

Kate Ashbrook

General Secretary, Open Spaces Society and Ramblers

Thank you, Barbara [Young] and thank you, Nicky [Gavron], for bringing us all together today. I speak for the Open Spaces Society, Britain's oldest national conservation body founded in the mid-Victorian era and saved places like Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest, and I speak for the Ramblers, who have recently run the 'Love London Walk London' campaign. We are delighted that the Mayor, when elected, his manifesto very much chimed with the Ramblers, appointing a walking czar in Will Norman [Walking and Cycling Commissioner], aiming to complete the Thames Path [National Trail following the River Thames from Kemble, Gloucestershire, to the Thames Barrier at Charlton, southeast London], get better access to open spaces and better protection.

The other thing I should say about the Ramblers is that we run the Walking for Health campaign, which we took over from Natural England [Government adviser for the natural environment in England] and we are getting people out into the urban areas and into the urban fringe. This is all about getting people on to green space and ensuring that green space and the paths are where the people are. We need more access in the green belt whether that is by public paths or by open space and we like to see those being rights rather than just permissive and custom. Custom does develop into rights in time, in 20 years, but rights are secure and are much better. For open spaces we advocate dedicating village greens, which not only protects the land from development but also gives people rights there and developers can voluntarily register land as village greens as part of mitigation, otherwise people can claim village greens by demonstrating 20-years use. We have had good examples of village greens created, such as King's Stairs Garden in Rotherhithe as part of the Thames Tideway Tunnel.

Natural England in its strategy actually says, "We will focus our work where it adds greatest value," and this is where, in the green belt, here, close to people, it can add value. The Countryside Agency before it dedicated doorstep greens. They are wonderful little green spaces close to people that they can enjoy. Developments should be designed to enable people to have a part in them to be able to walk there, to be able to get fresh air and recreation. The recent parks report recognised the multi of open space for physical and mental health and wellbeing, social cohesion, for the economy for air quality. All these things have been recognised very recently but it should not just apply to parks, it should apply to the wider areas. We need access to land generally, to the agricultural land of the green belt. There should be more access in return for these payments. There should be that public benefit. As Dieter [Helm] said this morning we can measure those benefits. You can put them into monetary terms. How do you pay for them? You switch money from other budgets. You make sure that money in health budgets is actually paying for the green infrastructure that it keeps us out of hospital, that keeps us out of care homes, that stops us getting dementia and all these expensive things can actually be offset by the green spaces.

The parks report recommends local authorities working closely with health and wellbeing boards. It has to be more than just the collaboration. It actually has to be the transfer of funds and it has to go beyond the parks. I think the parks report has a message for green space

LONDONASSEMBLY
Planning Committee
THE GREEN BELT OF THE FUTURE SEMINAR

generally that we can learn from. However, our message is that people must be at the heart of this and it must be designed for the wellbeing of the population. Thank you.