London Green Spaces Commission: Meeting of 5 September 2019

Chair: Shirley Rodrigues, Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy, GLA [Apologies]
Deputy Chair: Cllr Julian Bell, Chair of London Councils’ Transport and Environment Committee, Leader of Ealing Council
Observers: Rob Pearce, Parks Alliance | Dr Meredith Whitten, Researcher | Katharina Winbeck, Head of Transport, London Councils [Apologies] and Chris Whyte, Chair of the Green Infrastructure Cluster of LEDNet and Operational Director, Environmental Services, LB Brent.
Officers: Andrew Jones, GLA Environment Team, Ruth Knight, GLA Environment Team.

Background
Under Policy 5.3.1 of the London Environment Strategy, the Mayor committed to: address under investment, and improve the management of London’s green infrastructure, by developing new business models and improving awareness of the benefits of London’s green infrastructure. This included establishing a London Green Spaces Commission to develop new models for the delivery and management of London’s green infrastructure. The aim of the Commission is to support London boroughs to transform the way they manage and fund their services so that they can maintain or increase investment in parks and green spaces, in the context of substantial and ongoing constraints imposed on public sector funding.

Cllr Julian Bell chaired the meeting as Shirley Rodrigues was attending an event with the Mayor of London.

The Chair welcomed Commissioners, Rob Pearce, Parks Alliance and Chris Whyte, Chair of LEDNet and Operational Director, Environmental Services, LB Brent.
Dr Meredith Whitten presented her main findings from her PhD study on “Reconceptualising Green Space: Planning for urban green space in 21st Century London” to the Commission. Dr Meredith Whitten explained that it was clear that green infrastructure was underfunded, understaffed and underused and that green space was often thought of in terms of parks rather than wider green infrastructure. Dr Meredith Whitten argued that her findings showed that green spaces were grounded in the concepts of the past and 21st Century problems were being tackled using 19th Century solutions.
Rob Pearce presented the Commissioners with the business case he had developed including the strategic, economic, commercial, financial and management case for why parks matter and how to unlock their potential. He also outlined the “Making Parks Count Framework.”
Chris Whyte presented the key themes established by the LEDNet parks cluster which included: the importance of intersecting the green spaces agenda with other agendas such as public health, climate resilience, and air quality, investigating alternate delivery models, commercialisation in relation to income generation, community engagement with parks, digital transformation and supporting linkages between parks and green spaces, to create a ‘green web’ across London. Commissioners heard about the challenges that boroughs faced in providing green spaces, the ways that boroughs could enhance green space to maximise its quality of life benefits and the main challenges for making the best use of existing green space provision.
Following the oral evidence Dr Meredith Whitten, Rob Pearce and Chris Whyte answered questions from the Commissioners. Discussion focused around linking planning and green space functions, where the opportunities for disruption are and how a natural capital investment plan might work in London. Officers updated Commissioners on the work programme and the upcoming Borough workshops. A brief summary of work stream activity to date was followed by an overview of a model developed from the vision session by the Exploring and Sharing Delivery Models group presented by Fiona Brenner. Commissioners agreed to gather for a whole group discussion and consolidation session before the next meeting to start to shape Commission recommendations.

Cleared by: Shirley Rodrigues, Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy, GLA | Cllr Julian Bell, Chair of London Councils’ Transport and Environment Committee, Leader of Ealing Council
Secretariat Officer: Laura Marshall, Board Officer