

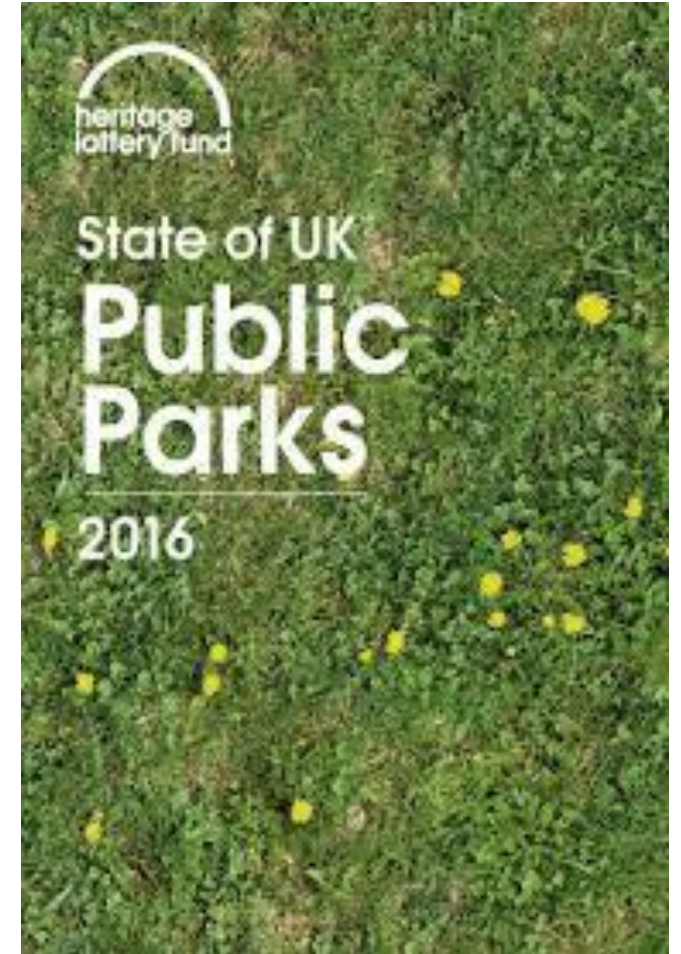
The Future of the UK's Public Parks



Background



- There are an estimated 27,000 public parks in Britain
- Local authorities have no statutory duty to fund and maintain public parks
- An estimated 2.6bn visits are made to public parks each year
- A 2016 report by the Heritage Lottery Fund found 92 – 95% per cent of parks managers had seen cuts to their budgets since 2012



The Findings of the 'State of UK Parks 2016' Report

- People use their parks regularly and visitor numbers are increasing
- Park maintenance budgets continue to fall
- Staff and skills are being lost
- The quality of parks is expected to decline
- Park services are facing increasing inequality
- Park management will be much more varied in the future
- Sources of external income are on the rise
- Communities are doing more for their parks
- Local authority commitment to parks does make a difference

How are Parks budgets changing?



- **In the past three years (2013 –15), what have been the changes in your revenue budgets**

- Budget increased = 0%
- Not changed = 8.3%
- Decreased by less than 10% = 23.2%
- Decreased by between 10% and 20% = 35.7%
- Decreased by more than 20% = 32.7%

In the next three years (2017–19), what would you say the changes in your revenue budgets will be?

- Budget increase = 0%
- Not change = 5.2%
- Decrease by less than 10% = 19.1%
- **Decrease by between 10% and 20% = 54.9%**
- Decrease by more than = 20%

Public parks inquiry



- After a great deal of stakeholder pressure, in July 2016 The Communities and Local Government Committee launches an inquiry into public parks to examine the impact of reduced local authority budgets on these open spaces and consider concerns that their existence is under threat.
- The Committee looks at how parks should be supported now and in the future. This includes studying alternative management and funding models, such as a mutual or a trust.
- *“We know people value their local spaces, and we want to develop a clear picture of the community benefits of public parks as well as who is using them, how often and for what?”*

Areas of investigation

- **Who** uses parks and open spaces, how often and for what
- The contribution of parks to the **health and well-being** of communities
- The impact of reductions in local authority **budgets** on parks
- What the **administrative status** of parks should be in light of declining local authority resources for non-statutory services
- How new and existing parks can best be **supported**
- What additional or alternative **funding** is available and what scope is there for local authorities to generate revenue from park users
- What the advantages and disadvantages are of other **management models**, such as privatisation, outsourcing or mutualisation



Responses to the UK Parks Inquiry



- The Committee has received nearly 400 formal written evidence submissions and more than 13,000 surveys completed online or face to face in parks since launching its inquiry in July 2016.
 - APSE, HLF, RTPI, KBT, TCPA, Natural England, Historic England, BLF, The Parks Alliance etc.
 - Friends Groups, Universities, Biodiversity Groups, Sports England, Football Association, Local authorities, Woodland Trust, Urban Pollinators, Frog Life etc.
 - Schools, Play groups, Horse Clubs, Angling groups, Ramblers, individuals etc.
- The Communities and Local Government Committee receives a petition signed by more than 273,000 people during an evidence session for its inquiry into the future of public parks.



APSE COMMENTS ON PARKS INQUIRY



- highlighted the value both to the public and the wider natural environment of parks and green spaces, together with the level of use and public support.
- easily accessible and free to use,
- value of green spaces to the National Health Service alone, is in excess of £2.1 billion per annum in reduced health treatment costs.
- 2010 revenue support grant made up 80% of council budget expenditure, but by 2019/20 this will fall to 5%. It is therefore likely that non-statutory services such as parks and greenspace provision could be lost unless other sources of funding can be found.
- no shortage of ideas as to how to generate income, in APSE's State of the Market Report on Parks (2016) Parks Managers reported over 30 different income generating activities.
- many of these alternative sources of funding are still ideas and proposals and even if implemented, are unlikely to redress the loss of previous and projected funding losses, even the summary of the Learning to Rethink Parks (2016) report by Nesta states, '*Rethinking Parks has shown the **potential** of new approaches to raise funding or cut costs in a way that **help** sustain public parks*'.
- consider how HLF funding is spent and rather than investing in improving, or regenerating facilities people are finding difficult to maintain, it could be used to help develop the initiatives already highlighted and tested, so as to allow them to become blueprints for others to follow.

Real Benefits

- 75% of respondents felt public parks should be a **statutory duty** for local authorities. At a time when many non-statutory services are under threat, APSE suggests ways to address the parks funding issue without putting extra pressure on non-statutory services.
- Many **stakeholders benefit** from parks and greenspaces, they need to be made aware of what they could lose if parks and greenspaces continue to decline or even disappear
- APSE is calling for a recognition of the benefits parks bring in **reducing upstream costs** in other public services and for funding to be allocated on an invest to save approach to prevention rather cure activities
- Government, both national and local, must accept that parks present a significant opportunity to use their existing assets to **save considerable sums for the public purse** for generations and should not be allowed to decline, be broken up or disposed of on a current budgetary savings whim.
- Government often talks of efficiency, **removing upstream costs** and **prevention not cure**, parks present a significant opportunity to use existing assets to save huge sums for the public purse for decades to come if they continue to receive funding at present

Are Parks really worth the effort?

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