that planning framework results in discussions and negotiations that do not quite come together for all sorts of reasons - political reasons, funding reasons, the development cycle - and so sometimes it ends up in a not-ideal outcome. Perhaps Nine Elms is an example of that.

Equally, there are some really good examples of where those things have come together - the politics, the funding, the planning - to come up with some fantastic new developments that increase the amount of high-quality green space. Kidbrooke Village in Greenwich is an example of that. It was the old Ferrier Estate, which was a really poor-quality estate that was demolished and removed. Now there is a fantastic new development with some really high-quality public open space and green space. The developer is working with the London Wildlife Trust to improve its biodiversity.

That is an example where the planning system worked very well. You can always find examples where the planning system has not worked.

Shaun Bailey AM: How do we capture that? When we regenerate in London it tends to mean densification, which means that any green space gets looked upon as something that you could put even more on housing-wise. How do we make that our culture? How do we knit that into the planning system? It is great that there is a good example, but I am asking. I am not telling here. What is the ratio of good examples to bad?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): It is probably getting better. On the issue around densification, you can densify by putting more buildings on a green space or you can build taller. There are lots of developments where the way in which they are designed means you can get higher density with good quality. You can do density very badly.

Shaun Bailey AM: I understand that, but the worry is that you could do that and then build on top of green space as well and get even more in. That seems to be the trend.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Sure, yes.

Shaun Bailey AM: If we look at policy, we have removed the protections from back gardens. The big debate now is about how much green space that is going to lose. Léonie [Cooper AM] made the point that people put plastic over their driveways. I have to say that one of my neighbours did it but, in his defence, it was concrete and he put the fake grass over it and so I am not sure if that is a good or a bad thing. I do not know. When I asked why he put grass there, he said, "Shaun, I am just covering the concrete". I thought, "Fair enough", and walked off. My point is that we are now looking at removing back gardens. They have been removed from the planning decisions. People can just do it. Are we worried that that will lead to a loss in green space?

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Yes. Once we used to think builder's rubble in the garden was bad news. Now it is plastic and being wholly concreted. Mad.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): I am not a planning expert, but the new London Plan policy allows for development on small sites, which could include some gardens, but again it comes down to the local authority. The local authority makes the final decision planning decision and so there is the option for the local authority to refuse those.

Shaun Bailey AM: They are being taken out of that decision, are they not?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): No, because part of it is as a result of national planning policy. The National Planning Policy Framework allows for increased development without planning permission, effectively permitted development rights, which is a national decision.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Shaun, you need to get in touch with the Government on that one.

Shaun Bailey AM: I will do, I am sure, but that is about a local thing because what is interesting about green space is that the real care for green space is driven by local people. People have as much love or maybe even more love for their small pocket park than they do for a big common that they think belongs to somebody else, whereas these small spaces are really quite important. I am very interested in: (a) how we hold onto them; and, (b) how when we develop we ask people as a matter of culture and as a matter of planning to give back and to save that space.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Again, through the London planning policy, the Urban Greening Factor requires new developers to ensure that they do a certain amount of greening in all new developments. The type of greening is dependent on a conversation between the local planning authority, the developer and the local community. We are not going to dictate exactly how that should transpire. It will come down to individual negotiation. In

some parts of London, the requirement for additional housing may actually trump people's desire for additional greening.

This is just an anecdote. I was talking to a colleague of mine yesterday and she was doing a lot of work in Thamesmead. They did a consultation with local youth about the space. There is a community centre on the site with some green space and they asked the local youth, "Do you like the green space?" They said, "The green space is fine". They said, "How could we improve it?" They said, "Put a Burger King there". There are different views about how to use space.

Shaun Bailey AM: Wisdom takes time.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Yes, hopefully.

Shaun Bailey AM: Can I just quickly ask this question? How is the GLA addressing areas of deficiency? How is that measured? What are we doing? What was interesting in the opening comments was that nobody mentioned children and play. In my view of a park, particularly where I came from, the park basically replaced our lack of back gardens. We were not particularly distressed about no back garden because we had two local parks. How is it assessed and how is it calculated? Where do we know this is a problem?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): There is a framework for assessing deficiency in access to open space and it is based on the distance of residential units from local parks, district parks and regional parks. There is a threshold in terms of 400 metres to a local park. It used to be quite crude, just drawing circles from a residential unit. Now it is quite sophisticated, and it is 400 metres, taking out barriers like railway lines, because in the old methodology you could have a house within 15 metres of a park that was actually on the other side of a railway line and so did not have access. It is much more sophisticated measuring. That data is held by local authorities and by GiGL.

The London Plan policy encourages where there is new development that those areas of deficiency are reduced where possible. Clearly in some places it is not possible. The planning process and the planning system measures this and provides a mechanism to reduce areas of deficiency, but it comes down to negotiations around the development.

The issue around children and play is really interesting. There has been a lot of focus on creating play space in local parks and lots of local authorities did some really good stuff around play in parks, particularly trying to create natural play opportunities, not just the classic pieces of child play equipment. A lot of the evidence suggests that children, particularly younger children, want to play very close to where they live. That is more about how we start thinking about the public realm as play space. Again, it is the issue around how you reduce traffic in local streets so that children can play in the street. When I was a kid I used to play football in the street because there were no cars, but I am old.

Shaun Bailey AM: We are all focused on reducing car ownership, which will --

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Not car ownership, but the use of the space.

Shaun Bailey AM: The unfortunate thing is, if you live in a street where people park their cars, they are going to want to park their cars there. If they do not own a car, you are in a better space on that.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Yes. It is not a solution that can work everywhere, but particularly where regeneration is occurring there are ways in which we can redesign the street layout to provide lots more areas of public realm, which become playable space. That is the critical thing. You can have a park 400 metres away that has a fantastic playground but, as a four-year-old child or a five-year-old child, you may have to cross three or four busy roads. You are not going to play in that space. You need play space immediately outside your residence. That is about courtyards. It is about parklets. It is about play space.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors' Network): Alleyways are particular opportunities in urban areas. You can gate these alleyways off. They very often become overgrown and unused. You hand the keys to those gates to the local residents and suddenly, as part of that, not only does the antisocial behaviour that was prevalent disappear but they become very valued, very local and very accessible green open spaces at the back of people's gardens. That is a common approach.

Shaun Bailey AM: That sounds like a good use of space. I have a question that maybe Helen, Tony [Leach] or anybody can answer. I have noticed in a few local parks that I walk past that there seem to be schools using them. Is that a new phenomenon? Is that a welcome phenomenon?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): It is not a new phenomenon exactly, although as pressure has gone on to create new housing, that in itself creates the need for new schools and the new schools cannot afford land other than playgrounds in caged roofs. What happens is they look to the park to produce the sports day, running track, etc. That is quite a good use of the park during the day but then it prevents other uses of the park during the day. It is part of a complex picture where new academies are effectively relying on public services through parks to provide their sports space.

Shaun Bailey AM: Is that just the reality of us growing to ten million people? It struck me - mainly because the children seemed to be having an absolute riot of a time - that it was a good thing. There were 30 or 40 of them. They were having a good time. They were using the equipment in the park, which many times in the daytime is not being used at all. I did not get the impression that they were preventing other people from using the park because, normally when I walk past the park, it is empty at that time of day. I just want to get your feel. Is that a welcome development or not?

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): In Parks for London we for a number of years have been encouraging the breaking down of the silos between the different departments in local government. We have been trying to talk to education to say, "Use your parks. They are great learning resources not just for sports but for learning". There is a degree of resistance by some simply because of health and safety, distance, getting there, lack of staff and all that jazz, and so that is an untapped resource. That kind of use has gone on for donkey's years.

However, what there has been a growth in is the use of parks by young children, playgroups and the like for forest schools. That is burgeoning. There are some local authorities that have reached agreements with these forest schools and they come in on a regular basis and use the park for teaching and learning, which is great. It is something that should be encouraged.

Shaun Bailey AM: You will grow a group of children who then become adults with a much better appreciation of the park and use it more regularly.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Absolutely, but then it goes back to the elephant in the room that we were discussing about funding. That is offsetting the education budget. It is not supporting the park. The park is being used but it is not getting any benefits in reverse to maintain it properly. There is a mismatch there.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Parks and green spaces are performing a whole range of statutory functions. This is why there is a national campaign for parks to become a statutory service, be recognised as a statutory service and be funded from central Government substantially. Part of the documents that I have handed to you - I want to make sure they are on the record - is the Charter for Parks, which has been launched by a number of national organisations calling for parks to become a statutory service and a hub and a range of other issues.

Shaun Bailey AM: Can I ask you a question? In the conversation we just had about other users using the parks and its membership going through the roof, in your mind, Dave - and I suspect I know the answer to this - are we at the point where park use is so high that it should be addressed in that way? Should it become a statutory service, a centrally funded service, because the use is so high or are we still on that journey?

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): No, we are still on the journey. The point is that you can always have wider and more usage of public green spaces but they need to be properly resourced and staffed and have the right range of facilities --

Shaun Bailey AM: I get that, but there is a point where, if the usage is so high, that is undeniable. That is what I am saying.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): We have not reached that stage.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): What you are discussing a bit is the desire line. There is a park near me where the intensity of usage has effectively forced a new path to be created. Over time that gets to be more hardstanding and eventually you have little pocket parks either side rather than a proper green space.

Again, there was something else that Peter [Massini] has said that I wanted to pick up on. I love green roofs. Do not get me wrong. We raised money through opening them up to the public through Open Garden Squares Weekend every year. They are fantastic, but they are not a substitute for the play spaces that are provided in parks, etc.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): I was not suggesting that. They are an alternative in places where you cannot have parks.

Shaun Bailey AM: I am going to let you move on, Chair. Thank you very much.

Tony Arbour AM: I quite like the point that you have just made about access to green roofs and so on not being a substitute. What I would really like to know is: what is the difference between a green space and a park? Tell me.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): All parks are green spaces but not all green spaces are parks. That is probably the simplest way of putting it. A green space can be a strip of land on a housing estate. It can be a tree in the middle of a roundabout. It can be a common. It can be a heath.

Tony Arbour AM: Can it be a wall?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Potentially. There is an example I can think of where there is a historic wall from a Capability Brown landscape that has a small strip of grass next to it. It is the last relic of a particular Capability Brown landscape, which I would regard as sort of green space and it has green growing out of it. The use of it, one could argue, is very limited in terms of amenity value but great in terms of biodiversity value and sense of place. It is about the value you put on a particular space.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): A golf course?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Yes, that is a green space. The oval cricket ground is a green space on a map, but does anybody get to use it other than the cricketers? No, but it gives a lot of joy.

Tony Arbour AM: All right. I really want to explore the green wall now. We have had lots of discussions in relation to the evolving London Plan. We are told that green walls could be a substitute for loss of, I suppose, green space in the sense of gardens and things of that kind. I have to say I find that quite difficult - unless you are Spiderman or something like that - for the green wall to be as much use to an individual as a garden.

Let us suppose that a green wall is put up. Who is responsible for the green well?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): It depends who owns the wall.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Absolutely.

Tony Arbour AM: That is exactly the point. If planning consent is given - and I appreciate that for something small of this kind it is going to be the local planning authority - does there need to be some control to see that the green wall is maintained?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Absolutely.

Tony Arbour AM: Does that work?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): The argument you are making is exactly the same whether it is a green wall or a green roof or a new piece of public open space. There is plenty --

Tony Arbour AM: I am going to come on to the roofs in a minute, but the open space, I suggest to you, is likely to be much easier to maintain than a green wall where the roots have gone or the thing is not properly watered or something like that. In effect, what I am trying to suggest to you is that there really is no substitute for terra firma.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): It is about use because the green wall contributes to air pollution mitigation and detracts from and covers up a whole set of sins from architects in terms of ugly buildings, etc. I agree with you that in terms of amenity value and social cohesion, a green wall is no substitute. It really depends. It is not an either/or. It is an and. It is part of a mixed picture for biodiversity, for climate mitigation, etc.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): No one is suggesting that we replace parks with green walls. Some green walls have worked very effectively. If you go around the City of London now, there are some fantastic green walls. They are adding green infrastructure to the urban environment.

Tony Arbour AM: You say that, but I can refer to debates that we have had here, debates that have been initiated by me and indeed even questions to the Mayor, which say when talking about proposals within the London Plan that one way of dealing with loss of terra firma green space is the provision of green walls. I have suggested - and you have confirmed - that it is an addition, not a substitution. Is that fair?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): That is absolutely fair.

Tony Arbour AM: All right. Under those circumstances, is it really a delusion to suggest that green walls should be part, if you like, of any kind of park strategy?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): It is not part of a park strategy. The Urban Greening Factor is designed so that where there is regeneration going on or where there is new development, the London Plan protects existing parks and green spaces.

Tony Arbour AM: When a developer comes along - and I can think of a couple of cases - and says, "Yes, it is perfectly true. We are going to be building on this back land here, but in return, in terms of area covered by greenness, I am providing all of these extra green walls and, therefore, that is a substitute", you would say that that ought not to be a substitute?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): It depends on the circumstances --

Tony Arbour AM: No, seriously. I thought you had just conceded. Can a green wall be a substitute for flat land --

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): It depends. There are plenty of examples of bits of green space that have very poor use and value and a greening solution that will provide better value. A good example of that is the issue around air quality. You may have a strip of grass next to a busy road that has no function and no purpose other than being a strip of grass between the road and the pavement. Replacing that with a green wall, particularly adjacent to a school, may provide more benefits than the piece of grass did in the first place.

Tony Arbour AM: Yes, but the two things do not match. You are not suggesting that the school is built in the middle of a road and has this little piece of land in front of it. You are simply talking about a strip of land that is isolated, are you not? You are saying that a green wall is better than that.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Again, it depends on the context and the circumstances.

Tony Arbour AM: I believe I have the concession. Let me ask your colleague, can a green wall ever be a substitute? No? Thank you. That is what I wanted to know.

The second thing that I would like to say, which is not on my list and which has arisen from what you have said and from this document that has been circulated about the number of Friends Groups that are involved in this. If a local planning authority or a borough decides to make parks a priority, it is going to do infinitely more than any London Plan or anything we do here. I suggest - and it is borne out completely by this - a London borough that to my knowledge has hardly ever restricted expenditure on parks, indeed is constantly investing money in parks, Richmond upon Thames, on the basis that parks are indeed the most important amenity that they have. I look at this and I see the number of groups and I look at the number of friends, which seems to bear that out. Ought not the task to be - and I suggest this to you, Chair - that we should be saying to London boroughs that this ought to be a number one thing?

As a rider to that, again from memory, right across London when they do these surveys of satisfaction with council services, parks, particularly in places like Richmond, have well in excess of 90%, which bears out the points that you are making. I am really quite impressed by this. Parks are the number one good thing for living. That really ought to be a conclusion, I would suggest, that we come to from this meeting.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Would people like to comment?

Tony Arbour AM: It is a rhetorical question because, manifestly, you must agree.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Yes.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): We would all agree that parks are a vital component to London and that is why we are all passionate about it.

Tony Arbour AM: The proof is the point I have just made. If a borough goes hell for leather --

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Yes. Tony, after that, could you ask the question that you were going to be asking? Thank you.

Tony Arbour AM: Yes, I know, I know. Let me do that before you answer or I shall be --

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Certainly this Committee, which is a political committee, should take a very strong line on the importance of parks, how they are essential, how they should be properly funded, how local boroughs should have the resources to be able to fund and manage their parks and staff their parks properly and also to work in partnership with their local Friends Groups, which are an essential component of these essential services.

This list that is provided is from Parks for London but I have provided it. It shows that there are nearly 700 groups that local authorities are recognising as Friends Groups, but probably the number is greater. There are other groups as well that are also involved with parks. I just want to say that the principle of community

empowerment and being involved in the decision-making, the activities, the maintenance and the management of a green space should be an essential part of the recommendations out of this Committee.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Also, you are absolutely right that there is a job across London for managers of parks to understand what the good aspects of the engagement are within boroughs like Richmond and the content and replicate that approach more widely. That is a very serious consideration.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): There are developmental issues even for Richmond that go beyond the boroughs. For instance, the views are jeopardised by seriously tall buildings in central London and so those historic views are going to be lost forever.

Tony Arbour AM: Anyway, the questions I have been specifically asked to ask you - one gets carried away - are: what innovative steps can be taken to ensure green spaces: (1) provide the benefits to Londoners and increase usability; and (2) are maintained to protect biodiversity?

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Any there any innovative steps that have not been covered so far?

Tony Arbour AM: You have covered one, which I had never heard of before and which was absolutely staggering to me. You mentioned it, Helen. Some local authorities are paying for access to the Green Belt. Somebody mentioned it.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): No, that was not me.

Tony Arbour AM: Somebody did. I have made a note of it. Did you say in relation to Enfield?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): That was in Enfield. Enfield owns quite a lot of farmland. They are now beginning to think about the future use of that land because farming in the Green Belt, in terms of food production, is not particularly significant. Can that land be used to provide better public benefits in terms of public access? It is similar to the model that has been happening in east London for a long time with the community forest and turning agricultural land into woodlands, parks and green spaces to provide quite significant recreational areas. In Enfield they are exploring how they can take agricultural land in and around Trent Park and effectively expand the offer of Trent Park by making that more publicly accessible.

Tony Arbour AM: There is a key point. It is the paying bit.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Yes. The Government is currently looking at the new Environmental Land Management Scheme. Post Brexit - and we will not discuss if and when that happens - land will no longer get funding from the European Union through the common agricultural policy. The Government is committed to providing an alternative funding mechanism and that is the Environmental Land Management Scheme. The Government, particularly Michael Gove [Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs], has been saying that that future subsidy, which is effectively what it is, should be paying for public goods rather than agricultural subsidies. The Government is devising a new Land Management Scheme that will pay landowners to deliver public goods. That can be flood management. It can be public access. If you currently farm or manage land in the Green Belt, in the future you may be paid a regular payment to make that land available for public benefit.

Tony Arbour AM: It does not happen already, then?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): No, not really.

Tony Arbour AM: Thank you. That is the innovative thing.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Sure.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Does anyone else have anything innovative in terms of managing to make green space available?

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): I just want to say one thing. It is innovative but it has spread throughout all parks. We have the Green Flag Award status. The innovative approach to that is to try to achieve Green Flag status for every public green space and some boroughs are adopting that policy. It is their aspiration to have a standard by which we can measure every green space and whether it achieves all the benefits that it should.

The other thing I was going to suggest is also not a new idea. The Fields in Trust protection covenant protects a green space for all time forever in perpetuity. Up until recently, this has been a drip-drip-drip approach. There are now 2,700 such spaces across the UK that are protected by Fields in Trust covenants. Some boroughs are taking the approach that actually they would like all of their public green spaces to be protected. In Haringey - and I have included, since you were referring to it, a document from the Environmental Scrutiny Committee, a little bit similar to this Committee here but at borough level, where the action really does take place at the borough level - the Scrutiny Committee is recommending that Haringey Council achieve the Green Flag for all parks that are capable of achieving it and also that all parks be protected for all time. This is a long-term way of looking at our parks and green spaces as essential but they have to be managed to a certain standard.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): In terms of innovation, one thing that is often overlooked about the value of parks is things like the right to light because there is right to light within your housing but there is no right to light within a park. Therefore, you can put as tall buildings as you like all around parks and then they become rather darkened courtyards. The other thing is noise mitigation.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Do you mean noise mitigation from passing traffic or overhead planes?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): It is very rare in London that you can get away from noise and get to tranquillity.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors' Network): Generally, I would promote the concept of soft landscaping as integral to traffic engineering and not as an afterthought. The city of Sheffield is a particularly forward-looking authority in that regard and may be a good example. Twinning traffic engineering with the extension of our parks and open spaces is important.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): There are really good examples in Waltham Forest. They have the Mini Holland fund and they have done some fantastic projects around greening streets, effectively.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): I have just seen in Highbury Corner they are putting in some of the biggest sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) areas under what will be a public space that is connecting a green space to the station. Various geeky people like me are peering through the railings, looking at these acres of sustainable drainage. Navin, can I bring you in now, please?

Navin Shah AM: Yes. You will be pleased to know that I do not have anything controversial like green walls, but on that subject I was looking it up. There is a GLA report, a recent one, which is entitled *Living Roofs and Walls*. It has three categories of walls: green, living walls, and biodiversity facades. It makes very interesting reading and so something for the next consideration.

Coming to my line of questioning, I have two questions about the enhancement of green space provision and that is looking at quality of life as well as accessibility. Then I want to run with questions about mayoral strategies and interventions.

Moving on to these specific questions, how can green space provision be enhanced to maximise quality-of-life benefits? That is to the panel.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): There is a strong connection between quality of the green space and quality of life. Think back to the broken window syndrome. If a place is not well maintained, it is going to put people off going there. We know that some spaces are not being managed as much as they ought to be because there is not enough revenue funding for them. This is what Parks for London is most concerned about. It is about the quality of the green spaces.

Dave [Morris] made reference just now to the Green Flag Awards, which is a national and international award for quality. I would say it is a baseline but, actually, looking across London, only 26% of London's parks have Green Flag Awards. That is partly because it is a voluntary award that you apply for and some boroughs choose not to do that, but it is worrying that only 26% of spaces have that award. There is a lot of work to do.

Then, linking back to the last question about innovation, there has been a lot of good work that has been done in the past that has been lost, such as the outreach work that staff in parks would do with children and young people. For example, Southwark used to run a whole programme for developing young friends of parks, which was brilliant, but it has been lost for lack of funding. There were outreach workers in terms of rangers involving the community with understanding their biodiversity. They have been lost. Even dare I say police or security staff whose job descriptions have been changed over the years so that rather than keeping away they are more interactive, that has been lost. Brilliant programmes where the police used to get involved in summer programmes with sports held in parks, which I believe used to help reduce knife crime, for example, are lost. All of those innovative things have been lost because the funding is not sustainable.

The innovation needs to be actually in the finance. There is one ray of hope, I believe, through the Treasury and its understanding and acceptance of natural capital accounting because they will actually understand those figures. There is a ray of hope in the future in terms of innovation that will open opportunities to enhance our green spaces.

For the limited funding that we have, I am seeing the biggest bang for the buck is where it is focused in small amounts at local communities. It gets them engaged, it gets them on board and they can do so much more. They are so much more passionate about their local spaces and that is where enhancement can take place. They will need some structures and some management from the landowners. They may need their local authorities and that is essential, too, but I have seen over the last few decades a coming together of the Friends Groups movement and those who own and manage parks to work together now much more than in the past when it was antagonistic. We look at every borough under ten categories in this annual report. We are seeing these successful and innovative local authorities are those that are engaging with their local communities.

It is sometimes as simple as organising small-scale events that are not necessarily charged for. It is curating events. It is animating the spaces so that they are doing much more than just sitting there, waiting for somebody to come and use them. People are going into them and getting more active.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors' Network): I agree with a lot of that as well. An important means of enhancing our green urban spaces is to ensure a regular and familiar presence within our parks. That does not just support the maintenance in the upkeep but it does give a sense of ownership and presence that helps make people more comfortable and secure within these parks as well. An enhancement would be, where possible, ensuring a familiar presence within those parks on a regular basis.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Absolutely. Having a dedicated person for a specific green space, you can build a whole lot around that person in terms of monitoring what is going on, reporting, interacting with the community, liaising with contractors that are coming in and out. This is something that was standard practice until the 1980s and councils need the resources to be able to bring that back. It is incredible. You could not run a library without staff. This is essential infrastructure we are talking about. Every community must have the resources to fulfil its function. This Committee needs to take a stand on that.

Can I just say that we are putting pressure on the Government nationally? I have included this for the record. Here is a recent statement by the Minister for Parks. There never used to be a Minister for Parks until a couple of years ago. Now there are negotiations going on. This particular statement by the Minister in April 2019 in response to what the Parks Action Group has been lobbying for within that relationship, basically talks about everything except for the key issue. The elephant in the room is what the Government is going to do to provide the proper funding, but that discussion is happening about long-term ring-fenced funding for parks and green spaces.

Navin Shah AM: Together with staff, volunteers as well can and do play a major role

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): We are not a substitute for proper staff. We are an add-on value.

Navin Shah AM: No, but you come across a lot of stakeholder groups and individuals who are very passionate about enhancing their parks and facilities, etc. They can be leaders and local ambassadors to push the local staff, if there is any. I support that. I am not saying that it is one instead of the other. It is a question of how volunteers can also take that leading role.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Definitely, yes.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Volunteers take a very active role in their green spaces and are passionate about them, but it is not necessarily the whole solution. There is a temptation for local authorities to then divest themselves of assets to volunteer sector or third sector organisations. That has yet to be proven to work long term sustainably. Local authorities seem to be the most stable model.

Navin Shah AM: If we can move on to my next question, Helen, you already mentioned access of refugees, black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. Chris [Whyte], you mentioned in the earlier comments, community cohesion, which again involves the whole diversity that we have in London.

The question is like the previous one. How can green space provision enhance and ensure accessibility to all?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Green space is theoretically accessible to all and it makes no difference. We are all human beings. We all have basic needs and those needs are fulfilled by wellbeing. However, there does seem to be a disparity from anecdotal evidence in usage depending on the areas you go to. There is a perception that needs to be broken down. Most Friends Groups tend to be of a certain demographic, I am afraid, and a certain age. The solution for that I have not quite got to, but there needs to be some more strategic thinking about how we change attitudes to volunteering in parks within BAME and younger people's views.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors' Network): That is right. The starting point for all of this really is very simply to keep our parks clean, safe and well maintained and provide an appropriate range of facilities, particularly in terms of age group, a playful environment for young children right through to toilet facilities and the like for older people. Those are very important considerations.

Navin Shah AM: There are mobility and sensory issues in particular as well need to be part of the culture and the policies, which I am not sure is the case. That is something certainly that needs to be looked into.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Also, there was a debate that happened last night as part of Chelsea Fringe that I was at. There is a perception that horticulture is a low-value career. That also has some sort of barrier in that people are expected to do a year's internship that is very cheap and there are very low-level National Vocational Qualification levels that do not get them high pay. There is a perception that managing parks is not that worthwhile. Again, that is something that needs to be overcome. There is a very big shortage of horticultural schools within London. That opens up another whole debate, but there is a big underselling of the value of horticultural and horticultural skills. Peter [Massini], I know you say that local authorities have to negotiate individually. Local authorities just do not have those skills within the planning departments and elsewhere.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): I guess partly the issue around how parks are currently used or designed is a reflection of the core interest groups that have been involved in parks for many years. They are sports groups or particularly interested in landscape and they tend to be from particular parts of society.

How to engage young people in parks goes down to the issue around contested space. Lots of local authorities have begun to rethink how they provide facilities in parks and are perhaps moving away from the traditional football pitch and are providing a skatepark or a multiuse game area. Quite often there is a pushback from the existing users of the park.

It is about how you identify what the needs are in a local park and who is your core audience. As Helen mentioned earlier, there are now lots of opportunities using data and mapping. There is going to be a new web-based tool released later this summer called Greenkeeper, which provides much more rich data around who lives close to a park and who has access by a public transport. You can begin to understand the park in the context of the demographics of the community and the accessibility via public transport and then begin to make decisions about how that park might be designed and managed in the future to meet different needs. That is very much about the local authority because it is the local authorities that have that granular information about where the park is, what the local community requirements are and how to match those two things up.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Space Lead, London Environment Directors' Network): I am also very mindful that biodiversity is a very good starting point for all of this as well. That is something that, managed in the right way and presented in the right way, can really inspire enthusiasm, stoke up curiosity and start a lifelong learning path for the community as well. I would very much see biodiversity as a starting point for creating those enhancements and those opportunities for the general public.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Can I just say one thing? Having a friends group and getting the community involved gives a sense of ownership and that can change the atmosphere to a green space where it is seen as a desert in terms of the community, even if it is used, unless there is some kind of organised presence. There could be a website. There could be meetings that people could attend. There could be an email list they can join. For example, we run the noticeboards. Lots of Friends Groups run the noticeboards. Councils do not have the staff anymore to animate those noticeboards. There are more events that are community events. There is a real change in perception by the community that feels this is their local space and that can lead to all kinds of things down the line, more activities, more groups and so on.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): We are moving into some of this to be covered in our final section and so if we can let Navin keep going?

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): I was not sure what the question was.

Navin Shah AM: It is about access and enhancement of green spaces. We have covered generally the aspects that I thought could be raised. Moving swiftly on to a document that Dave has flagged up, there are a couple of Mayor's pledges. Number five talks about the Mayor's pledge to make London the first National Park City and then, following on from that, in number six the Mayor says that we should set a long-term target to make more than 50% of our city green and ensure that all children have access to nature.

Peter, if I can start with you, what is the role of the National Park City scheme in principle and the forthcoming National Park City Festival as well? How are these plans coming together?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): The National Park City was a campaign that was run and initiated two or three years ago during the last mayoral elections. All the candidates who stood for election supported the idea of London becoming a National Park City. Essentially, a National Park City is a movement. It is a way of engaging a lot more people with London's parks and green spaces and demonstrating that they have value in terms of health and

wellbeing and that there are lots of opportunities in London to do fantastic things outdoors, whether it is playing football in the park, walking your dog, taking your children to the playground or more niche things like paddle-boarding on the Thames or parkour in the public realm. It is trying to stimulate people's interest in the outdoors.

It goes back to a point that Dave [Morgan] made about how twenty or thirty years ago perhaps parks were used a lot more. That is partly because there were fewer other distractions. A lot of us spend time now indoors in front of a computer screen. It is about trying to make people aware of the fantastic opportunities available in the great outdoors in London's parks and green spaces and encouraging particularly younger people to make use of that rather than perhaps some of the more modern-day preoccupations of computer screens, retail therapy and those kinds of things.

Navin Shah AM: Do you think that there is enough in the draft London Plan to achieve the Mayor's target of 50% green land?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): To achieve more than 50% of London being green requires the protection of the existing network of parks and open spaces. The London Plan sets that out. It says that parks, green spaces, Metropolitan Open Land and the Green Belt should be protected. It then introduces the Urban Greening Factor, which says that all new developments should contribute additional greening in those developments.

That is a new policy. The previous policy was an encouragement to incorporate things like green roofs. This is now saying that all new developments must do a certain amount of greening. We can do that now because the way we green developments has come on hugely in the last ten years. Installing things like SUDS, much more effective tree planting pits, green roofs and green walls - unfortunately - have become much more technically well developed. I take Tony's [Arbour AM] point. A green wall built ten years ago quite often died, but now there are some fabulous green walls and green roofs. The ability for developers and architects to incorporate green developments has come on in leaps and bounds.

We think the policy framework will result in a greener London and it is backed up by things like Healthy Streets, which is about transforming the public realm.

Navin Shah AM: Dave, do you want to comment on this aspect of a National Park City and green space?

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): It is not just a movement to encourage people to get out into open space. It is also about raising the profile of green space across London so that it is seen as essential infrastructure, as we have all said, but now it is badged London-wide through this National Park City framework, if you like. That can only be a good thing.

What we say is that it should lead to real commitment to our parks and green spaces from everybody in London that they have to be properly protected and properly financed.

Navin Shah AM: Do you think the Mayor has managed to raise the bar in that respect?

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Yes, but it is not so much the Mayor. The Mayor has accepted the lobbying from the movement that has built up, which has been unstoppable. Everybody agrees that it is a really good thing and now the whole world is looking at London as

the very first National Park City. All over the world people are saying that they want to turn their cities into national parks.

Navin Shah AM: To you and the other members of the panel, do you think that in the London Plan those changes do support and would speed up the National Park City concept?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): I think we would all endorse the fact that raising the agenda of parks on the political map is very important and the National Park City is certainly playing its part. I just do not know if I would say that it has teeth in certain areas. It goes back to my concern over creeping memorialisation, in particular Victoria Tower Gardens and also the one I mentioned in Hampstead Heath, and the fact that parks are still changed in terms of their use into places that do not necessarily offer the maximum values for amenity, social cohesion, etc. The aspiration is there and a lot of it is good, but in specific areas it is still missing a few tricks.

Tony Arbour AM: Is a cemetery a park?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): It depends. Brompton Cemetery and Highgate Cemetery - the 'magnificent seven' - are certainly places where people go to get relaxation, but it depends what you mean by a park. If you are wanting to kick a football about, I would say, no, that is the wrong place.

Tony Arbour AM: I do take your point about Victoria Tower Gardens because that is a monster monument that they are putting in there and it puts the whole thing out of kilter but on the other, but on the other hand having a memorial in a park does not stop it being a park. Contrariwise, having lots of monuments - i.e. in a cemetery - could mean that it is still a park.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Absolutely, and that is the complexity of managing all the green space in London.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): It is not a park but it is an open space. It comes back to your earlier point about green space. They keep bees in Streatham Cemetery and they have many bats. There is the open space element of cemeteries because people do not disturb them. You can get very good biodiversity because it tends to be undisturbed because some people find offensive the idea of people going in and digging up the monuments and the graves for obvious reasons.

Shaun Bailey AM: Has the Mayor considered using TfL advertising to promote parks?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Not that I am aware of, no.

Shaun Bailey AM: That is number one. On the Green Flag thing, you said there is lots of work to be done, but there is a bit of a contradiction in what you said because you said a lot of local authorities do not pursue it. They may already have Green Flag-level parks but we do not know.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Yes, a good point.

Shaun Bailey AM: Does it cost money to use Green Flag?

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): For the application process, but it is not a huge amount.

Shaun Bailey AM: That would be your bar to entry right there, I imagine. This is a personal thing. Why do parks have fences around them? I find it intensely annoying.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Not all parks do. Lots have hedgerows around them. Frequently, particularly in inner London, it is about preventing inappropriate behaviour, particularly at night in the night-time economy. An example is Vauxhall Park versus Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. They are very close to each other but the crime rate in Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens is substantially more because that is not fenced whereas Vauxhall Park is fenced. It is about managing different types of behaviour.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Can I very quickly come in on that? It is an interesting point. Part of the philosophy around green infrastructure is to blur the boundary between park and public realm. Fences are quite important sometimes because they are an indefensible space. The Olympic Park is a really good example. The Olympic Park does not have fences. It is trying to make sure that the parkland is part of the wider public realm so that people do not see it as a separate space.

Shaun Bailey AM: That is probably around how it is conceived in the first place.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Sure, absolutely.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): It is a historical thing.

Shaun Bailey AM: If you have a park that was conceived to be fenced off, it has turned its back to everything else and becomes a private space. Antisocial behaviour needs secrecy, normally. I find fences around parks quite hostile. That is why commons are often quite good because you just happen to be on the common when you step off the kerb. Going forward, that should be part of our --

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): No, we should not have a policy on this because there are many spaces where people are strongly committed to the places being closed at night for a whole bunch of reasons.

Shaun Bailey AM: No, exactly. It is not a policy about a fence. It is a policy about overall master-planning. That is what I am looking at, rather than a policy about a fence.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): The fence is not necessarily a barrier. It depends on the hedgerows around it, etc. It is about visibility lines rather than the physical entity of the fence itself.

Shaun Bailey AM: It is also about the long walk to get --

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Often it is part of the historic integrity of the park. The iron fences going away during the World War to create tanks, etc, has emotive issues going back quite a long way. Fences can be beautiful as well.

Shaun Bailey AM: Somebody just needs to look at it. I will stop, Chair.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): I am going to close this down. We could go down the rabbit hole of fences for hours.

David, could I bring you through in this final section? We have already ranged so widely that we may have covered some of the issues in this final section but, David, over to you.

David Kurten AM: Yes, thank you. It has been great listening to you all so far. We have talked a lot about local councils and government and the Friends Groups. I want to bring you back to the people who use the parks. My first question is: what do you think people in communities can do to increase the benefits they get from the parks they use?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): Are you wanting to find out what users would get more out of if we did more?

David Kurten AM: Yes. Obviously, there are different reasons why people use the parks. Perhaps I am thinking more of what sort of uses the parks could be put to, the people that use the parks in a local community, and how that would enhance the parks. What benefits would they get out of it if they used parks in a different way?

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): It is chicken and egg. If you provide certain facilities, you attract certain people. In our park, we have an outdoor gym. It is incredibly popular even until midnight. People are in there doing their pulling up and stuff. Did we know that there was a demand for that beforehand? If you are to get those people into the park rather than to pay to go to a commercial gym, lots of people are now coming to the park. In fact, all ages. Kids go on it.

My experience in my own park, Lordship Rec, is that you can transform the uses of a park and there is a whole different way you can attract people. Obviously, facilities, staffing, resources etc, but also having a whole range of activities for different sections of the population and also groups and by encouraging people to form specific groups that they are passionate about. Perhaps it is a dog-walking group. I do not mean professional, I mean local people with dogs or, like you say, a playgroup coming into the park as part of their activities. You can get a wider range of activities going on in that park.

It is chicken and egg as to whether that comes first, whether the people come in first and then you provide the facilities or the other way around.

David Kurten AM: When it is up and running, people will know it is there and they will go and do it, but it is who is best to start it up. I suppose it could be either. It could be the local people or it could be the local council.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Spaces Lead, London Environment Directors Network): I will tell you an example of a local council taking that programme forwards. It is the London Borough of Islington and they offer up service-level agreements

whereby they offer the maintenance of anything from a flowerbed to large areas of park to local community groups who are willing to sign up on that basis. They provide some funding to support that work and not only does that local involvement foster that enthusiasm, it ensures that particular park is very well maintained and managed.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): I come from Islington and there is real community ownership of those spaces that are managed under those service-level agreements. It is not that the volunteers are being paid to do the work, but they are getting support and funding which provides them with tools and a bit of structure to help them keep doing that maintenance work. It seems to give those groups a bit of underpinning. It seems to be working, but they should not be thought of as cheap labour. It works if it is done in a way that enables the group to function well.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): They cannot fulfil all the functions. For grass-mowing you need major bits of equipment, etc. You cannot expect them to do everything. It is too difficult.

David Kurten AM: How about community events, maybe seasonal events? What more can be done in terms of those sorts of things? We have things at Christmas, obviously. We have things in the summer when the sun is shining. Is there anything that could be done in that sort of line?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): The Friends Groups often do run community events, some of the traditional events. Some schools often use parks for summer fetes etc. That does happen. There are some barriers depending on the local authority because there are often fees attached to getting a licence for the park to be used for that particular day. On the whole, local authorities are supportive of that.

The problem is there is a creeping commercialisation. You get to the bigger extremes of Underbelly and Oktoberfest that used to be in Kennington Park or South West Four (SW4) [Festival] in Clapham or there are some other ones north of the river as well. The local community do not get a huge amount of it. The local authority gets some money in commercially. However, only today there was a thing on a group of parks' managers about how Clapham Common - and that is why I mentioned it - has had so much intensive use over so many years, they are now going to have to strip away the land and replant. You have to question how much the commercialisation has added value to the park because, certainly in terms of noise, impact for the residents and loss of community value for the residents over the years, it has been a lot, but it also does seem to have had a long-term impact on the park for which it has not been sufficiently compensated.

David Kurten AM: There can be some overuse.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): In terms of encouraging people from the local community, local authorities should make it as attractive as possible. They should not be charging for community events. I do not think local authorities tend to charge for community events, certainly not for Friends Groups. In my experience, they should definitely not charge for Friends Groups because the whole point is to get the park better used and the community empowered and involved.

There is a lot of bureaucracy in terms of organising events and having to fill out a 16-page form and I do not know if anyone has been looking into streamlining that.

Shaun Bailey AM: They cannot get through because there are legal requirements an authority has to fulfil. I used to run a charity and our local authority were very generous with the park. They would provide stewards and all sorts, but you still needed to fill in the form.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): What we have done in Parks for London is looked at good practice across the boroughs in terms of events from the small scale to the large scale. Again, we have developed a generic policy and a process for boroughs to follow through. I have also been involved in several scrutiny committees who are specifically looking at the whole issue of events.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Is that a generic events policy?

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): Yes.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): We talked about this the last time around and we had Simon Ingyon [Executive Director, Parks and Leisure, Enable Leisure and Culture] on and somebody from Barnet talking about the various different events policies. You now have a good practice guide.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): We have brought it together. It is on our website.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): That is on your Parks website.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): Yes, it is on our website. It is a bit buried, but I can give the Committee staff a link.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): No. Thank you for raising it. The thing is that because of resources back at the coalface, the ability to do a lot of these things we have been thinking about are quite restricted. I am concerned that a lot of park services are so understaffed and underfunded, all they are doing is firefighting because they have to keep the grass cut, they have to keep the litter off and they have to try to keep the two toilets open, that is all that is left. Whilst all that is important, what we are encouraging local authorities to do is be far more strategic about the way they run their services, to think big and to be holistic and, above all, to collaborate with one another in different boroughs. That is gradually happening. There is some excellent good practice going on, but it is not known about. Again, I plug this because we bring it out in this yearly.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Would you say it is less about enabling volunteering in community work and more about developing a collaborative approach with the areas and a big range of community groups?

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): Absolutely. The stakeholder groups for parks are ginormous if you think of the potential users that are out there. It is a complex management thing.

Getting back to the point earlier about charging for some of these users, it is not about making the money. It is about finding a way of regulating them and making sure they are not taking over a space and stopping another user from using it, professional dog walkers, for example. It is balancing all these things.

Where boroughs are doing well, they are listening to the communities that use them. They are engaging with them and that is the process that although historically is terrible, it has made people go back to basic principles and work alongside each other which did not happen so much in the past.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Spaces Lead, London Environment Directors Network): From a borough perspective, the starting point on this process that is very often overlooked is a local needs assessment. That is establishing very clearly and firmly what the local requirements are, what people want to do in the parks and designing a programme and an offer around solely that, therefore, it is best targeted.

Historically, the cultures in the sectors are much better at that sort of engagement; the park providers less so and there is a task to bring that other approach up to speed.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Do you think there is a benefit in terms of, for example - I know it is a bit controversial - the forest school and taking whole lessons outside, taking children into the parks? It seems to me that one of the issues about improving access to parks is to get children from all backgrounds and there is no school that is not very mixed in London in terms of ethnicity. Everybody comes from a different background. It is getting them into the parks in the first place because I sometimes think there are some barriers with children, and all social groups as well. Their parents do not take them to the park or to the common or to whatever. When they do, it is an unfamiliar environment. It might look a bit messy, there might be some biodiversity that they are not used to, there might be something prickly, there might be something they are not allowed to eat. Do you think there is a benefit to having that engagement with teachers and schools?

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): Definitely, and from early years.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): From very early years.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): From very early on.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Yes.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): That is why I am here today.

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Spaces Lead, London Environment Directors Network): With particular consideration given to those schools for children with special educational needs, autism, where the benefits of an outdoors environment are absolute when it comes to dealing with those sorts of difficulties.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): In terms of playgrounds, you have to manage them. They have to be safe, in good condition, attractive places. This requires serious money and a lot of councils are struggling now to maintain their basic playgrounds. This is the first age group.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): I am thinking more about nature. The problem with playgrounds is everyone is very aware of the safety things, therefore, they are now all covered in surfaces that are not natural. The call it springy turf but it is like the plastic grass I referred to earlier.

Finally, what are the barriers still that people experience in making use of green space and how can they be overcome? This is my final question and then Caroline [Russell AM] has one right at the end.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): It goes back to the refugee project that I was helping to deliver. A lot of people just do not realise it is there for them and that they can use it. This is a

hypothesis. One of things I have been aware of while we have been talking about it and with your question, David [Kurten] and yours, Léonie [Cooper AM], is that there is not enough survey work of what people of London want from their local parks, the usage and the satisfaction levels. That has been lost in the local authority cuts in that we do not know the satisfaction levels for our parks and why people are not going to them. It is quite a tricky question to unpick. We have some ideas from historic evidence, but it is not a regular thing that is going on.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): In terms of the survey - just to compliment Ian [Williamson, Scrutiny Manager, Environment Committee], who was one of the leading lights here, who is sitting here very quietly but helped us with the first investigation that we did - we did put something out and we got something like 3,500 responses from people saying what they felt about parks and open spaces. This is when we did the *Park life* report. Some of us like song titles in City Hall. One of the things that came out very strongly from that report was what people appreciated was something that was virtually on their doorstep. They wanted something local which also comes back to my question before about tiny parks and is it almost better to have lots?

The group I was with last night, it is in Southfields Grid, have set up a splinter organisation which has been called "Greening the Grid" and they have been systemically, with some money possibly from City Hall but definitely from the council, planting flowers around the base of every single tree.

They have also been running Winter Wonderland, getting people to go past and look at each other's windows and they also run a hanging baskets in front gardens competition. The whole area has gone from being where people were doing all the typical paving over the front garden to becoming much more of that Healthy Streets environment and the biodiversity gain. They are not far from two or three actual open spaces but the linkages now in terms of the biodiversity are amazing.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): It is appropriate to point that out. Natural England do regular surveys of people's uses of natural environments. One of the things they picked up on is that one of the barriers to using parks is not the fact the park is no good or it is not close enough, it is people's time, people's lives are much busier and much more diverse than they ever used to be.

Part of the philosophy now, and it goes back to your point about links, is how you build access to the park or access to the green space into your daily activity. Rather than it being something you do on a Sunday afternoon, it is something you do on your way to work. The walking, cycling routes to the Tube Station go through the park, therefore, you have that more regular contact with the park and the green space which links into the ambition of TfL to get 80% of Londoners actively doing 30 minutes of activity each day. You build it into your daily life rather than it being something that is separate. It goes to the point of Shaun's [Bailey AM] about parks having a fence, being a separate space instead of part and parcel of your daily life.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): The answer is the best way is just to make being in nature, being in the park, the open space, the heath, the common, whatever it is as part of your overall activity for that day, every day.

Peter Massini (Principal Policy and Programme Officer, Green Infrastructure, Greater London Authority): Yes.

Léonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): Thank you. That answers my question.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): We have had an amazing morning. It has been incredibly interesting. The idea of creeping commercialisation is not something that I thought of but it resonated, as well as the importance of the staff in parks, the cuts to those staff having an impact on things like youth engagement and some of those benefits from parks which are potentially at risk of being lost, or have been lost but could be regained by all these hints about an interesting, strategic approach that is about to be released next week. I will definitely keep my ears open for this.

The other thing is the importance of listening to communities and engaging with communities. Ian [Williamson] just gave me an example, which is that the local Friends Group in Blythe Hills Fields near Catford intervened on the spot last week to stop a contractor from mistakenly mowing over the biodiverse grass patch. When you have local residents, who have absolute ownership and engagement with a green space, they will leap in to defend that green space just because they happened to be there. Their daily life has taken them through the park, and they are there to catch the mistake before it happens.

Just before we wind up, I just want to give each of you the chance to say if there is one thing that you think the Mayor could do that would best support action by people and communities to make more use of their green spaces, if there is one thing you would like to tell the Mayor to do. I do not know, Peter [Massini], is that a slightly odd question?

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): You cannot ask him because he tells the Mayor what to do all the time.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Yes. Just listen hard, Peter. Chris, do you want to start?

Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services, London Borough of Brent, and Green Spaces Lead, London Environment Directors Network): The messaging around our green spaces is a crucial solution to much bigger global problems around climate change, environmental degradation and the importance of maintaining a flourishing biodiversity in an urban space. That natural world, the bigger issues around it, the global situation and what role our London parks play in people putting litigation against that.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): The adoption of London as a national park city is a huge step for the profile of parks and green spaces. It needs to be, as Helen [Monger] said earlier, given teeth. I would like to know how much, what percentage of the budget of TfL is going into maintaining these important green routes, paths and green routes through parks that we are encouraging people to use but park services cannot afford to mend. I would like to know. That is something you can ask as the Committee, the percentage of that budget.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): We will.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): Also, how much planning money is being put into parks? All this housing that is being built, people need parks and green spaces. Is it 30%, is it 50% of that money or is it like 0%? That is something the Committee can have an influence on.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): There is perhaps a greater role for the Mayor to involve Team London in working with communities around parks and green spaces, mobilising volunteers. Not just like being a parachute group coming down and doing something, which I do not think is sustainable, but by connecting local businesses with local parks to build up a long-term relationship; not corporate branding and all that, but more where the people who are working for that business get involved with that space or those

spaces on a long-term basis, almost adopt it. They do not just get involved in terms of painting the railings, dare I say, or something like that, but they provide perhaps support to the Friends Group where they might need legal advice or financial advice, things like that, very practical things that multiplied across London could be very impactful.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Bringing more skills into the network of support.

Tony Leach (Chief Executive, Parks for London): Absolutely and bringing together business and parks. Many of our parks, particularly central London parks, are used by office workers. They are not paying their rates to that local council or even to London. They are commuting.

Leonie Cooper AM (Deputy Chair): That was one of our recommendations from last time. We need to check up and pick up on that.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): I would like to see a greater investment in upgrading horticulture skills and the recognition of paying proper wages to horticultural people involved in working in parks and giving them a higher status. Also, I would like the Mayor of London to sign up to the Charter for Parks. I am surprised you did not ask for that, Dave.

Dave Morris (Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces): I was hoping someone else would.

Helen Monger (Director, London Parks & Gardens Trust): And for all green spaces to be declared Fields in Trust, therefore, they cannot be encroached on. I would like more seriousness taken to Rights to Light in outdoor spaces, not just indoor. Obviously, I would like you all to buy a ticket to Open Gardens Squares Weekend.

Caroline Russell AM (Chair): Fantastic. Thank you all very much for what has been an incredibly helpful morning.