



# Association for Public Service Excellence

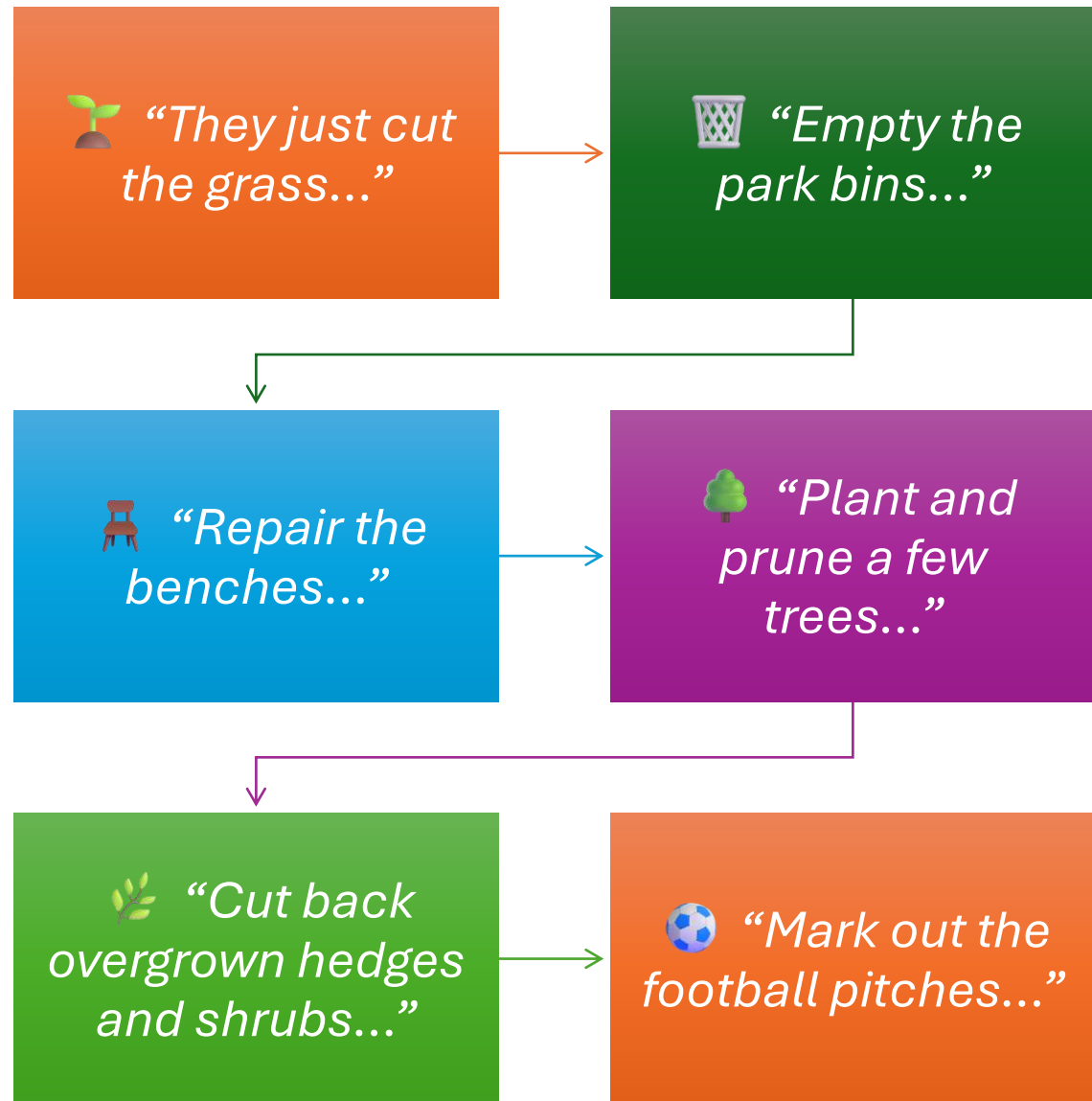
An Introduction for Councilors to Parks  
and Greenspace

Darrin Mellor – APSE Associate

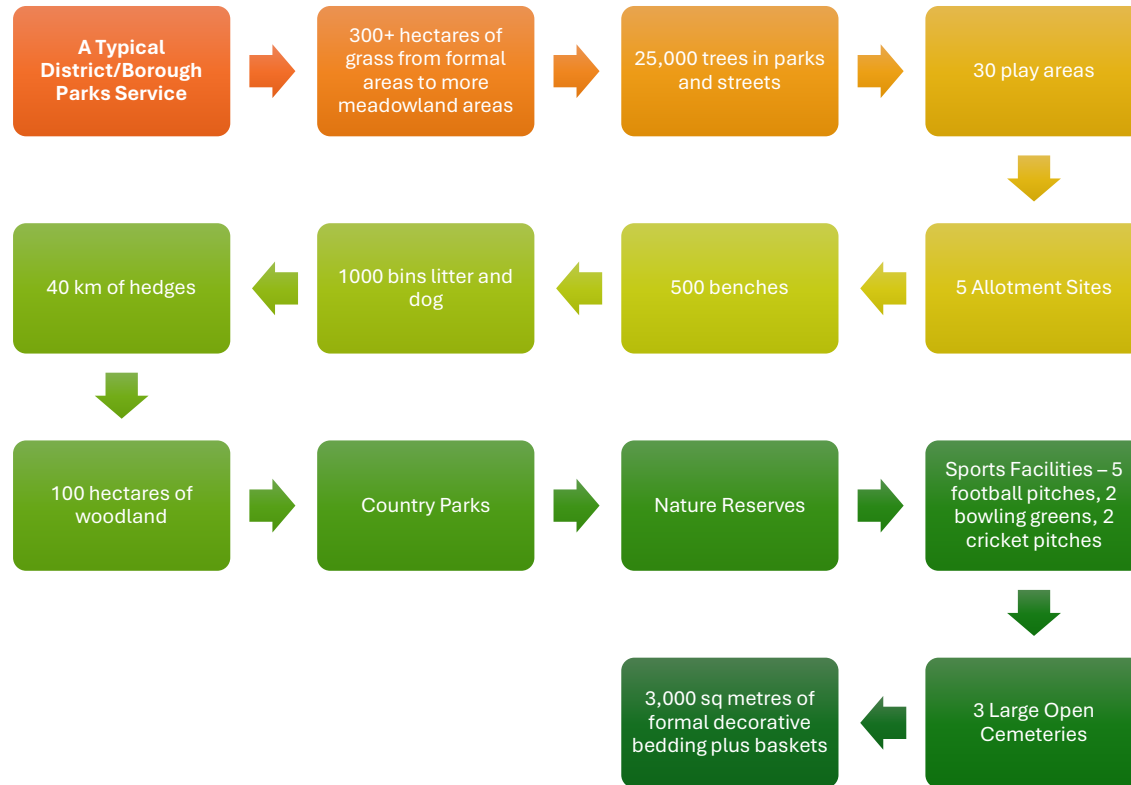
# Who am I? – an introduction Darrin Mellor

- APSE Associate – Parks, Open Spaces & Grounds Maintenance Specialist
- 🌳 42 years' experience in Parks & Grounds Maintenance
- 🏛️ Experience across both the public and private sectors
- 🤝 Independent Consultant since 2016
- 📊 Specialist in service reviews, procurement transformation and commercial improvement
- 🚜 Delivered consultancy and interim management assignments for local authorities across the UK
- 🌱 Passionate about creating sustainable, high-performing parks and green space services

Parks, oh they  
don't do much  
do they!



## What Does a Modern Parks Service Do?



*Modern Parks and Open Spaces Services can be responsible for hundreds of assets, millions of square metres of land and dozens of statutory and discretionary services that touch almost every resident, every day.*

# What Does Your Parks Service Actually Do?

Parks and open spaces services cover a wide range of assets and activities



Parks and Green Spaces



Grass Cutting and Grounds Maintenance



Floral Displays and Bedding



Trees and Woodland Management



Play Areas and Children's Facilities



Sports Pitches and Outdoor Facilities



Outdoor Gyms and MUGAs



Rights of Way, Paths and Trails



Verge and Highway Landscapes



Litter and Street Cleansing



Dog Waste Bins



Public Toilets



Seats, Benches and Street Furniture



Memorials and Cemeteries



Bridges, Structures and Fencing



Watercourses, Ponds and Lakes



Nature Reserves and Conservation Areas



Visitor Facilities, Cafés and Buildings



Events and Community Activities



Fleet, Machinery and Equipment Management



Volunteers and Community Groups



Biodiversity and Environment Management



Inspections, Safety and Risk Management



Asset Management and Planning



Budget Management and Value for Money



Community Engagement and Consultation



Sustainability and Climate Change Action



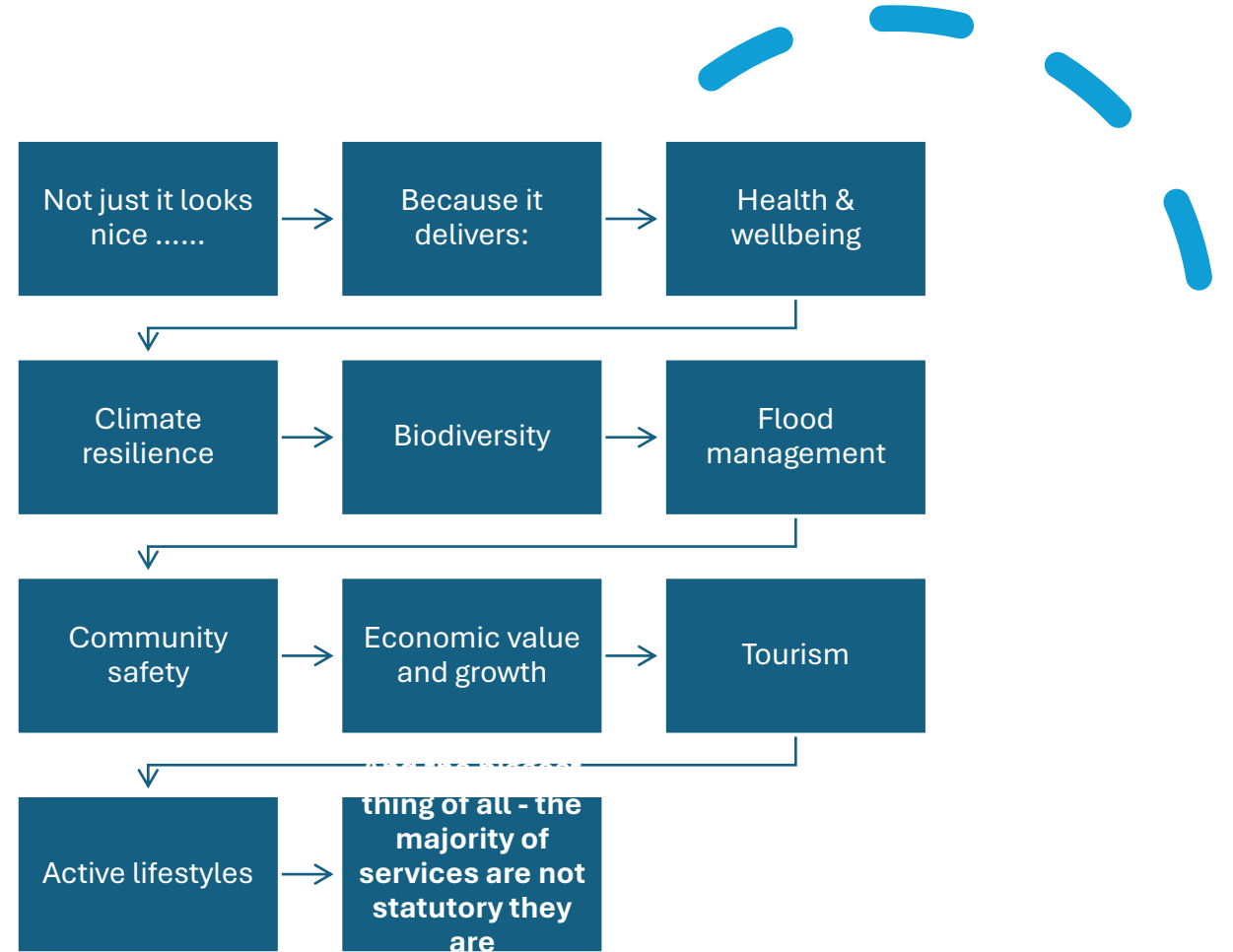
Signage and Wayfinding



Every council is different – services reflect local priorities, assets and community needs.

There is no standard Parks Service – understanding what you provide is the first step to valuing and improving it.

# Why Greenspace Matters



# Where Does The Money Go?

Typical budget areas for a parks and open spaces service



## Staff

The largest cost – people deliver the service



## Fleet & Machinery

Vehicles, plant, tools and equipment



## Fuel & Lubricants

Fuel, oils and consumables



## Trees & Woodland

Tree maintenance, inspections and specialist works



## Play Areas

Inspections, maintenance and safety compliance



## Sports Facilities

Pitches, courts and associated facilities



## Parks & Grounds

General maintenance, planting and enhancements



## Litter & Cleansing

Litter bins, emptying and street cleansing operations



## Buildings & Structures

Pavilions, toilets, fencing, benches and signage



## Overheads & Support Costs

Management, admin, IT, HR and corporate support



## Inspections & Compliance

Health & safety, play inspections, audits and training



## Biodiversity & Sustainability

Habitat management, environmental initiatives



Most costs are fixed – rising wages, fuel, materials and compliance costs continue to increase. Good planning, efficient operations and the right standards help us deliver the best value for residents.

# CURRENT CHALLENGES FACING PARKS SERVICES

Multiple and increasing pressures are driving the need for change

Parks and open spaces services are under more pressure than ever.  
Councils must adapt to limited resources, rising demands and a changing world.

## 1 BUDGET PRESSURES



Continued funding reductions mean doing more with less is the new reality.

## 2 RECRUITMENT



Attracting and retaining skilled, reliable staff is increasingly difficult and competitive.

## 3 TREE SAFETY



Growing legal and public scrutiny around tree risk management and safety compliance.

## 4 CLIMATE CHANGE



More extreme weather, prolonged droughts and flooding impact green spaces and operations.

## 5 BIODIVERSITY



Protecting and enhancing biodiversity while meeting service demands.

## 6 AGING FLEET



An aging fleet increases maintenance costs and reduces efficiency.

## 7 AGING ASSETS



Parks infrastructure and equipment are aging and require ongoing investment.

## 8 RISING PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS



Communities expect higher quality, more accessible and better maintained green spaces.



These challenges demand a smarter, more sustainable and value-driven approach.  
Councils are changing the way parks services are delivered to meet today's needs and tomorrow's challenges.



## DELIVERY MODELS

There is no one-size-fits-all solution.  
Selecting the right delivery model is key to achieving sustainable, high-quality and resilient parks services.



## Delivering Parks and Open Spaces Services

*Today and Tomorrow*

There is no perfect model—only the model that best meets local priorities, budgets and outcomes.

<b>Model</b>	<b>Examples</b>
In-house	Direct Labour
Outsourced	Contractor
Hybrid	Mixed
Shared Service	Joint Council
Parish	Local Delivery

# Biodiversity and the Climate Challenge

Changing Priorities over the years, from short uniform cut grass and shrubs to this

## Biodiversity – A Core Part of Our Service

Protecting and enhancing nature for today and future generations

- Habitat Creation**  
Creating and managing habitats for wildlife to thrive.
- Pollinator Friendly**  
Supporting bees, butterflies and other pollinators.
- Wildlife Corridors & Connectivity**  
Linking green spaces to help wildlife move and flourish.
- Tree & Woodland Management**  
Planting, protecting and managing trees for people and nature.
- Water & Wetlands**  
Protecting and enhancing ponds, streams and wetlands.
- Grassland Management**  
Using the right mowing at the right time to support biodiversity.
- Invasive Species Control**  
Managing invasive species to protect native habitats.
- Species Conservation**  
Protecting and encouraging priority species and habitats.
- Community & Volunteering**  
Working with communities to care for nature together.
- Monitoring & Continuous Improvement**  
Monitoring our impact and improving what we do.

Healthy ecosystems. Thriving wildlife. Better places for everyone.  
Biodiversity is not a luxury – it is essential for resilient, sustainable and future-ready communities.

# Addressing the climate challenge

## 🌍 Reducing Carbon Emissions

- Transition from petrol and diesel machinery to battery-electric equipment where operationally viable.
- Move towards an electric fleet, supported by renewable charging infrastructure.
- Use of low-carbon alternative fuels such as HVO where electric vehicles or plant are not yet practical.
- Reduced vehicle movements through improved route optimisation and scheduling.
- Renewable energy generation at depots and parks buildings (e.g. solar PV).

## 🌿 Climate Resilient Landscapes

- Sustainable planting schemes replacing high-maintenance formal bedding where appropriate, reducing water use and ongoing maintenance costs.
- Increased tree planting to provide shade, improve air quality and capture carbon.
- Creation of wildflower meadows and species-rich grasslands.
- Drought-tolerant planting and climate-resilient tree species.
- Improved soil health through reduced cultivation, composting and mulch programmes.



## 💧 Managing Water and Flood Risk

- Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) in parks, highways and town centres.
- Rain gardens and swales to reduce surface water flooding.
- Natural flood management through wetlands and ponds.
- Rainwater harvesting for irrigation.
- Reduced irrigation through smarter planting design and water-efficient landscaping.

## 🦋 Supporting Nature Recovery

- Connected habitats and wildlife corridors.
- Pollinator-friendly planting.
- Woodland management for biodiversity and resilience.
- Deadwood habitat creation where appropriate.
- Integrated pest management, reducing reliance on herbicides and pesticides.

## 👥 Healthy & Resilient Communities

- Increased tree canopy to reduce urban heat.
- Parks as cooling spaces during heatwaves.
- Green infrastructure improving health and wellbeing.
- Community food growing and orchards.
- Volunteer conservation programmes.
- Environmental education and citizen science projects.
- Designing parks that are resilient to future climate impacts.

**“Climate change is no longer a separate environmental issue—it influences every decision made by modern parks and open spaces services, from tree selection and mowing regimes to fleet replacement, biodiversity, flood management and long-term financial planning.”**



# MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Different views, different needs – all important

RESIDENT 1

Cut the grass every week.



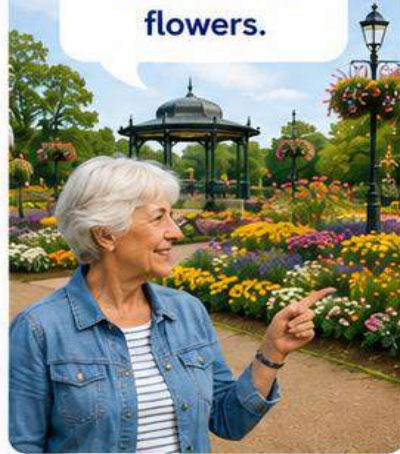
RESIDENT 2

Stop cutting the grass.



RESIDENT 3

Plant more flowers.



RESIDENT 4

Stop spending money on flowers.



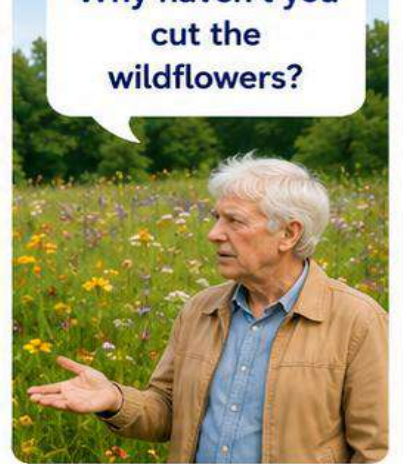
RESIDENT 5

Why don't we have more wildflowers?



RESIDENT 6

Why haven't you cut the wildflowers?



Who's right? .....



.....



**All of them...**

Every resident has a valid view. Our job is to balance priorities, resources and the wider benefit for everyone.



Great services are about listening, explaining and involving communities to deliver well-managed, valued and sustainable green spaces.



# COMMERCIALISATION

MAXIMISING SITE INCOME TO INVEST IN BETTER PARKS AND SERVICES



## DOG WASH STATIONS

Provide income and a facility



## CONCESSIONS

Cafés, mobile catering and ice creams



## EVENTS

Festivals, concerts, parkrun and more



## LICENSED DOG WALKING

Generate income while protecting the park



## ACTIVITIES

Attract visitors and create income



## ROUNDBABOUT SPONSORSHIP

Generate income from key gateway locations



## VEHICLE & FLEET ADVERTISING

Turn your fleet into moving billboards



## MORE INCOME BETTER PARKS

Reinvesting income to improve facilities and services



Commercialisation isn't about selling off our parks – it's about smart opportunities that generate income to reinvest in greener, cleaner, safer and more vibrant spaces for everyone.



INCOME GENERATED



REINVESTMENT IN PARKS



BETTER FACILITIES & SERVICES



STRONGER COMMUNITIES

# YOUR ROLE AS A COUNCILLOR

## Strong leadership today for better parks and communities tomorrow



### YOUR ROLE

- 
**SETTING PRIORITIES** Help decide what matters most for your parks and open spaces.
- 
**BUDGET** Make informed decisions on funding and resource allocation.
- 
**POLICY** Shape policies that guide sustainable and inclusive park management.
- 
**LISTENING TO RESIDENTS** Hear different views and understand community needs.
- 
**SCRUTINY** Hold services to account and ensure high standards and transparency.
- 
**CHAMPIONING COMMUNITIES** Promote the value of parks and support thriving, connected communities.

### FIVE QUESTIONS EVERY COUNCILLOR SHOULD ASK

- 1 Are we maintaining the right standards?** Ensure our parks are safe, welcoming and well looked after.
- 2 How do we know?** Use data, inspections and feedback to measure performance.
- 3 Are we getting value for money?** Make sure resources are used well and deliver the best outcomes.
- 4 What do residents actually want?** Engage with communities to understand needs, ideas and priorities.
- 5 What should our parks look like in ten years?** Plan for the future with a clear vision for next generations.



**YOUR DECISIONS TODAY SHAPE BETTER PARKS AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES FOR TOMORROW**

Ask the right questions. Make informed decisions. Champion your communities.



LEAD



OVERSEE



LISTEN



CHAMPION



DELIVER

# 10. KEY TAKEAWAYS

Investing in parks and open spaces delivers value for today and the future



1

## PARKS IMPROVE LIVES

They support health, wellbeing, communities and the local environment.



2

## GREAT VALUE

Parks provide significant economic, social and environmental returns.



3

## LISTEN TO COMMUNITIES

Understanding different needs helps us make the right decisions.



4

## PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Sustainable management today ensures resilient, thriving spaces tomorrow.



5

## BE INNOVATIVE

New ideas, technology and partnerships can deliver better outcomes.



6

## INVEST WISELY

Targeted investment in the right places delivers the greatest impact.



7

## WORK TOGETHER

Strong partnerships and collaboration unlock opportunities.



8

## MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Different views are normal – clear communication builds understanding and trust.



9

## MAXIMISE INCOME

Commercial opportunities help invest in better parks and services.



10

## MAKE IT COUNT

Good decisions today create better, greener places for everyone.



**BETTER PARKS. STRONGER COMMUNITIES. GREENER FUTURE.**

By working together, we can protect, improve and invest in our parks and open spaces for the benefit of current and future generations.



HEALTHIER  
PEOPLE



STRONGER  
COMMUNITIES



THRIVING  
ENVIRONMENT



BETTER  
VALUE

# A Councillor's Guide to Parks and Grounds Maintenance

Tuesday 30 June, 11.00-12.00



**Thank you!**

Slides will be available to download. You will all receive a link next week

