Edition One

apse SECTOR NEWS



PARKS AND GREENSPACES

Investing in playgrounds, award-winning parks teams and community gardens

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Editorial

From Parks to Allotments: Supporting Community Green Spaces

APSE's latest report reveals how local councils are adapting their use of glyphosate and adopting integrated weed management practices to reduce reliance on the herbicide - **read the report here.**

The future of local authority green spaces will also be a central focus of the APSE Southern Region Parks and Green Spaces Seminar on Thursday 12 November, where we will explore how councils can protect, adapt and enhance these vital community assets - **book your place here.**

To round off the month, we will be exploring waterfowl management at the Waterfowl in Focus webinar on Wednesday 25 November, examining the challenges and opportunities associated with managing geese, ducks and other waterfowl in parks and public spaces – **join us here.**

Our recent Local Authority Allotments State of the Market report highlights the growing importance of community green spaces and explores how councils are responding to increased demand for allotments through smaller plots - **read the report here.**

Congratulations to Nottingham City Council, winners of the Best Service Team: Parks and Green Spaces award at the recent APSE Service Awards. In this edition, we take a closer look at how they are providing vibrant, accessible and welcoming green spaces for residents across the city.



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Nottingham City Council's award-winning parks and green spaces team

Nottingham City Council was awarded the Best Service Team: Parks and Green Spaces award at the APSE Service Awards in Liverpool, recognising their outstanding commitment to delivering vibrant, accessible and welcoming green spaces for the city.

Over the past year, Nottingham City Council has transformed its parks and green space service through targeted investment and the launch of the Greener, Healthier, Happier Nottingham Strategy.

The council's Greenspace and Natural Environment Service secured more than £1.1 million in external funding, which has been invested in parks, play areas and heritage sites across the city, helping to enhance community spaces, protect local heritage and improve access to high-quality green environments for residents.

Despite financial pressures and increasing demand on public spaces, the service has delivered a transformative programme of capital investment, operational improvement, commercial growth and community engagement. This work has strengthened the city's parks and natural assets, improved the quality of life for residents, and demonstrated a clear commitment to innovation, sustainability and social value.

A major achievement for the council was successfully securing and delivering over £800,000 of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) investment. This funding has enabled a wide range of improvements including new and refurbished play areas, surfacing upgrades, improved signage, biodiversity-focused enhancements and footpath upgrades. Parks across the city benefited from the funding, including Stockhill Park, the Arboretum, Woodthorpe Park and Locksley Park.

The Council also secured £350,000 from the FCC Communities Fund to refurbish and create new playgrounds across the city. The investment has strengthened Nottingham's citywide play offer, ensuring that families have access to modern, inclusive and engaging play spaces regardless of where they live.

As a result of further funding from the National Heritage Lottery Fund, Nottingham's beloved Victoria Embankment paddling pool has been reopened to the public. Local families have been able to enjoy the paddling pool throughout the summer, with thousands of visitors returning to one of the city's most treasured attractions.

Another significant achievement was the return of St Ann's Allotments to Nottingham City Council management. As one of the largest and most historically significant allotment sites in Europe, its return marks an important milestone in the stewardship and preservation of the city's green heritage

The service also opened the Green Heart, a new central green space designed to support biodiversity, recreation and community use. The project delivers 438% biodiversity net gain, planting 34 mature trees including a wide mix of species for climate-resilience and disease-tolerance.

Alongside these investments, Nottingham City Council launched the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, setting out its long-term approach to restoring nature, improving habitat connectivity and strengthening ecological resilience. It provides a clear framework for future investment, partnership working and community involvement, ensuring that nature recovery is embedded across planning, development and land management.

The council's parks and green space offering has been enhanced by the hard work of its dedicated team of volunteers. Volunteer participation has reached its highest level to date, with 480 active volunteers supporting the Nottingham Green Guardians programme and contributing thousands of hours to parks, nature reserves and community projects across the city.

Looking ahead, the service aims to expand nature-based wellbeing programmes, increase social-prescribing referrals and strengthen community-led stewardship of green spaces. Future goals also include securing additional external funding, delivering further biodiversity gains and extending improvements into more neighbourhoods, ensuring Nottingham's green spaces continue to thrive for future generations.



Newry, Mourne and Downe Council announces plans to protect Newcastle's award-winning landmark tree

Comhairle Ceantair
an Iúir, Mhúrn
agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne
and Down
District Council

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has unveiled plans to ensure Newcastle's award winning "bendy tree" remains a distinctive landmark in the heart of the resort for many years to come.

After being crowned UK Tree of the Year 2026, winning a whole new legion of fans and taking more than 30% of the national public vote, the 150 year-old Wych Elm is to have a special support structure constructed to help stabilise it. The iconic tree's root plate is experiencing significant decay, with the new support currently at the design stage.

The success of the affectionately known "bendy tree" in the Woodland Trust competition has been lauded far and wide, but there is one group of people who were especially proud of its success - Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's maintenance crew.

They lovingly look after the instantly recognisable Wych Elm and its sweeping, leafy branches which form an unmistakeable arch. The crew was rooting for the bendy tree in the UK-wide competition, the theme of which was Against All Odds, with trees shortlisted for being impressive, beautiful and sometimes baffling examples of how nature can survive adversity.

Out in all weathers, the maintenance crew is responsible for preserving the tree located on the promenade and within touching distance of the beach and Dundrum Bay, watching over the resort's transformation for a century and a half.

The Council staff cut grass, remove litter and undertake annual and formative pruning at the tree, admitting it is very dear to them. The Wych Elm was once part of a long line of such trees stretching along the promenade with the Council crew delighted with its success and caring for it as one of their own.

The Elm is the sole survivor of a line of trees planted along the original promenade in the 19th Century to shelter it from the sea breeze. It's been battered by gale force winds for decades, which framed its now iconic shape, with the award-winning tree putting the ordinary into extraordinary, adapting to its surroundings and displaying remarkable resolve.



Edinburgh City Council launches new investment programme to create a greener, healthier and fairer Edinburgh

The Council has launched a new investment programme enabling residents and businesses to invest in projects that contribute to a healthier, inclusive and thriving city.

EDINBVRGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

The new investment initiative will give residents and local businesses the opportunity to support projects that reduce climate damaging emissions, prepare for the impacts of climate change and help to protect nature.

The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and a nature emergency in 2023 reflecting the need for urgent and sustained action to reduce emissions and become a climate resilient and nature positive city. Progress has already been made to make sure that Edinburgh is ready to cope with the challenges that a changing climate brings - the Climate Ready Edinburgh Plan and its associated Implementation Plan include the approach the Council is taking to adapt and respond at a local and regional level.

While open to anyone, the new investment programme will enable Edinburgh residents and businesses to be actively involved by investing in projects that contribute to a healthier, inclusive and thriving city to live, work and do business in.

Funds will be used to deliver nature-based projects across the capital to reduce emissions, improve access to nature, offer cooler spaces during heatwaves, reduce flood risk during heavy rainstorms, and boost biodiversity.

This investment phase will include tree planting and delivery of sustainable drainage systems such as rain gardens and rainwater planters in key parts of the city to prevent flooding.

The new investment programme, Edinburgh Green Investment, in partnership with Abundance Investment Ltd, encourages investment from a minimum of £5, with interest at a rate of 4.84%, paid every six months over the course of five years. The funding window will remain open until November 30 2026 or until the target of £1 million is reached.



Local volunteers in Pontnewydd Park transform neglected parkland into community wildlife garden

Local volunteers are transforming a neglected area of parkland into a community wildlife garden and outdoor learning space.

The Friends of Pontnewydd Park group is turning a former rose garden into an accessible community wildlife garden with improved paths, wildflower beds, canal boat shaped planters, a flowering pollinator stone wall and woodland play and learning spaces.

The transformation is the latest chapter in the group's ongoing revival of the former miners' welfare park in Cwmbran - supported by the new Torfaen Deal, which aims to empower communities to tackle local issues.

As part of the project, the Friends group have consulted with local residents and schools and provided the manpower, with the council helping the group to develop the plans and secure funding.
The council's Healthy Planet, Healthy People team and volunteer Nature Connectors will continue to support the project through community engagement activities and events.

The project has received almost £15,000 from The National Lottery Community Fund's Sustainable Steps programme and was developed with support from Egin consultants and Torfaen Council.

Recent sponsorship from Morgan Sindall has also helped the group reinstate park toilets for use by community groups and schools.

TORFAEN COUNTY BOROUGH
BWRDEISTREF SIROL TORFAEN

Leicester City Council awarded £1.5m million to refurbish and enhance outdoor community spaces across the city

Leicester City Council has been awarded £1.5 million from the Government's Pride in Place Impact Fund to refurbish and enhance 14 outdoor community spaces across the city.

The city council is set to contribute an additional £230,000 of Section 106 developer contributions as match-funding for the project.

The new investment will see equipment completely overhauled on ten neighbourhood parks and play areas. Work is already finished at Loughborough Road play area, with a revamp of the play equipment at Thomasson Road playground due to be complete in the next couple of weeks.

Work on the remaining eight schemes expected to be complete by spring 2027. These will include play areas at Appleton Park; Glovers Walk, in Beaumont Leys; Windmill Park on Keyham Lane; Kingfisher Youth Centre, in Saffron; Rushey Fields; St Helen's Close; Stoughton Street; and the toddlers' play area at Western Park.

There are major improvements planned for the play area in award-winning Abbey Park, which will see its existing play equipment completely overhauled and a new, large-scale multi-play unit installed, along with new landscaping.

The government funding also will support the creation of space for community food growing in New Parks and Saffron. The Western Park Freeriders dirt jump trails are also currently being overhauled as part of the programme.

Leicester City Council

Rain gardens installed in Swansea communities

Cyngor Abertawe Swansea Council

A series of improvements aimed at increasing green infrastructure, creating better walking and cycle links and increasing protection against flooding are being installed in a Swansea community.

Plants, shrubs and improved pedestrian areas are part of a number of measures, better known as 'rain gardens' and are currently being created at key locations within the Sandfields/St Helen's area.

Rain gardens capture water runoff from the road and pavements. Its trees, shrubs and flowers help reduce the risk of flooding and help decrease pollution getting into waterways and harming ecosystems.

They also offer food and shelter to pollinators all year round and provides a splash of colour through the seasons.

The improvements are also part of Swansea Council's efforts to introduce better walking and cycling infrastructure across the city, following a successful grant bid to the Welsh Government's Active Travel programme.

Further funding for the scheme has been provided via the Welsh Government - Local Places for Nature fund and Natural Resources Wales.

Sites currently being improved include Phillips Parade and Rodney Street.The improvements follow on from previous consultation with residents and businesses in the area and was supported by community regeneration experts - Urban Foundry, who helped develop the innovative plans.

The latest works follow on from similar measures which have been completed directly outside St Helen's Primary School.
Improved paving was also installed, along with dropped kerbs, providing better access for those travelling to and from the school, whether on foot or using bikes and scooters.

Stuart Davies, Head of Service for Transport and Highways in Swansea Council, said: "These innovative measures are providing local communities with a range of benefits where links between streets for walkers and cyclists are improved.

"The introduction of rain gardens also provides a green and sustainable solution for spots within communities where standing water can occur during heavy rainfall.

A further 'rain garden' has been installed at the end of Burrows Road, adjacent to Oystermouth Road.

The rain garden projects are all part of the council's vision to help develop greener spaces, cleaner air and lower carbon emissions in communities across the city.



Leeds City Council introduces the 'goat' of lawnmowers to Roundhay grassland

Leeds City Council has introduced a herd of goats to the grassland on Asket Hill to protect and encourage biodiversity of the area.

By grazing on the land, the goats will control shrubs and brambles in a natural way and maintain the field which can be difficult to access due to the steep terrain.

By grazing on the land, the goats will control shrubs and brambles in a natural way and maintain the field which can be difficult to access due to the steep terrain.

The rare breed Royal Golden Guernsey goats, supplied by Castle Howard-based Mossy Oaks, can live outdoors all year round in harsh environments, making them perfect for maintaining and improving habitats for wildlife.

Asket Hill is a local wildlife site recognised for its species-rich lowland meadow, which is a threatened type of habitat.

These special habitats support a wide variety of wildflowers and insects, providing an important food source for birds and bats, which will be protected through letting goats graze the field rather than using machinery.

Species-rich grasslands have declined by 97% over the last 50 years, and losses are still continuing.

Conservation grazing with goats mimics the ecological role that would have been held by wild herbivores historically found in the area.

Currently running as a pilot scheme, the plan is for the goats to return each year.



Huge funding boost for trees in Plymouth and beyond

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Up to one million trees could be planted across Plymouth and surrounding areas in the next 20 years thanks to almost £30 million in Government funding.

The money, funded by DEFRA and England's Community Forests network's flagship Trees for Climate programme, was awarded to the Council as lead partner and accountable body for the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest partnership and will allow for the delivery of an ambitious programme of tree planting and woodland creation and establishment.

The investment will also provide funding for Plymouth's own ambitions to increase street tree planting, enhance green spaces and improve access to nature across the city, helping deliver the priorities set out in the Plymouth Plan for Nature and People.

Since its launch in 2021, the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest has gone from strength to strength and was this year crowned England's Community Forest of the Year 2026.

Over 500,000 trees have already been planted across more than 190 sites using initial £14.2 million of external funding, with more than 5,000 trees planted in Plymouth alone during the most recent planting season.

Earlier this year, the partnership adopted its new 25-year Forest Plan, which aims to significantly increase tree cover across Plymouth and South West Devon, create 3,000 hectares of new woodland and bring existing woodlands into sustainable management by 2050.

The Community Forest stretches from the South Devon coast, across Plymouth and into the rolling landscapes of Dartmoor National Park.

Unlike a traditional forest confined to one location, a Community Forest is a network of trees and woodlands spread across the region. From street trees in Plymouth and parkland planting to school-based Miyawaki mini forests, community orchards, agroforestry and large-scale woodland creation on farms, every project contributes to a connected landscape that benefits people, wildlife and the climate.

Communities are at the heart of this work with thousands of people taking part in planting days, woodland care, training, events and local greenspace projects each year. Charities, landowners, farmers and community groups, have played a key role alongside partners, local authorities, environmental organisations, schools and volunteers in delivering tree planting projects across both urban and rural landscapes.

The community forest also aims to boost local employment by supporting 1,000 woodland and forestry jobs by 2050. This includes training tree growers, woodland managers, timber workers, rangers and green skills apprentices.

The community forest is a partnership between Plymouth City Council, National Trust, Woodland Trust, Dartmoor National Park Authority, Devon County Council, South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council.

Working with communities, farmers, landowners, schools and delivery partners, the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest will continue expanding tree cover across the region, creating a legacy for future generations.



Upcoming events

Do you want to share best practice, network with local government colleagues and keep up to date with the latest developments in parks and green space services? Explore our upcoming events:



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