

London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network

The London network for the 600+ Friends and User Groups for all green open spaces www.lfgn.net

Protecting and promoting green spaces * Improving and enhancing the quality of green spaces

Expanding the amount of green space generally * Improving staffing and management

Seeking adequate resources for green spaces (capital and revenue)

Ensuring the involvement of Friends/Users groups as partners in the management of their parks and green spaces

Response to A City for all Londoners, 9.12.2016

URGENT ACTION NEEDED TO PROTECT LONDON'S PUBLIC GREEN SPACES – Mayor's statement must be amended and expanded to reflect this

Role of the Mayor and the GLA*

The Mayor has statutory strategies on biodiversity and on climate change adaptation, as well as the London Plan. The Mayor's election manifesto included these pledges:

1. **Protect nature and play space**
2. **Protect the green belt, green spaces and play spaces**, prioritising development on brownfield sites
3. **Strengthen protections for open spaces within the London Plan**, including playing fields, Metropolitan Open Land, and our Sites of Importance for Local Nature Conservation and nature reserves
4. **Protect wildlife and biodiversity** by creating green corridors through the city
5. **Make London the first 'National Park City'**
6. **Set a long term target to make more than 50 per cent of our city green** and ensure that all children have access to nature.

In a recent Mayoral response to the reduction in local authority funding for green spaces, the Mayor stated: *"I will continue to highlight the adverse impact of this and lobby government to ensure local authorities are adequately resourced to deliver a full range of necessary and important local services. I'll also be developing an environmental improvement programme and tree-planting campaign to provide local communities with support to conserve and enhance local green spaces"*

The previous Mayor's Green Infrastructure Task Force final report concluded that **green infrastructure must be considered as essential as the city's transport, energy, water, waste and digital infrastructure.**

* Extract from the London Assembly Green Spaces Investigation Outline, 11.11.2016

London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network Statement

Intro / Summary We are the voice of the dynamic and inspirational grassroots movement of over 600 local Friends of Parks groups - the volunteers who act on behalf of the communities who use and care about our vital public green spaces throughout London. We exist to support and represent their activities, issues and concerns, and to amplify their passionate and knowledgeable voices. We meet bi-monthly at City Hall to share news and views.

Our much-loved parks and green spaces - around 3,000 throughout London - are recognised by all to be essential public resources providing an unparalleled range of vital services and facilities for all sections of our communities, and for nature.

But their future is under threat due to Government cuts to local public services. This serious underfunding crisis needs to be addressed and reversed immediately.

Our public green spaces need statutory recognition (as a statutory service) and effective support and protection by all tiers of Government backed by adequate public funding (eg from general taxation or public infrastructure budgets) – plus good management and community involvement. This is not only to address the current disastrous and worsening underfunding crisis but also to fulfil the full potential and benefits of our green spaces for nature and for all London's communities.

A grassroots movement throughout London The LGSFGN was set up in October 2009 at a conference in Tottenham attended by 80 Friends groups' representatives from 17 boroughs. Currently there are over 600 local Friends and Users Groups for the 3,000 designated open green spaces in London, and so far 17 borough-wide Friends Forums to help co-ordinate efforts. Our aims are:

- * Protecting and promoting green spaces
- * Improving and enhancing the quality of green spaces
- * Expanding the amount of green space generally
- * Improving staffing and management
- * Seeking adequate resources for green spaces (capital and revenue)
- * Ensuring the involvement of Friends/Users groups as partners in the management of their parks and green spaces

Most of London's Friends Groups were set up by local park users over the last 15 years to try to reverse the neglect their local green spaces had fallen into as the result of savage public spending cuts in the 1970s and 1980s. After much success, but still much to do to complete the job, it was felt in 2009 that the looming new round of public spending cuts could herald a return to 'those bad old days'. To counter this we would need to coordinate and strengthen our efforts, speak out together and take up strategic issues facing green spaces. Also we had so many stories and successes to share! This picture was reflected across the UK with the development of other regional networks and in 2010 the launch of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces.

We are gradually encouraging the development of active Friends Forums in all 32 London boroughs. Nationally, there are over 6,000 local Friends Groups and the many local networks are linked together through the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces – of which we are an active member, representing London. It now feels that our grass-roots (literally!) movement is fast-growing and fast-evolving into something very significant. We are aiming for a Friends Group for every urban green space, a Friends Groups Forum for every borough and area, and a statutory duty on all Councils and landowners to protect and manage all their spaces to Green Flag Award standards.

Friends Groups Local Friends Groups are independent community organisations set up by park users and local residents to promote, protect and improve a local green space - in essence to 'take ownership' of the space on behalf of local communities and park users. Friends Groups are responsible for a wide range of highly positive achievements, including: organising local events of all kinds, planting bulbs and helping increase biodiversity, disseminating information and news, producing publicity and history pamphlets, working closely with parks staff and managers, monitoring and reporting maintenance issues, getting key user groups to work together, developing visions for improving local spaces, applying for and accessing outside funding sources, lobbying for adequate resources and planning policies, and so on.

Our public green spaces Every green space should have the management and maintenance it deserves to enable the local community to enjoy its many benefits. This includes adequate on-site staffing, buildings and facilities in good condition and in daily use, and well-maintained natural and horticultural areas, playgrounds, paths and park furniture. And most importantly, the local community and in particular any Friends or User groups need to be able to be fully involved in the management of that green space. With an increasing population and rising obesity levels amongst London's children, public parks are needed more than ever and should be expanding rather than shrinking, improving rather than deteriorating. Where else can community cohesion occur so abundantly - with London's many minority ethnic groups, ages and interest groups intermingling, enjoying the exhilaration and freedom of open, public and green space?

Policies and programmes abound aiming to recognise, protect and enhance London's open green spaces: the London Plan's all-London Green Grid; London's Green Infrastructure Report; Spatial Planning Guidance - Preparing Tree and Woodland Strategies; Play provision criteria; Open Space Deficiency standards; Biodiversity Action Planning; Fields In Trust covenants; the Green Flag Awards, London in Bloom awards; Metropolitan Open Land and other designations, and last but not least the growing movement towards London being declared a National Park City (supported by the London Mayor). The GLA itself has recognised that green space is essential infrastructure which 'needs to be planned, managed and funded like other essential

infrastructure.' [See Appendix 1 below for GLA statement to the national Select Committee Inquiry]. The London Mayor has made specific manifesto commitments to champion and defend parks and green spaces (see above at top), and we call for action to ensure that these promises are fulfilled.

Despite all this, member groups and borough Forums are reporting on major and worsening threats to open green spaces – parks, sports fields, nature reserves, woodlands and cemeteries etc. They are witnessing ever greater cuts in parks' staff, increasing inappropriate commercial usage and even loss of sites or parts of sites to development.

Government public spending cuts have seen savage reductions to London boroughs' already inadequate parks maintenance budgets over the last 6 years - with even more cuts threatened. We don't want London's green spaces to return to the scandalous neglect and dereliction that afflicted most of the country's urban green spaces 20-30 years ago. Most Friends Groups were set up in the last 15 years precisely for that reason. Their often stupendous efforts have gradually borne fruit, but for most the recovery is not yet complete – and Government cuts have thrown the gears into reverse. There are also growing problems caused by privatisation and fragmentation of local services. Most spaces don't even have a Friends Group yet so are likely to be in a particularly poor state, or well on the way there.

For these reasons we supported the growing calls by MPs, Horticulture Week, The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces and The Parks Alliance for a Parliamentary Select Committee National Inquiry into these matters. The Inquiry is currently underway and the LGSFGN Chair gave oral evidence at the first open session on behalf of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, with reference also to the LGSFGN.

The level of protection and funding is clearly inadequate, and a crisis is growing in front of our eyes. The situation will continue to deteriorate unless swift comprehensive and effective action is taken at all levels of Government.

Hence we support the submission of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces and their call for parks to be designated as a statutory service (as recommended by the Government's Select Committee on parks in 2003) and to be adequately funded mainly from public funding sources ie taxation. [See Appendix 2 below.]

Dave Morris - Chair, LGSFGN

NOTE: We also refer the LA Committee to the overwhelming expert and research evidence provided to the Government's current Select Committee Inquiry into the Future of Parks, which backs the above views, for example from:

- Historic England
 - Association for Public Service Excellence
 - The Parks Alliance
 - The Heritage Lottery Fund
 - 38 Degrees
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Appendix 1

GLA evidence to DCLG Select Committee Inquiry, Officer submission [September 2016. Extracts]

The Greater London Authority has a particular interest in the future of public parks in London because the Mayor is obliged to set strategic policy for London's natural environment and green spaces through his London Plan and his environment strategies. By providing citywide leadership the Mayor also has a role in assisting boroughs to develop new approaches to securing the resources needed to manage and maintain public parks, and to determine the role of parks in a city which continues to grow and develop. The Mayor is also committed to making London a 'National Park City' – a policy framework and public campaign to maintain and enhance London's status as a city of parks and green spaces. The quality and extent of public parks is also highly relevant to the Mayor's Health Inequalities Strategy and his Economic Development Strategy. Access to green space is one of the key determinants of health; and London's status as one of the greenest big cities contributes to attracting inward investment and a highly-skilled workforce.

The scale of the problem and the challenge faced by local authorities is set out clearly in the [State of UK Public Parks 2016](#) a recent report from the Heritage Lottery Fund. We do not intend to repeat these arguments here. Suffice to say that the Mayor recognises that public parks need core levels of public funds in order to maintain the basic services and benefits these assets provide. ... The advice and recommendations provided in this submission ... are drawn from [Natural Capital: investing in a green infrastructure for a future London](#), the report of the independent Green Infrastructure Task Force. The points below are a summary of the key messages [note: extracts]:

- Parks and green spaces should be regarded as components of an integrated 'green infrastructure' that is recognised as being as vital to the economic development of our cities as the existing infrastructure of roads, rails, pipes and cables.
- Cities need to rethink the way we plan, design, manage and fund existing green spaces. The role of green spaces, especially in the urban environment, need to be reframed (for example, by combining recreation with flood risk management or protection of heritage with green walking and cycling routes) and regularly upgraded or modified, as happens with other forms of infrastructure.
- Considering green infrastructure as a network also means that we should fill the gaps in our green infrastructure by incorporating it into buildings and public realm.
- Government needs to ensure better join-up of policy and programmes across departments in order to ensure the benefits of green infrastructure are realised and supported by all relevant Departments, including DCLG, Defra, Department of Health and Department for BEIS.

Recommendation: Those responsible for making key decisions about a city's infrastructure should acknowledge that the green parts [of] cities will need to provide a wider range of benefits. They should also recognise that this green infrastructure needs to be planned, managed and funded like other essential infrastructure.

...the management and maintenance of London's traditional green infrastructure has been subject to boom and bust cycles of public funding, i.e. periodic capital investment followed by often inadequate long-term maintenance funding. This has been exacerbated by the fact that green infrastructure provision is not a statutory requirement for local authorities and therefore there are no dedicated or ring-fenced funds allocated to green infrastructure provision. This is an area that could be addressed as part of the debate on fiscal and financial devolution. For example the London Finance Commission suggested, in its report [Raising the Capital](#), allowing London government to introduce levies on environmentally detrimental or unhealthy activity to assist in delivering wider public good objectives.

Changing the way we value the benefits of green infrastructure will help address these problems. Some of the approaches advocated by the Natural Capital Committee and others may be helpful and need to be embedded into practice. But it is also clear that new sources of funding and finance are needed. These include models that compensate for environmental loss or degradation, or leverage more private sector finance to offset the costs of upgrading more traditional infrastructure....

Recommendation: As of the ongoing identify the scope for additional levies or compensatory mechanisms on environmentally detrimental activity that could assist in funding green infrastructure projects. These should include, for example, 'stormwater credits' and 'biodiversity offsetting'.

Appendix 2

National Federation of Parks And Green Spaces: Evidence to DCLG Select Committee Inquiry

[September 2016. Extracts]

BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENTLY-UNFOLDING CRISIS

8. There is a growing crisis for the management of the UK's 27,000 urban green spaces, as central Government continues to cut funding to local authorities for their vital public services. If this policy is not reversed, public sector funding for discretionary & 'non-statutory' services like parks is projected to fall by 60% or more from 2010-2020.

9. This underfunding crisis is hitting all the fundamental pillars of effective green space management - the need for adequate front line staffing levels with experienced and dedicated staffing, enough 'back office' support (for outreach, funding bids, coordination, for liaising with Friends Groups and volunteers [*See Appendix 2: Park Managers and Communities*], policy development, contract management, enforcement etc), effective ongoing maintenance, effective management, adequate capital investment for infrastructure and buildings etc.

10. Similar policies and cuts were seen in the late 1970s and 1980s and most urban green spaces gradually but inexorably slid into decline over the next 10-20 years. Indeed many if not most became unsafe, problem spaces plagued by neglect, vandalism and anti-social behaviour and shunned by local people. The Friends movement mushroomed in the 2000s (from a few hundred local groups of park users to now around 6,000 of such groups) mainly to try to address this neglect, and to try to rescue their treasured local spaces.

11. In addition there were national crisis reports calling for adequate funding and management: for example:

- the Green Flag Awards were launched in 1997
- CABEspace was set up in 2003 to raise standards (but merged into the Design Council by the Government in 2011)
- The Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee held a Parks Inquiry and made recommendations in 2002-3
- The charity GreenSpace was set up to champion parks (but closed down in 2013 due to lack of funding)
- the Government put in more resources for use by Local Authorities
- the Lottery began its Parks For People program. Over the last 20 years the Lottery have provided grants of around £850m for capital investment in around 800 (approx 3%) of urban green spaces so they can be held up as an example of what all spaces could and should achieve.

12. As a result of 15-20 years of increased public concern, greater public profile, lobbying, campaigning, outspoken expert opinion, Government recognition and investment for green spaces, a large percentage (but not all) of the neglected spaces had by 2010 gradually seen a recovery in terms of some of the necessary investment, management, standards and community involvement required. But only around 1,600 green spaces have so far been recognised as achieving the minimum Green Flag Award standard that all 27,000 urban spaces should be reaching.

13. This unfinished recovery process has been thrown into reverse in the last few years. The Heritage Lottery Fund's 2014 report: 'The State of UK Public Parks', documents the inexorable and disastrous slide into a new crisis. Their 2016 follow-up Report shows that that crisis is deepening.

C. WHAT'S DIFFERENT NOW AS COMPARED TO THE PREVIOUS 1980s/90s CRISIS?

14. The main differences between now and the 1980s and 1990s include:

- we now have a vibrant and dedicated Friends Groups movement, with increasing levels of local, regional and national strategic networking and organisation
- the importance of green spaces is now well documented and publicly acknowledged and their profile is high
- no-one who cares about green spaces, or who has any experience of the last 15 years of hard-work and

the colossal additional investment required to turn things around, would ever want to allow a repeat of the previous fiasco of under-resourced and consequently mismanaged green spaces throughout the UK

- we are calling for the underfunding crisis to be addressed at a stage when Government action can make a real difference and hence the rescue operation will be much easier to implement this time round

D. WHAT FUNDING AND MANAGEMENT DO OUR PARKS NEED?

15. The Inquiry clearly recognises that it is not an option to refuse to address the above issues. Or to abandon our public responsibilities and wish the situation would somehow go away, or be waved away with magical thinking rather than through practical, comprehensive and effective solutions.

16. The greenspace sector has been encouraged or forced to try to 'rethink' the tried and tested model for the successful management of local public green spaces - Local Authorities adequately-funded by local and national taxation, transparent and accountable to local communities. This model, whilst of course not perfect, has largely worked for the whole country for as much as 100 years. Indeed, mainly due to the influence of the Friends Groups movement, CABESpace, and expert opinion on the vital importance of well-run green spaces, most Parks Departments had been improving their transparency, accountability, innovation, methodologies, standards, partnerships and community involvement throughout the 2000s. But the recent and increasing under-resourcing, fragmentation, privatisation, and loss of experienced and dedicated staff has undermined this positive process and is now causing increasing crisis and demoralisation within Local Authorities.

17. New and often tenuous ideas to fund parks are being floated or promoted. Most of these ideas, whilst they may work for a few spaces, or as 'add ons' to the existing core funding for some spaces, seem to be wholly inadequate and/or inappropriate for the ongoing and long-term, secure, effective and responsible management of the great majority of our 27,000 public green spaces.

18. These ideas often boil down to increasing and unacceptable commercialisation of public space, some form of untested localised fundraising for certain individual sites (generally far less substantial, reliable, efficient, fair or comprehensive as general taxation), and/or a wildly-unrealistic and unacceptable expectation that community volunteers will somehow commit to life-long voluntary work and management responsibilities.

19. It is widely acknowledged that volunteering in parks is patchy, and limited by lack of support and capacity. *[See Appendix 2]*. The State of UK Parks research reports 2014/16 confirm this, despite the increase in number of local groups.

20. We of course welcome community involvement in parks and are always open to appropriate innovative ideas. But we don't wish to substitute for well-trained and resourced staff, or to feel exploited as cheap labour.

21. If adequate and long-term resources for all our green spaces are not secured, thousands of spaces will fall into neglect and disuse, or even close, many will be 'developed' on, or partly or completely sold off, or they will be transformed into commercialised sites for those who can afford access and sponsorship.

22. In the increasingly desperate quest to find alternative sources of funding there is a disturbing and growing trend of parks (and their Friends Groups and managers) being forced to compete with each other for ever-scarcer resources instead of working together for everyone's benefit. This is counter-productive and damaging in the long term.

E. WHAT ARE THOSE WHO LOVE PARKS DOING TOGETHER TO SPEAK UP FOR GREEN SPACES?

23. It has been, and is likely to continue for some time yet, a very difficult and challenging time. But we know that positive thinking and common sense, backed up by the necessary Government action sooner rather than later, must and will prevail, as the alternative is too shocking to contemplate.

24. We can understand that each individual green space or managing authority is under pressure to somehow try to survive the underfunding pressures. Many strategies of varying levels of appropriateness and effectiveness will be attempted or employed to try to 'muddle through' this crisis. We should be careful not to make a virtue out of a necessity. Also, short-term efforts to survive will mainly serve to mask the breadth, depth and seriousness of the long term underfunding crisis facing the entire sector.

25. Some key positive strategic responses are already being advocated and pursued, for example by Friends Groups / Love Parks / Fields In Trust. *[See Appendix 3: Some positive strategic responses]* These efforts are

seeking to stand up for the long-term interests of these vital spaces - speaking out for parks' needs, for adequate funding and effective protection; promoting Friends Groups; Love Parks campaigning; aspiring for Green Flag Award standards for all parks; challenging cuts to parks services;

26. Now it's the turn of the Government to ensure it matches the above efforts and commitment, and ensure it fulfils its obligations to the UK public.

27. It is noted that some national organisations, because of their links to Government or government funding, may feel unable or unwilling to openly criticise Government policies or make recommendations for effective Government action. We do not feel constrained in the same way, and indeed believe we all have an obligation to the public to ensure our organisations 'speak truth to power'.

F. THE SELECT COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS FROM 2003

28. We believe a crucial reference document for the current Scrutiny Inquiry is the 2003 ODPM: Housing Planning Local Government and the Regions Committee Report 'Living Spaces: Cleaner, Safer, Greener'.

[\[https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmmodpm/673/673.pdf \]](https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmmodpm/673/673.pdf)

29. Its Conclusions and Recommendations paragraphs are at pp 35-40. *[See Appendix 4: 2003 Select Committee Key Recommendations]*

30. Making parks a statutory service and ensuring adequate long-term revenue and capital funding arrangements were key recommendations from the 2003 Committee Report.

- 'A long term funding programme is required which reflects the poor state of public spaces and the importance which the public puts on them.' *[Recommendations para 30]*

- 'We ... recommend that local authorities should be given a new statutory duty.' *[Recommendations para 31]*

31. The NFPGS is calling for the current Select Committee to recommend that the upkeep of parks and open spaces become a statutory service. Obviously if this was the case, there would also need to be adequate funding arrangements put in place.

32. We believe that the previous Recommendations remain just as, or even more, appropriate now, and are the most useful starting point when considering the above key Issues set by the current Committee. Indeed, if the 2003 Recommendations had been implemented then arguably the country's green spaces would have been protected and the current Committee would not be having to repeat the work of the previous Committee.

G. A STATUTORY PARKS SERVICE - WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE ?

33. There are a number of relevant statutory models, especially those relevant to Local Authorities, from which a Parks Statutory Service can draw key elements, including Litter and Waste Management, and the Health Service scrutiny powers of Local Authorities.

34. We believe the key elements and questions to be addressed include

- How are Local Authorities best placed to have the central role in ensuring all parks and other public green spaces are well looked after, and how can this be achieved effectively?
- How must central Government ensure that adequate, ring-fenced and long term core public funding, revenue and capital, be made available, enhanced by other reliable sources, to ensure the requirements are achieved?
- What kind of effective reporting and monitoring system is required?

[See more details as set out in Appendix 5: A Parks Statutory Service]

35. The Government should ensure that public green space has adequate protection eg in planning policies. We note that the number of parks and green spaces protected by 'Fields In Trust' protective covenants are continuing to grow [currently 2,608 sites]. The Committee is urged to consider the appropriate mechanisms for how all 27,000 UK parks could obtain a similar level of protection.

H. OUR PUBLIC PARKS – WHAT LEVEL OF BUDGET IS CURRENTLY EMPLOYED AND REQUIRED FOR THE UK'S PARKS?

36. The following is taken from official DCLG statistics and information. *[See Appendix 6: Parks: Local Authority*

Expenditure. See also Appendix 7: Map: National Annual Distribution of Total Expenditure] We note that the figures need refinement as the data is complex. A statutory service would be expected to lead to accurate reporting in the future.

‘ According to data collected from local authorities by DCLG the total amount spent on Open Spaces in England amounted to £972 million in 2014/15. This is a gross expenditure figure which takes no account of income generated by open spaces. It is worth noting that 2014/15 is the first year that expenditure has fallen below £1 billion in cash terms for many years. Data collected by the Welsh and Scottish governments indicate a total for 2013/14, of £190.84 million for Scotland and £75.22 million for Wales. ‘

37. We believe the current management and maintenance funding for Wales and Scotland [2013/14] and England [2014/15] – totalling £1.238 billion - is clearly below the level needed, and below the levels of the past. The DCLG figures quoted above indicate that something in the region of £2 billion per annum is required for basic day to day, primarily revenue management and maintenance.

38. In addition, the HLF £850m total spend (primarily capital investment) since the Parks For People fund was established equates to an average of around £1m capital spend per recipient park for much-needed refurbishment and renovation of some of each park's infrastructure and facilities. As these are generally the larger parks, a more modest guesstimate of an average of around £500,000 capital expenditure needed per park every, say, 50 years, would approximate to a capital cost over a 50 year period of £13.5 billion, or an additional £270m per annum to achieve the same level of much-needed but part-renovation throughout the lifetime of all 27,000 public parks.

39. It should be noted that the HLF projects are rarely a total renovation, but where this has occurred the figures are much higher and hence the £270m pa estimate would need to be much higher by an unknown factor. Lottery money is expected to be and has been match-funded on each occasion, mainly by the local authority (by an average of around 5%-25%, which also would need to be factored in to ascertain a reasonable estimate for an annual capital spend for UK parks.

40. Hence it could be estimated that around £2-3billion per year is required for an effectively funded statutory service.

41. This is huge value for money considering the daily benefits to the entire population of the UK's 27,000 parks, including the major contribution to statutory outcomes (eg health, biodiversity, flood control, crime reduction etc).

42. It is a very small amount when compared to the public cost of other vital Government-funded public services (eg health, education, social services etc) and other key infrastructure (eg energy, transport, flood control etc), or proposed additional military spending (eg nuclear submarines).

43. Hence the necessary funding levels could and should be provided out of taxation.