

# **LONDON**ASSEMBLY

**Park life: ensuring green spaces  
remain a hit with Londoners**



**Environment Committee**  
July 2017

Holding the Mayor to  
account and  
investigating issues that  
matter to Londoners

**LONDON**ASSEMBLY

# Environment Committee Members



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The Environment Committee examines all aspects of the capital's environment by reviewing the Mayor's strategies on air quality, water, waste, climate change and energy.

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# Leonie Cooper AM

## Chair of the Environment Committee



There are many aspects of living in London that are important to Londoners – the amazing nightlife, fabulous restaurants, interesting neighbourhoods, buildings old and new that often become tourist attractions. London is also very much the capital city of the UK and an internationally recognised world city.

But one of the aspects of London life that comes up time and again when Londoners talk about what they value are London's parks and green open spaces.

From the Lea Valley in the north east to the Wandle Valley in the south west, from the Olympic Park in Stratford, our most recently created large open space, to Richmond Park, originally created by Charles I in the seventeenth century to allow him to hunt deer, London is blessed with a wide range of open spaces. As well as these large park and green spaces there are also much-loved pocket parks scattered across London. Nearly all of these green spaces are well-used and much-loved. However the level of recognition of the role they play in people's lives and the improvements they offer in terms of health and wellbeing is low – as is the level of funding available for the upkeep of these green spaces, to maintain them as the jewels they are.

This report has been produced to examine the current situation with regard to London's parks and green spaces, to look at what needs to be done to maintain them, and to make a series of recommendations to the Mayor, to ensure we are able to pass on to future generations access to beauty in the midst of our city.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Leonie Cooper'.

Leonie Cooper

# Summary

London is a green city. Almost half of it is classed as green space – including domestic gardens, public parks and sports fields. Green spaces provide areas to exercise and socialise, they give space for London’s wildlife and they help manage the risk of flooding. Londoners love them. Our investigation stimulated a huge response from the public and stakeholders, including trusts, charities and local authorities. We listened and have recommended to the Mayor ways in which London’s green spaces can not only be protected, but also enhanced to maximise their benefits.

The Mayor has committed to increasing London’s green space. This is welcome, but efforts need to be focused on those areas most in need. Half of London’s households are too far away from the nearest green space – more than the maximum recommended distance of 400m in the London Plan. Better data on green spaces – including who uses them – will help ensure investment can be properly targeted, as can natural capital accounting which helps us see exactly how much green spaces provide to the economy.

Public sector funding for green spaces is falling. Traditionally, green spaces have been owned and managed by local authorities but cuts in funding have forced them to explore alternative forms of service delivery and income generation. Although there is a general consensus that local authorities should be the owners of green spaces, there is an opportunity to diversify funding models by changing green space management, including Trust models and non-profit social enterprises. Each of these has its pros and cons, and the GLA could help local authorities by bringing together evidence and best practice.

Volunteers will become an increasingly important part of London’s green spaces, regardless of the funding and management models that emerge. However, over half of London’s local authorities surveyed have cut their funding for volunteer outreach and support. We call on the Mayor to use the GLA’s Team London to support green space managers to increase and diversify London’s green space volunteering community – particularly to involve more young people.

London’s green spaces need a clear vision for the future. The Mayor and GLA have roles to play in creating a strategic, citywide approach to London’s green space, and set a clear vision for the future. Green spaces generate more benefits when they work together – the concept of “green infrastructure”. The All London Green Grid has made some progress in promoting green infrastructure through a policy framework and planning guidance, but more

can be done to put this into practice in new housing and infrastructure developments. Appointing a green infrastructure champion would provide a focal point to raise awareness of the benefits of green space and promote activity to industry leaders.

# Recommendations

<b>Extending and improving access to quality green spaces in London</b>	<p><b>Recommendation 1</b></p> <p>In the forthcoming Environment Strategy, the Mayor should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• state his intention to run an accessibility audit of green space, comparing the results against the London Plan open space categorisation, noting areas of deficiency and signposting these areas for investment</li><li>• clarify his plans to increase London’s green space in terms of quality, multi-functionality and accessibility</li><li>• set out a specific action plan to improve green space data collection to help target investment which improves access to, and quality of, green spaces</li></ul> <p><b>Recommendation 2</b></p> <p>The GLA should examine the feasibility of setting up a single, citywide website to provide key information on all London’s green spaces, including ways to get involved and a crowdfunding function.</p>
<b>Safeguarding the financial future of green spaces in London</b>	<p><b>Recommendation 3</b></p> <p>The Mayor should highlight case studies and support best practice in achieving a finance model which draws from a variety of sources, specifically providing a research framework for documenting the value of green spaces and any value added programmes conducted in these spaces.</p>



<p><b>Providing a clear vision for green space management which is open, inclusive and accountable to the public</b></p>	<p><b>Recommendation 4</b> The Mayor should help local authorities develop a better understanding of the benefits, challenges and implications of alternative delivery methods.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 5</b> Team London should assist green space managers in recruitment, retention and satisfaction of green space volunteers, including assistance for fundraising, diversifying the membership base and connecting with target groups.</p>
<p><b>Strengthening London's infrastructure by connecting existing green spaces</b></p>	<p><b>Recommendation 6</b> The GLA should conduct an audit of the All London Green Grid, investigating how many local authorities have included it in local policies and what practical impact the ALGG has had.</p>
<p><b>Championing green spaces</b></p>	<p><b>Recommendation 7</b> The Mayor should take steps to promote the concept of green infrastructure at a city level by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bringing together evidence on green infrastructure in a format suitable for use by planners, developers and other stakeholders</li> <li>• incorporating green infrastructure within individual Mayoral strategies and further into the London Plan</li> <li>• appointing a Green Infrastructure Commissioner or Champion.<sup>i</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>i</sup> The Conservative Group have dissented from this recommendation. Reason given that the Deputy Mayor of Environment should fulfil this role.

# 1. Introduction

## Key findings

- London is a very green city: over half of the capital is green space, providing a number of benefits and enhancing the quality of life for city dwellers
- Local authority cutbacks put many of these spaces at risk, although innovative funding and management models may help
- People feel passionately about this issue. Our investigation stimulated a huge response from the public and stakeholders. We have made a series of recommendations to the Mayor about how London's green spaces can be protected and enhanced.

- 1.1 London is a green city. Green spaces, which include parks, domestic gardens and sports pitches, provide a range of benefits to the city and are highly valued by Londoners. Their popularity, and the passion Londoners have for their green spaces were reflected in the response to our call for evidence where we received one of the largest responses in Assembly history.
- 1.2 Although most of London's green space is made up of domestic gardens, our investigation focused on local authority owned and publicly accessible green spaces. The reason for this is that local authorities are facing difficult decisions in order to protect, maintain and improve green spaces.
- 1.3 Funding pressures on local government mean that local authorities are increasingly looking towards alternative management models, and different sources of income, in an attempt to balance the books. Many green spaces are expected to become self-financing within the next decade, using income from commercial activities such as cafés and music festivals.

## Our investigation

- 1.4 We gathered evidence through a range of methods – more detail is provided at Appendix 1. Our call for evidence generated over 1,500 submissions from stakeholders and individuals. At two committee sessions we heard from a range of guests including the GLA Environment Team, Parks for London, the London Wildlife Trust and the National Park City campaign. A number of committee members also attended a site visit to St Mary's Secret Garden in Hackney.

### The most frequently-used words in public submissions to our investigation



- 1.5 In this report, we set out our conclusions from our work and make a series of recommendations to the Mayor. We hope the Mayor will consider this report during the development of his forthcoming Environment Strategy.

## 2. London's green spaces

### Key findings

- London's green spaces already provide huge health, environmental and social benefits but we are not using their full potential
- Half of London households live too far away from the nearest green space – more than the maximum recommended distance of 400m in the London Plan
- Data on London's green spaces needs to be improved so that investment can be properly targeted
- A single, citywide website could galvanise action and provide a focal point to increase awareness of local green spaces and attract funding, including crowdfunding.

- 2.1 Nearly half of London's land is green space but not all is open to the public. A quarter of London's land is private, such as domestic gardens, golf courses and farmland, leaving 18 per cent of London as designated public open space. This area includes parks, public gardens, cemeteries, community gardens and green corridors, which are usually owned by local authorities.<sup>1</sup>

#### Nearly half of London is green space



Source: Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC

## The benefits of green spaces

- 2.2 London's green spaces benefit London in three main areas:
- Health – green spaces provide places for people to exercise. We know that people who spend time in nature are healthier, irrespective of their income status.<sup>2</sup> In terms of positive mental health, research shows that spending time in green space reduces stress levels.<sup>3</sup>
  - Environmental – green spaces provide a number of environmental benefits that are particularly important for a large city. They help cool London during hot weather.<sup>4</sup> They play an important role in flood water alleviation as vegetated surfaces intercept, store, and reduce the volume of surface water run-off.<sup>5</sup> And green spaces are essential to protect and promote biodiversity.
  - Social – green spaces provide a shared community space for individuals to meet, providing opportunities to meet friends and make new ones.



Park playgrounds, for example, are an excellent way for people from different backgrounds to mix. In a recent survey, over 80 per cent of local authorities felt that their green spaces promoted community cohesion.<sup>6</sup>

#### Case example: St Mary's community garden



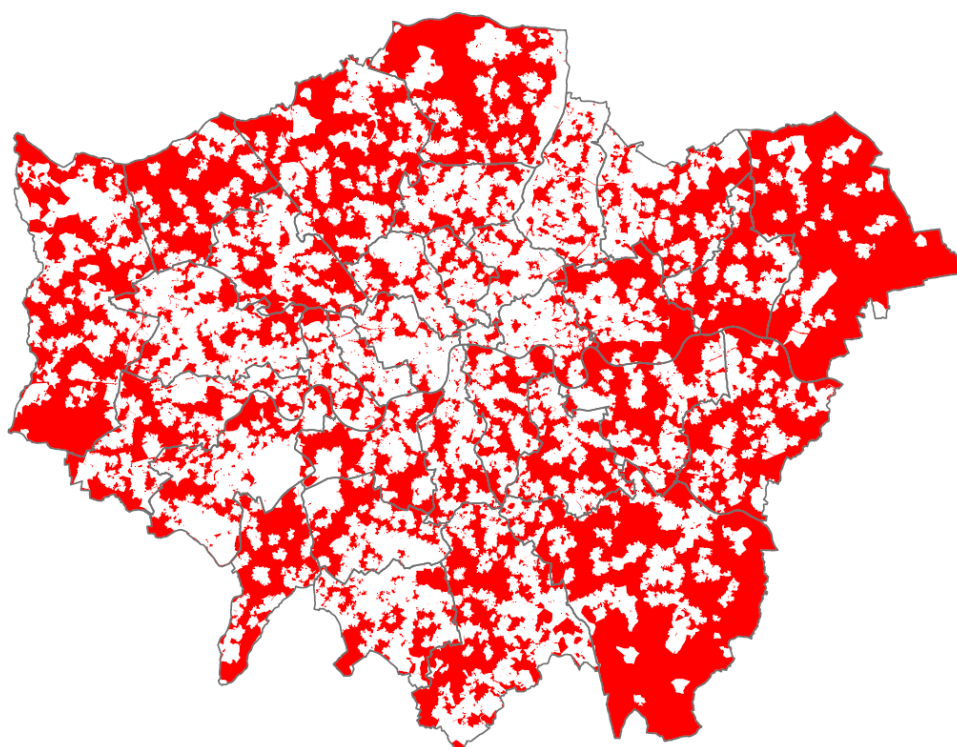
St Mary's community garden delivers vital services in a built-up area of central London and runs specific therapeutic services for hard-to-reach groups. The garden has recently supported residents with diabetes and obesity to grow their own vegetables and eat more healthily.<sup>7</sup>

- 2.3 The benefits of green spaces are highly valued by Londoners and this appreciation will continue to grow as London grows. In their responses to the investigation, people frequently attributed the city's green spaces to positive mental health, improving their personal relationships and connecting them to nature in an otherwise grey, urban environment. London's green spaces will become even more important as the city's population grows and as climate change increases the frequency and severity of extreme weather events.
- 2.4 Many of the benefits of green spaces can only be realised if people actually use them. Despite 18 per cent of London being publicly accessible green space, many people live too far away to enjoy those benefits. And many Londoners are not aware of the green spaces that may be nearby. Both these issues need to be addressed if we are to maximise the benefits of London's green spaces.

## Improving access to London's green spaces

- 2.5 According to the London Plan, people should live within 400 metres of a small public green space, such as a local park.<sup>8</sup> Currently, only 50 per cent of London's homes are within that recommended distance. As the map below shows, large parts of London are classed as "areas of deficiency" in access to public green space.<sup>9</sup>

**Many parts (shown in red) of London are not near public green spaces**



Source: Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC

- 2.6 The Mayor has committed to improving access to green space. In his election manifesto, he set a long-term target to make more than 50 per cent of the city green and to ensure that all children have access to nature.<sup>10</sup> Some progress has been made; Transport for London (TfL) has funded Camden Council to create a new green space in Alfred Place, celebrated as central London's first new park in over 100 years.<sup>11</sup> This follows the development of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park at Stratford, the first new park in outer London.
- 2.7 But to spread the benefits of green spaces across London, it is vital that funding is directed towards green spaces in the right parts of London to meet local needs. There is evidence to suggest that this has not always been the case, and that a two-tier system of green spaces has developed, with capital funding focusing on flagship sites, and with other parks "receiving very little attention".<sup>12</sup> The most deprived communities are often losing out.

- 2.8 To deal with this imbalance we need better data. Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL) currently manages a centralised data set on land use, ownership, facilities, features and site quality. This is an invaluable resource for London, providing policy-makers, planners and other key decision-makers with vital information. However, by their own admission, GiGL is reliant on partners providing accurate and up to date data.<sup>13</sup> Because of this reason, current data is not always up to date, and it does not include specific information such as visitor numbers. Improving the data on London's green spaces would seem to be a necessary part of a plan to making the most of our existing green spaces, and planning any new ones.

## Recommendation 1

In the forthcoming Environment Strategy, the Mayor should:

- state his intention to run an accessibility audit of green space, comparing the results against the London Plan open space categorisation, noting areas of deficiency and signposting these areas for investment
- clarify his plans to increase London's green space in terms of quality, multi-functionality and accessibility
- set out a specific action plan to improve green space data collection, to help target investment which improves access to, and the quality of, green spaces

## Increasing the visibility of London's green spaces

- 2.9 Making more people aware of their local green spaces should be a priority – not only to allow Londoners to gain the benefits they bring, but to encourage funding and commercial activity (discussed further in the next two chapters). Yet awareness of green spaces is patchy. As Sue Morgan, CEO of The Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust, told us, “[the term] ‘Hidden gem’ comes up quite a lot but that can be a negative thing as well as a positive thing”.<sup>14</sup>
- 2.10 Bringing London's green spaces under one title, in one place, would increase the visibility of green spaces. Establishing a single London-wide online hub for green space information could help Londoners connect with their local green spaces. The possible designation of London as a National Park City would provide an excellent opportunity to do just that.



### London as a National Park City

A campaign to emulate a National Park across London's green spaces has gathered substantial community and political support. A National Park City means 100 per cent of Londoners having free and easy access to high quality green space.<sup>15</sup> The London Assembly unanimously passed a motion in 2015 supporting the initiative, and the Mayor included it as one of his manifesto pledges.<sup>16</sup> Over 50 per cent of ward teams have declared their support for the campaign and a number of responses to the investigation mentioned support for a National Park City.<sup>17</sup>



- 2.11 City wide websites, intended to increase visibility of green spaces and drive up visitors, have already been trialled in other UK cities. My Park Scotland is one example which is being used to cultivate interest in green spaces. The website currently provides information on location, facilities and events for many public parks in Scotland, including all those in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The GLA should look to examples such as My Park Scotland to see how such an approach could work in London.<sup>18</sup>

## Recommendation 2

The GLA should examine the feasibility of setting up a single, citywide website to provide key information on all London's green spaces, including ways to get involved and a crowdfunding function.

# 3. Funding for London's green spaces

## Key findings

- Pressure on local authority finances means that funding for green spaces is under threat, and alternative funding sources need to be identified and secured
- Natural capital accounting is one way of understanding the costs and benefits of green spaces and should be used across London
- We have identified a number of ways in which the Mayor could support local authorities who are looking for alternative funding sources.

- 3.1 The majority of London's public green spaces are owned and funded by local authorities.
- 3.2 Over the last decade, local authorities have been subject to significant financial pressure, with major reductions in funding from central government. They therefore have to make tough decisions about what services to prioritise.
- 3.3 Green spaces are highly valued by local residents, but are not a statutory function for local authorities. Funding for discretionary services is now seen as one area in which savings can be made. For example, we heard that some local authorities are cutting all green space funding by 2020 and others were making significant cuts to their service. A survey from Parks for London found that respondents had made cuts to learning and education, sports outreach and security services from their parks budgets.<sup>19</sup>
- 3.4 We understand that London's local authorities have to make tough decisions about which services to prioritise. However, in making such decisions, they need to be aware that cuts to funding put London's green spaces at risk and may lead to a spiral of decline. If local authorities are unable to maintain the quality of these spaces, it seems probable that fewer people will use them. As this happens, they become less valued and it becomes even harder for local authorities to justify expenditure on them. The improvements we have seen to London's green spaces over the last decade may be quickly undone, and the potential benefits these spaces offer may be lost. Neglected green space can become magnets for antisocial behaviour and in this way places that were previously an asset for communities become a liability.
- 3.5 With no sign of any imminent improvement in their finances, local authorities are innovating about how they fund their green spaces. During this investigation we heard about several ways that funding could be generated from different sectors, allowing London's green spaces to become financially sustainable.

## Capturing the value of green space

- 3.6 Local authorities can supplement their funding of green spaces by bidding to other sources, notably the Lottery Fund, to pay for improvements and amenity items such as playgrounds.
- 3.7 To attract these other sources, local authorities will need to convince funders that their investment will generate benefits. We think that natural capital accounting provides a sound methodology to do this. Under this approach, it is possible to quantify the costs and benefits of green spaces more accurately – for example demonstrating flood alleviation services that green spaces provide in financial terms. Kitran Eastman, from Barnet Council's Environment Commissioning Group, summed up this approach when she told us that:

“We think that we need to put a cash value next to it because, if we are looking at investing cash, people want to know what we are going to get back for it.”<sup>20</sup>

- 3.8 Natural capital accounting is still a relatively new concept and is not used consistently across London, or more widely across the UK. The GLA is, however, already taking steps to encourage it in London by supporting a natural capital account in Barnet and funding a pan-London assessment of green space.<sup>21</sup> The assessment will provide a high-level evaluation of London’s natural capital and a breakdown of the economic value of all the public parks and green spaces by borough. The results of the pan-London assessment will be launched in the summer, along with the Environment Strategy.
- 3.9 This approach to valuing natural capital at a local level was supported by the recent Communities and Local Government Select Committee, which recommended that the Government should support the development of “robust and accessible transferrable models which local authorities can use to assess the value of their parks”.<sup>22</sup>
- 3.10 According to Peter Massini from the GLA Environment Team, a pan-London natural capital account would ‘unlock’ funding for green spaces and help “with those very difficult decisions about where local authorities and others spend their money”.<sup>23</sup> As part of this, local authorities will need proper guidance and a simple framework to use. We expect this to be produced as part of the GLA’s best practice green infrastructure guidance, taking into account lessons learned from the Barnet pilot.
- 3.11 We believe that a natural capital accounting approach has value and the potential to clearly demonstrate the value of green space. However, it will not generate any additional funding for green spaces by itself; alternative funding streams still have to be identified and secured. During this investigation we heard about three such sources of funding: joint commissioning with other public services, income generation from commercial activity, and philanthropy.

## Joint commissioning with other public services

- 3.12 Joint commissioning is where two or more organisations come together to specify and pay for a service that will bring benefits to both parties. In the context of green spaces, one option is for the health sector to help local authorities fund their green spaces in the expectation of gaining some public health benefits. Robin Smale from Vivid Economics told us that “if clinical commissioning groups were comfortable that there were schemes that would provide reasonable value for money, then they would be able to put funding in place”.<sup>24</sup> Robin went on to state that this would require experimenting with intervention and documenting successes. Natural capital accounting would therefore be a vital part of this approach – only by calculating the benefits would commissioners be persuaded to invest their own scarce resources in green spaces.

- 3.13 Health and social care services have been involved in the design and delivery of programmes which utilise green space benefits. Barking Riverside is one of 10 'Healthy New Town' projects funded by NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups. The aim is to provide an attractive environment that promotes active and sustainable healthy living by creating multi-functional green spaces. The integration of green spaces in new developments demonstrates that local green spaces are essential for effective place making and creating healthy communities.<sup>25</sup>
- 3.14 In London, there are an increasing number of community garden schemes, similar to the St Mary's garden we visited in January, where users are funded by their social services to attend. Another example is the Lambeth GP Food Co-op, covering 11 practices in south London, where patients with long-term conditions work together to grow food. This food is then sold to Kings's College Hospital, thereby enabling one set of patients to provide food for others. These existing programmes demonstrate the health and care services' awareness of green spaces and their contribution to a healthy lifestyle.<sup>26</sup>
- 3.15 Local authorities should look to collaborate in devising co-commissioning strategies. As the 2015 Green Infrastructure Task Force report and respondents to our investigation noted, there are significant benefits in connecting local and city wide deliverables such as public health. By identifying common objectives and working together to attract funding streams, local authorities can not only work more efficiently, they can enhance the overall level of benefits created.<sup>27</sup>

## Income generation from commercial activity

- 3.16 Commercial activity has become an increasingly important way of funding London's green spaces. The most visible increase has been in major events. According to London and Partners, commercial events have increased by over 20 per cent in the last two years, with the fastest growth being in major events attended by 5,000 to 50,000 people.<sup>28</sup> These events can be highly profitable. For example, the two-day Wireless Festival in Finsbury Park raised over £300,000 for Haringey Council. The council has used this money to pay for improved lighting and free access to eight basketball courts, three volleyball courts, one badminton court and outdoor table tennis facilities.<sup>29</sup>
- 3.17 While these events may bring in much-needed income, they can divide public opinion. When people were asked whether they preferred to be charged for park facilities or have more commercial activity in green spaces, the majority chose commercial activity. But many people object to the increasing commercialisation of London's green spaces; we received over 70 submissions mentioning this.<sup>30</sup> The CLG Committee also received responses from several Friends Groups in London mentioning the damage that events were causing to the natural environment.<sup>31</sup>
- 3.18 If, as we expect, commercial activity in London's green spaces is now here to stay, local authorities may need help to manage this growth. Recognising this

need, Parks for London set up the Large Scale Events in Parks Action Group in 2016. This group has suggested parameters for events in parks, such as retaining accessibility to community amenities during events and information about income generation.<sup>32</sup> Once the recommendations are published by Parks for London in late 2017, the Mayor could assist in its success by encouraging London boroughs and other managers of green spaces to incorporate them into individual local policies and procedures.

## Philanthropy

- 3.19 Because local authorities have traditionally funded green spaces in the UK, there has been little need to encourage philanthropic donations. There is therefore huge scope to increase funding from these sources, and this is already happening in some parts of the country. For example, the Bournemouth Parks Foundation is a charity set up to improve local parks, supplementing the maintenance work undertaken by Bournemouth Council. In its second year of operation, the foundation exceeded its annual target of £50,000 in donations and grants, and is funding projects such as a new pocket park and a sculpture trail.<sup>33</sup>
- 3.20 Crowdfunding has proven to be a successful way that green spaces can cultivate community support. My Park Scotland has a crowdfunding function on their website. In one project example, over £70,000 was raised to improve a play area and build a new play trail throughout the Callender Park in Falkirk.<sup>34</sup> Not only does this allow the community to take ownership of improvements, potentially making these faster, but also raises the awareness of green space protection and enhancement with the wider community.

## Supporting innovative funding approaches

- 3.21 We have touched on three key alternative funding sources that local authorities could use – there are many others, including sponsorship, leasing and private hire. A number of organisations do provide funding and support for innovative schemes such as the Bournemouth Parks Foundation, which was supported by Heritage Lottery, Big Lottery and Nesta. But we heard from local authorities who said they needed more help. They simply may not have the resources or skills that are required, or may be unwilling to invest time exploring innovative but potentially risky funding streams.
- 3.22 The CLG Committee's investigation into public parks recently recommended that the Government should provide additional funding to help local authorities transform the way they deliver their services. To complement this, we call on the Mayor to provide London's green space managers with the practical guidance and best practice examples that will help them transform their funding arrangements.

### Recommendation 3

The Mayor should highlight case studies and support best practice in achieving a finance model which draws from a variety of sources, specifically providing a research framework for documenting the value of green spaces and any value added programmes conducted in these spaces.

# 4. Alternative delivery methods

## Key findings

- There is a general consensus that local authorities should retain ownership of their green spaces
- In response to funding pressures, a range of alternative delivery methods are being considered. Each of these has its pros and cons, and the GLA could help local authorities by bringing together evidence and best practice as to what is most appropriate
- Regardless of the method chosen, volunteers have a key role to play in maintaining and improving London's green spaces. However, many local authorities are cutting funding for volunteer outreach and support
- As the range of delivery methods grows, the risk of a fragmented approach to green space increases. The Mayor and GLA have roles to play in creating a strategic, citywide approach to London's green space.



## Ownership and accountability

- 4.1 The evidence we collected from stakeholders indicates widespread support for local authorities retaining ownership of their green spaces, and this is something we support.
- 4.2 Local authorities are best placed to own and govern green spaces. Accountability for supporting healthy communities gives local authorities a clear role in promoting and maintaining green spaces. Many local authorities clearly said that they want to retain ownership of their green spaces. Camden Council concluded that the provision of safe, welcoming, well maintained green spaces is essential to enable local authorities to promote active lifestyles and social inclusion.<sup>35</sup> Wandsworth stated that, although their parks and leisure service is run by a 'spun out service', responsibility for policy across these spaces remains firmly with the local authorities and its elected Members.<sup>36</sup>
- 4.3 Residents support this. Many of the respondents to the investigation were concerned that green spaces were 'being sold off'; hundreds included the word 'public' in their replies, including "they are part of our common heritage and must remain publicly-owned". Retaining public ownership is intrinsically linked to concerns over accountability. Councillor Feryal Demirci, Vice Chair of London Councils Transport and Environment Committee, stated "with any issue related to green space, residents look to the local borough. Whether we pass on management or not, we would still be accountable".<sup>37</sup> Any sale of public green space would see this accountability, and perception of community ownership, diminished.
- 4.4 The local authority will always be the backstop; if an alternative delivery method fails then the local authority will need to 'pick up the pieces'. This is where campaigners have doubted the ability for a local authority to relinquish responsibility of management. Nadia Broccardo, Chair of Potters Field, London Bridge, reflected on being separate from the local authority as, "potentially, it can be very creative in generating that revenue, but there is always that backstop that the local authority, if it all goes wrong, will have to take up the slack for that".<sup>38</sup>

## Choosing the right management model

- 4.5 While there appears a consensus that *ownership* of local authority green spaces should remain unchanged, it seems clear to us that their *management* will change. As the map below shows, local authorities across London are already managing the day-to-day running of their green spaces in different ways.
- 4.6 For those local authorities who still manage their own green spaces, the ongoing funding pressures are making them re-assess their options. However, deciding which management model to adopt is not straightforward, and there are various options to consider, including:

- **In-house service.** Many local authorities manage their green spaces through in-house teams. For example, Southwark<sup>39</sup> is proud of its track record with parks, citing the high level of expertise which has resulted in a number of Green Flag Awards. However, other local authorities have decided against this traditional model, often on the basis of cost.
  - **Sub-contracting.** This approach can involve a range of options, including private sector operators or charitable organisations. For example, Enable, which manages Wandsworth green spaces and leisure services, is a non-profit social enterprise currently applying for charitable status. Enable reported that being separate to the council was beneficial.<sup>40</sup> Benefits included competitive business rates on a number of facilities run on behalf of the authority, as well attracting funding unavailable to local authorities.
  - **Trust model.** The Trust model requires an endowment from the local authority, which is invested to provide an ongoing revenue stream to fund maintenance and improvements. The Parks Trust, Milton Keynes has said this governance structure has been essential in its ability to protect green spaces and ensure financial sustainability.<sup>41</sup>
- 4.7 Each of these options have pros and cons, and local authorities – already dealing with funding pressures and service transformation – would benefit from some guidance and support in choosing how to manage their green spaces under a new approach. Camden highlighted that innovation of delivery methods could be stifled without the appropriate capacity to explore and implement them.<sup>42</sup> Some guidance is already available; the National Trust has published advice on how the trust model could work for green spaces.<sup>43</sup> But we think the GLA could make a useful contribution by bringing together the evidence available for all the main management models to give local authorities a single guide – with suggestions on which organisations to contact for more detailed advice.

## Recommendation 4

The Mayor should help local authorities develop a better understanding of the benefits, challenges and implications of alternative delivery methods, by bringing together evidence on different model and making it available pan-London.

## Encouraging community participation

- 4.8 Whichever management models are chosen, local communities need to be an integral part of London's green spaces. Voluntary groups have a long history of supporting green spaces, and interest in these has "mushroomed" over the past couple of years, according to Tony Leach, CEO of Parks for London. There are now over 600 Friends Groups across London, organising events,

maintaining parks, and working closely with parks staff and other key user groups.<sup>44</sup>

- 4.9 There is a clear opportunity to increase community participation in green spaces, especially amongst young people who are often users of these public spaces, but lack influence. In a 2015 survey, nearly 70 per cent of young people across the UK stated they could be motivated to volunteer to create community spaces, but only 7 per cent of them actually did volunteer.<sup>45</sup> There is therefore huge untapped potential, which could be harnessed to the benefit of London's young people as well as its green spaces.
- 4.10 Some organisations are already broadening their volunteering demographic. Matt Frith from The London Wildlife Trust challenged the notion that green space volunteers were 'time rich retirees' and went on to state "Our demography seems to be dropping in terms of age...we have been very good, very successful, in attracting much younger volunteers; those successors are the volunteers of the future".<sup>46</sup>
- 4.11 London faces particular challenges in enabling people – particularly young people – to volunteer. We heard that many Londoners are 'time-poor' or transient and therefore are unable to make long-term commitments to volunteering.<sup>47</sup> This means that more resources are needed to get the most out of volunteers who have often have less experience than those who are able to dedicate more time to volunteering. Yet, in a recent survey, Parks for London found that over half of local authorities surveyed had cut their volunteer outreach and support.<sup>48</sup>
- 4.12 Team London, the Mayor's volunteering programme for London, could play a greater role in supporting green space volunteers. It currently has 5 per cent of its roles advertised on the Team London website dedicated to 'cleaning and greening'. These roles include urban food growing, environmental education and therapeutic horticulture. However, there is the potential for Team London to do more in this area.<sup>49</sup> As Daniel Raven-Ellison, Founder of National Park City highlighted:
- "There is a range of projects, campaigns, interventions, that could be done to help reframe how we think about green spaces from a cultural perspective... Those are the two big issues: how we spread the great ideas and successes and how we bring more and a greater diversity of inclusive community volunteers into London."<sup>50</sup>
- 4.13 Team London could also play a greater role in the recruitment and retention of green space volunteers. Recognising that there is now less back office support in particular organisations, such as local authorities, these groups may need other sources of support. In view of its expertise, and citywide reach, Team London could play a valuable role in expanding and diversifying London's green space volunteering community.

## Recommendation 5

Team London should assist green space managers in recruitment, retention and satisfaction of green space volunteers, including assistance for fundraising, diversifying membership base and connecting with target groups.

### Encouraging a joined-up approach to London's green spaces

- 4.14 One of the risks that comes with change at local authority level is that green space management becomes fragmented and ineffective at the city level. This is compounded by the fact that local authorities are not the only owners of public green spaces in London. GiGL currently lists over 50 ownership types of green space in London, with the majority of open space ownership unknown.<sup>51</sup> This knowledge gap will mean difficulties for London's green infrastructure and the ability to work together for the benefit of green spaces.
- 4.15 As the range of delivery models in use increases, the risk that green space managers do not work together also increases. We do not want to see London's green spaces being managed in silos, with little regard for the benefits that a more integrated London wide approach could bring. This is another reason for the Mayor and the GLA to get involved now, before this happens. As we discuss in the next chapter, the benefits of London's green spaces when brought together can be much greater than the sum of its parts. The Mayor can play a key role in making sure this opportunity is not lost.

# 5. Towards a greener London

## Key findings

- Green spaces generate more benefits when they work together as part of a network of green infrastructure
- The All London Green Grid aims to promote green infrastructure through a policy framework and planning guidance, but more can be done
- Appointing a green infrastructure champion would provide a focal point to raise awareness and promote activity.

## Seeing green space as a whole rather than a half

- 5.1 In order to maximise the benefits that London's green spaces can provide, we need to start thinking about them as a whole, rather than as individual spaces. The term green infrastructure is a phrase used to describe all green and blue spaces (such as rivers, canals, lakes and ponds) in and around cities, allowing us to refer to and recognise the collective value of all these spaces.<sup>52</sup> Recognising the value and role of green infrastructure means that we can plan better cities, incorporating green spaces and their benefits as we develop the urban environment.
- 5.2 Londoners will also benefit if the city's green spaces are better connected. In isolation, each green space can offer environmental, social and health benefits – but these are much enhanced when the green spaces are joined together. Integrated, safe and attractive routes and corridors between green spaces encourage people to walk and cycle between them, and make it easier for wildlife to move between habitats. One great example of this can be found in Boston, Massachusetts.

### **Boston's Emerald Necklace offers an example of connected green space right in the heart of the city**

Nine of Boston's parks are linked by a trail of parkways and waterways around the city. A not-for-profit organisation puts on a number of events throughout the year, as well as advertising volunteer projects and youth programmes to attract community involvement.<sup>53</sup>



- 5.3 In contrast, many of London's parks are 'islands' of green space surrounded by roads. In his manifesto, the Mayor committed to improving this, pledging to "protect wildlife and biodiversity by creating green corridors through the



city”.<sup>54</sup> Of course, linking London’s green spaces together through policy is not new. The All London Green Grid (ALGG) policy document and supplementary planning guidance seeks to guide the formation of a functioning London-wide network of green infrastructure (including green spaces and “blue” hydrological features such as rivers) by providing a strategic framework to connect existing and future green spaces.

- 5.4 The GLA administers quarterly meetings of the ALGG Advisory Group where stakeholders come together and discuss good practice as it relates to green infrastructure. According to the GLA’s Peter Massini, the ALGG provides a “good policy framework for thinking about the strategic management of the network of green spaces”.<sup>55</sup> At a policy level, this is beginning to take effect. In 2014, a report showed that half of London’s local authorities had included the ALGG in local policies, two years after it was published.<sup>56</sup> While a positive development, it is unclear whether this has been taken up more widely since 2014, or what effect it has had on the ground. We think it is time for an update on the progress of the ALGG across London.

## Recommendation 6

The GLA should conduct an audit of the All London Green Grid, investigating how many local authorities have included it in local policies and examining what practical impact the ALGG has had.

## Embedding green infrastructure in policy making

- 5.5 We believe that the ALGG could go further in both policy and practice. For example, we heard that the idea of green infrastructure has “fallen through the gap” in major development projects, despite the opportunities and benefits it can offer to local communities and to developers. The development around London Bridge station was quoted as an example by Nadia Broccardo, Chief Executive of Team London Bridge and Deputy Chair of Potters Field Park.<sup>57</sup> A recent London Assembly Housing Committee report concluded that existing green infrastructure policy is “not being translated at a ground level”.<sup>58</sup>
- 5.6 One way of addressing this problem would be to bring together key evidence on green infrastructure research, making it relevant and accessible for planners, developers and other relevant stakeholders, as suggested by GiGL. We support the idea of Sue Morgan, CEO of the Wandle Valley Regional Park trusts, who suggested that the Mayor should bring these groups together:

“I would like to see the Mayor stitching together green infrastructure across the different organisations and departments within the GLA. Design reviews, place-making transport, housing, air pollution, river catchment: it is all affected by green infrastructure. Encouraging

developers to see the benefits of green infrastructure is paramount for green infrastructure to be successful.”<sup>59</sup>

- 5.7 There are also clear opportunities for the Mayor to include green spaces in his other key strategies. A recent study calculated that physical activity in green spaces is estimated to provide £2.2 billion a year in health benefits.<sup>60</sup> Embedding green infrastructure thinking in the Health Inequalities Strategy would therefore be another positive and welcome step.

## Championing London's green spaces

- 5.8 During the investigation, we were frequently told about the need for London to have its own green space 'champion'. Sue Morgan, CEO of The Wandle Valley Regional Trust concluded, "We need a champion, an advocate, somebody who really understands the social, economic, and environmental benefits of green infrastructure".<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the Green Infrastructure Task Force report recommended the Mayor should 'appoint a green infrastructure commissioner'.<sup>62</sup>
- 5.9 As has been proven with other high profile appointments, using one person to promote a certain issue can be helpful in raising awareness and moving an issue forward. The previous Cycling Commissioner was one such example, the Victims' Commissioner for London was another. We therefore agree with the findings of the Green Infrastructure Task Force, and call on the Mayor to appoint a champion or commissioner to promote green infrastructure across the capital.

### Recommendation 7

The Mayor should take steps to promote the concept of green infrastructure at a city level by:

- bringing together evidence on green infrastructure in a format suitable for use by planners, developers and other stakeholders
- incorporating green infrastructure within individual Mayoral strategies and further into the London Plan
- appointing a Green Infrastructure Commissioner or Champion.



# Our approach

The Environment Committee agreed the following terms and conditions for this investigation:

- To examine Mayoral policy and programmes regarding London's public green spaces, focussing on:
  - Extent
  - Governance and management
  - Valuation
  - Maximising the benefits
- To contribute to the development of the Mayor's Environment Strategy and other relevant policies and programmes.

At its public evidence sessions, the Committee took oral evidence from the following guests:

- Anita Konrad, Director of Strategic Partnerships & Programmes, Groundwork London
- Sue Morgan, CEO, The Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust
- Robin Smale, Director, Vivid Economics
- Ellie Robinson, External Affairs Assistant Director, The National Trust
- Kitran Eastman, Strategic Lead Clean & Green, London Borough of Barnet
- Valerie Selby, Principal Parks Officer, Enable LC
- Peter Massini, Principal Policy & Programme Officer, GLA Environment Team
- Tony Leach, CEO, Parks for London
- Matt Frith, Director of Conservation, London Wildlife Trust
- Daniel Raven-Ellison, Founder, National Park City
- Councillor Feryal Demirci, Labour Councillor for Hoxton East & Shoreditch, Vice-Chair of London Councils Transport and Environment Committee
- Nadia Broccardo, CEO, Team London Bridge
- Sam Parry, recipient of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Fellowship

During the investigation, the Committee also received written submissions from the following organisations:

- Lordship Rec, Haringey; London Green Spaces Friends Group's Network; National Federation of Friends Groups
- Friends of Mayow Park (Lewisham)

- Tottenham & Wood Green Friends of the Earth
- Friends of Hoblingwell
- Friends of Wimbledon Park
- Wandle Valley Forum
- LA21 Bexley
- Friends of East Greenwich Pleasaunce
- Save Old Farm Park, Sidcup Campaign Group
- The Ramblers
- Save Lea Marshes
- Friends of Queensbury Recreation Ground
- Friends of Canons Park
- Friends of Kennington Park
- Forest Gate Community Garden
- Ealings Forgotten Spaces
- The Save Oakfield Society
- Friends of West Harrow Park
- Kingston Biodiversity Network and Kingston Environment Centre
- London Diocesan Fund
- Diversity Works
- Serving Richmond and Wandsworth
- Sowing the Seeds network
- Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Portsmouth University and Wildflower Turf Ltd
- Open Spaces Society
- Sustain
- CPRE London
- Parks for London
- Community Food Growers Network
- The Environment Trust
- South West London Environment Network (SWLEN)
- Brent River & Canal Society
- Capel Manor College
- Sustainability Research Institute (SRI) - UEL

- eCountability
- The Environment Agency London Team
- The RSPB
- London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network
- Redbridge Group of the London Wildlife Trust
- London Boroughs Biodiversity Forum - Southwark
- Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC (GiGL)/ Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC)
- Natural England
- Historic England (Heritage at Risk - London)
- Save Victoria Tower Gardens Campaign
- ATKINS
- Fields in Trust
- Glendale Managed Services
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- The Land Trust
- Wandle Valley Regional Park
- Hammersmith Community Gardens Association
- Land Use Consultants Ltd (LUC)
- London Parks & Gardens Trust
- Ealing Dean Allotment Association (EDAS)
- Woodland Trust
- Sustrans
- Cross River Partnership
- Haringey Council (Parks and Leisure Services)
- London Borough of Ealing - Environment & Leisure
- London Borough of Camden
- Wandsworth Councils
- RB Kingston upon Thames
- Southwark Council (Parks and Leisure)
- City of London Corporation

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## Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज़ का सारांश अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

## Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের একটা সারাংশ নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে ফোঁ করবেন অথবা উল্লেখিত ডাক ঠিকানায় বা ই-মেইল ঠিকানায় আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

## Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کا خلاصہ اپنی زبان میں درکار ہو تو، براہ کرم نمبر پر فون کریں یا مذکورہ بالا ڈاک کے پتے یا ای میل پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

## Arabic

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العنوان البريدي العادي أو عنوان البريدي  
الإلكتروني أعلاه.

## Gujarati

જો તમારે આ દસ્તાવેજનો સાર તમારી ભાષામાં જોઈતો હોય તો ઉપર આપેલ નંબર પર ફોન કરો અથવા ઉપર આપેલ ટપાલ અથવા ઇ-મેઈલ સરનામા પર અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.





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