



Exploring the future of our greenspace at APSE's Parks Seminar 2026

To: all UK authorities

1 Focus of the Seminar

On Thursday 12 March. We welcomed local councils and industry leaders from across the parks, nature and environment sector to the [APSE Parks Seminar 2026](#). This year's event, held at Old Trafford Football Stadium in Manchester, focused on working together to deliver greener, healthier and more resilient places for people and nature.

Local authorities from across the UK were represented at the event, with delegates coming together to collaborate, share insights and discuss the future of the parks service.

Chaired by Cllr Sam Lux, Nottingham City Council Cabinet Member for Climate and Nature, the Seminar explored the national, local and frontline landscape of the parks service, with expert insights from Natural England, the Office for Environmental Protection, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Forest Research, Forestry Commission, APSE and Denbighshire County Council.

1.1 The role of greenspaces in Natural England's strategy

Oliver Harmar, Chief Officer of Strategy at Natural England, opened the Seminar with an exploration of the role of greenspaces in Natural England's New Corporate Strategy. Oliver examined the impact of greenspaces on society and their potential to build cross-community relationships, improve health and wellbeing and mitigate against environmental hazards.

1.2 OEP's role in environmental protection and nature recovery

Helen Venn, Chief Regulatory Officer at the Office for Environmental Protection, discussed OEP's role in protecting the environment, examined the government's progress against the Environmental Improvement Plan and outlined recommendations to drive nature recovery.

1.3 State of the Market: Parks and Greenspaces – Key Findings

APSE Principal Advisor, Matt Ellis, presented the findings of the latest State of the Market: Parks and Greenspaces report and highlighted the pressures facing local authority parks services. Matt

outlined the growing number of councils prioritising biodiversity, the continued financial pressures facing the sector and the importance of engaging with the community and local leadership for long-term sustainability. The full report is available to download from the APSE website [here](#).

1.4 Transforming urban landscapes with wildflower initiatives

Helen McNally, Head of Commercial Landscapes at Pictorial Meadows, shared the transformative work they are doing to regenerate urban landscapes through wildflower planting initiatives. Helen highlighted case studies from across the UK, including the Parkhill Flats in Sheffield and Holbeck in Leeds, where wildflowers had transformed the local environment.

1.5 Local nature recovery strategies in Greater Manchester

Dr Rachel Morrison, Senior Policy and Partnerships Officer – Environment at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, discussed Local Nature Recovery Strategies and their role in driving nature recovery on a local level. Rachel presented Greater Manchester’s Nature for All strategy and outlined their targets to protect wildlife-rich spaces, connect people with greenspaces and build a more resilient environment.

1.6 Protecting dark skies and reducing light pollution in Wales

David Shiel, Area Manager at Denbighshire County Council, presented the vital work being carried out across Wales to safeguard their dark skies, reduce light pollution and protect the local wildlife. David shared the Wales National Good Practice Guidance and outlined the importance of considering light pollution when planning strategies and producing development proposals.

1.7 Impact of local government reorganisation on parks services

Mo Baines, Chief Executive at APSE, discussed the potential impact of local government reorganisation on parks services in England and the need to be resilient ahead of the change, emphasising strong governance, forward planning and workforce stability as critical factors. Mo also highlighted the need to consider the opportunities to look at insourcing Parks services to generate efficiencies and synergy across new unitary authorities.

1.8 Emerging tree health risks and biosecurity workshop

Dr Caroline Gorton, Tree Health Pathologist at Forest Research and Dr Emma Aspin, Biosecurity Officer at the Forestry Commission, led an interactive workshop into emerging pests and diseases, biosecurity risks and practical approaches to protecting urban trees. Delegates from local authority environment and nature teams worked together to discuss a series of real-world scenarios, identifying potential risks, solutions and ‘quick wins’.

1.9 Grasslands, wildflowers and carbon sequestration workshop

Wayne Priestley discussed the evolution of grasslands, the current carbon landscape and the potential for wildflowers and grasslands to support carbon sequestration. Wayne outlined the steps to creating grassland and wildflower strategies and highlighted the importance of community support and transparent communication to gain buy-in from the local community.

2 APSE Comment

APSE will continue to be an advocate for the UK's public parks and open spaces by promoting their value at every opportunity. Through our training suite, advisory groups, research programmes and benchmarking service, membership of APSE can bring significant benefits to those who work in local government – from officers to directors to elected members to chief executives – by helping them comprehensively get to grips with the latest policy and technological developments.

All APSE members can sign up to APSE's Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Network, which is an online network providing at least four learning events across the year, with expert speakers from across local government and the wider parks and greenspace sector. You can sign up to the network using [this link](#).

By signing up to the network you will be informed of future parks seminars if you missed out on this one!

Beatrice McKenzie
Communications Officer, APSE

Matt Ellis
Principal Advisor, APSE

Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular network meetings, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Networks are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE Network meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national networks include:-

- FM and Building Cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Veterans and Military Champions Network
- Local Government Reorganisation Network
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing

Visit www.apse.org.uk for more details.



Association for Public Service Excellence
3rd floor,
Trafford House,
Chester Road, Manchester M32 0RS.
telephone: 0161 772 1810
fax: 0161 772 1811
web: www.apse.org.uk

NEW MUNICIPALISM
Delivering for local people and local economies