

**A review of London's parks and green spaces:
strategy, governance and value**

for

THE LONDON GREEN SPACES COMMISSION

prepared by

Parks for London

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Canonbury Park, Islington

Hackney Marshes

Caledonian Park, Islington

Wandsworth Park

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reveals the key issues raised by several London portfolio holders, chief executives and Borough green space managers about the need for a strategic approach to green space management, the importance of governance and the need to recognise the value of their green spaces.

Historic approaches to green space planning and management can limit the full multifunctional benefits of green spaces being realised. Greater change might be achieved by developing strategic policy along-side service transformation across siloed departments, but Boroughs need support to develop and implement such changes. The promotion of exemplar projects, best practice and learning from unsuccessful approaches should assist the process. Boroughs need to pay attention to both the wider sub-regional and local context and demographics rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. However, Borough-specific strategy and funding often work against the former. London's wider governance through the GLA and London Councils has the potential to incentivise greater collaboration at a sub-regional scale.

Borough governance and service delivery varies greatly and is ever changing, and decisions are often driven by short-term thinking – exacerbated by the four-year election cycle. A wider range of stakeholders are getting involved with green spaces and this is leading to more diversified management solutions, however such stakeholder- and community-based organisations need to be nurtured.

The lack of a robust evidence base makes it hard for local authorities to demonstrate value for money or overcome the perception that 'parks' do not require ongoing investment. Therefore, the need to raise the profile of green spaces, including how they support other council strategies and services, is important. Revealing the economic value of parks by supporting natural capital accounting and explaining the concept to decision makers would help the process. This includes identifying relevant data and tools, which are critical to supporting arguments for the economic value of green space. Similarly, acknowledging the London-wide benefits that accrue if green spaces are managed as green infrastructure and adopting relevant policies also could raise the profile of green spaces and how they fit into and support broader environmental, economic, social and health strategies, plans and goals.

INTRODUCTION

"London's parks are at a crossroads and we cannot continue as we have in the past – the money simply isn't there. If we pass the tipping point, communities risk losing control of parks, along with democratic accountability for the open spaces that they value so much.

London Boroughs face increasing financial pressure and the strain is showing on the resources available for parks, leisure and sports facilities. The current climate of austerity does not suggest the situation will improve.

There is doubt about whether or not councils will be able to provide support for the service as money is diverted to meet statutory responsibilities such as adult social care and elderly care."

– Cllr Julian Bell, Chair of London Councils' Transport and Environment Committee (2015).¹

¹ <https://www.localgov.co.uk/London%27s-parks-on-the-brink-of-%27privatisation%27/38911>

London's parks and green spaces have always been subject to a boom and bust cycle of funding. This has been exacerbated in recent years by a more fundamental restructuring of public-sector finances which has resulted in substantial and long-lasting reductions in funding for public parks and green spaces.

The *Public Parks* report of the Communities and Local Government Committee has highlighted that because of these constraints there needs to be a reshaping of local authority governance and financing of parks and green spaces, complemented by new ways of securing resources through social investment and private sector finance.² Indeed, one of its key recommendations is:

"To support service transformation which parks require, key stakeholders should work with local authorities which are pioneering alternative management models or funding arrangements, to address the barriers and manage the risks which arise and identify additional transitional support or funding which may be appropriate to nurture the development of such models".

The London Assembly have also identified this as an issue in their *Park Life* report.³ Recommendation 4 of the report states:

"The Mayor should help local authorities develop a better understanding of the benefits, challenges and implications of alternative delivery methods".

Several Boroughs have put in place arrangements to address the short-term funding crisis. These include establishing charitable trusts or establishing joint services, but few have been able to undertake a strategic review of their service and develop proposals for service transformation in line with the recommendation from the Public Parks inquiry.

In response to the *Park Life* report, DCLG have committed to establish a national Parks Action Group tasked with bringing forward proposals to address some of the issues faced by public parks and other green spaces across England. This is being mirrored in London by the establishment of a London Green Spaces Commission.

The London Green Spaces Commission has the following objectives:

1. *Articulate and communicate the common problems faced by London Borough parks services and highlight the potential impact of continued underinvestment in London's parks and public green spaces. This will build on the findings of the review of London Borough Park Services undertaken by Parks for London.*
2. *Use new knowledge and information about the economic value of London's parks and public green spaces to demonstrate the need for continued investment by Boroughs and other key stakeholders, in order to maximise the opportunity to deliver social and environmental benefits. This will build on the findings of the Natural Capital Account for London's Public Green Spaces.*⁴

² Communities and Local Government Committee (CLGC), House of Commons, 2017. Public parks. (HC 45, Seventh report of session 2016 -17) 11 February 2017. [online] Available: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmcomloc/45/45.pdf>. Accessed: 17 April 2018.

³ London Assembly Environment Committee (LAEC), 2017. Park life: ensuring green spaces remain a hit with Londoners. [online] Available: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/environment_committee_-_park_life_report.pdf. Accessed: 25 May 2018.

⁴ Vivid Economics Limited, 2017. Natural capital accounts for public green space in London. [online] Available: www.london.gov.uk/natural-capital-account. Accessed: 30 September 2018.

3. *Build a broad partnership of key decision-makers who recognise the value of London's parks and public green spaces and can influence future investment decisions and leverage additional sources of finance.*
4. *Explore new more sustainable business models for parks services in London Boroughs so that they can maintain and increase investment in these assets to secure the public benefits they provide. These business models should consider new forms of finance and/or new or complementary governance structures.*

The Commission needs to have a good evidence base that demonstrates the real and significant economic value of parks and green spaces. Consequently, the Mayor of London, in partnership with National Trust and Heritage Lottery Fund, has published a *Natural Capital Account for London's Public Green Spaces* which helps to reveal their economic value.⁵

The Commission will also need to understand the current state of play with regards to how Borough existing green space services are structured and funded, and how the services that they provide contribute to wider objectives of local authorities and their partners. Although Boroughs have shared information and experience about new models that some have begun to operate, there is no up-to-date review that can help inform the work of the Commission.

This report provides such a review; it summarises the current arrangements in London Boroughs for the funding, managing and governing local authority parks and green spaces. These arrangements are in a constant state of flux and are expected to continue to change.

The research conducted for this report addresses solely publicly accessible green spaces managed by local authorities across London. It does not include information from other large landowners such as The Royal Parks, the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority or small independent park trusts.

This report was written by Dr Meredith Whitten with additional information from Parks for London. It combines feedback from several sources: face-to-face interviews conducted with portfolio holders, chief executives and council green space managers; a workshop for green space managers and other interested parties (e.g. Environment Directors); and a survey of London's Borough Heads of Service (or equivalent). The challenges regarding the development of a longer-term sustainable resourcing of London's green spaces that were mentioned most often by participants in this research are discussed below. While this is in no way intended to be an exhaustive list, the challenges highlighted here provide an overview of key issues relating to green space funding, management, maintenance and governance across the capital. Quotes from in-person interviews are used throughout the report to illustrate, in respondents' own words, the advantages and challenges surrounding delivery and management of parks and green spaces within their Boroughs. These respondents spoke openly and provided insightful comments; to respect this, their anonymity is maintained here.

⁵ www.london.gov.uk/natural-capital-account

CHALLENGE 1 – STRATEGIC APPROACH

1a A more strategic approach to green space planning and management would realise the multifunctional benefits of green space –

In general, the planning, design and management of green space is not integrated into a strategic, Borough-wide approach to fulfilling local authorities' core statutory functions. Instead, green spaces largely remain a separate, non-statutory, or discretionary, service. Thus, they are not recognised for the value they could add to a range of other statutory council services, such as public health and well-being, economic development, social care, and environmental resilience. Although examples of collaboration across a council's functional areas exist, this is the exception, not the norm. Instead, a silo

“I think the fundamental problem parks often have is it delivers on so many things that it ends up focused on nothing. ... And I think that's the problem when the Council still ... they still work a bit in silos and you've got to try and break across that, ... So we could be contributing to someone else and just never get any recognition. So the challenge is to make sure that people are well aware of what we are contributing to those different outcomes” (interview respondent 8).

approach to council services and budgets perpetuates a lack of strategic planning and cross-department collaboration, meaning the role a parks and green space service could play in the delivery of other council services is overlooked.

Parks and green spaces, and the existing or potential services they provide, are rarely considered in many local authority strategies relating to housing, public health

and education, amongst others, other than in relation to parks being constraints to development or parks providing generic benefits such as space for play or exercise. The current collaboration mentioned most often involved the green space team working with public health colleagues on the use of public health funds to install outdoor gyms in parks. However, respondents said such efforts largely occur on an ad-hoc basis and do not form part of a long-term strategic plan of investment in public health initiatives utilising green space networks.

A lack of a more integrated approach is illustrated, ironically, by the existence of a variety of strategies directly related to parks and green spaces. For example, a council may have a suite of strategies for open space, healthy play, sport and biodiversity, but a fully integrated approach to the planning, design and management of green space that could better address the potential collaboration and tensions across these areas, in the form of an overarching green infrastructure strategy, for example, rarely exists.

Most green spaces are planned and managed in relation to the administrative boundaries of London's 32 Boroughs and the City of London, and not on a wider sub-regional or London-wide scale, even though the benefits of green spaces transcend Borough boundaries and a more strategic and integrated approach can lead to synergies and efficiencies in both provision and function of the wider green space network. For example, River Catchment Partnerships along river corridors provide a strategic approach to green space management across Borough boundaries for handling flood management and water quality. On a broader scale, initiatives such as the Wandle Valley Regional Park aim to ensure that at a sub-regional level walking and cycling links adhere to a common approach to design, management and signage, and the recreational offer of a connected network contributes to health and well-being, environmental, and regeneration objectives on a wider scale than simply the Borough level. Yet, tension exists around whether the primary function of green space is to serve the local community or to benefit Londoners in general. This tension is exacerbated by the limited, Borough-specific approach to funding and managing London's green spaces.

1b Revenue funding concerns cause local authorities to take a short-term approach to generating funds – Budget constraints across local government have resulted in councils focusing on balancing the books in the short term. This often has particular ramifications for

green space

funding, management and maintenance and how green space is integrated into other council services, functions and budgets because of the issues described in 1a above. The need for discretionary

“They downgraded parks maintenance, which is an easy saving to do from an accountant's perspective on a spreadsheet, and on day one you don't really see the difference. On day 90 you probably don't see the difference, but over a period of time the quality goes down and down and down, the usage level will go down and down and down, the anti-social behaviour goes up and up and up, and they actually end up costing more not less for all of those reasons. So I think they've always been an easy hit, it's not a statutory service, it hasn't got to be provided” (interview respondent 11).

services such as

parks and green spaces to be seen to be as cost-effective as possible drives decision making and reinforces a short-term approach, as local councils concentrate on the next budget cycle and decisions are made based on what services can be reduced or made more efficient to deliver the cost-savings needed in the immediate budget cycle. Due to this focus on cost-reduction in recent years, many councils have not been able to consider new policy approaches such as natural capital accounting that require consistent and long-term investment to maintain, just as other infrastructure such as highways do.

With central government further reducing the revenue support grants to local authorities by 2020, the focus on minimising local government spending and increasing income targets will intensify. This already has caused local authorities to look for ways to commercialise or generate additional revenue from their green spaces. Respondents described tension regarding commercialisation of parks and green space, namely from trying to strike a balance between maximising income generation of these spaces and minimising impact on residents. While the income generated from events and lettings/licences can make an important contribution to a council's corporate income and, in some cases, directly to the green space budget (if it is ringfenced), the revenue derived from events is sometimes minimal, in comparison with the

disruption (whether real or perceived) to residents and green space users. Respondents from Inner London Boroughs were particularly concerned about the impact of commercial events on

“I don’t think we’re at capacity or full potential in terms of income generation. We’re good, but we’re not as good as we could be. But, a lot of that comes down to balance, so if we wanted to generate £1m this year from income, I could do it tomorrow. ... But, the Councillors’ perspective is no, this is primarily a public open space that should be open to the public. ... We need to find that balance of events and we do have events, obviously, we have lots of events but a big concert or a festival weekend is going to take that park out of commission for at least two weeks. It is going to cause a lot of damage which we then take a year to recover, etc. So it is all about balance” (interview respondent 6).

residents, although respondents in Outer London also said the issue of holding large-scale events in parks concerned them, as well. However, some respondents said restricting use of a green space for a few days a year for commercial purposes is a necessary and acceptable trade-off councils should consider if it keeps green spaces free and accessible the rest of the year.

Deriving income from green space and managing these spaces as green infrastructure assets providing critical environmental services are not mutually exclusive goals. However, the current environment of severely decreased budgets is driving local

authorities to focus largely on the former with insufficient consideration for the latter.

The cost of maintaining parks and green spaces varies greatly from Borough to Borough - see Figures 1 & 2, below. Every Borough has a different range of assets/infrastructure and approach to management from which they can derive income. Some Boroughs are keeping their net revenue costs low by generating income from fees and charges such as events, lettings and leases.

The cost of maintaining inner London Boroughs tends to be greater than outer Boroughs, which is not surprising since their spaces are generally smaller and more intensively used/managed and managed. However, when looking at cost/head of population there is little correlation between where the Borough is located.

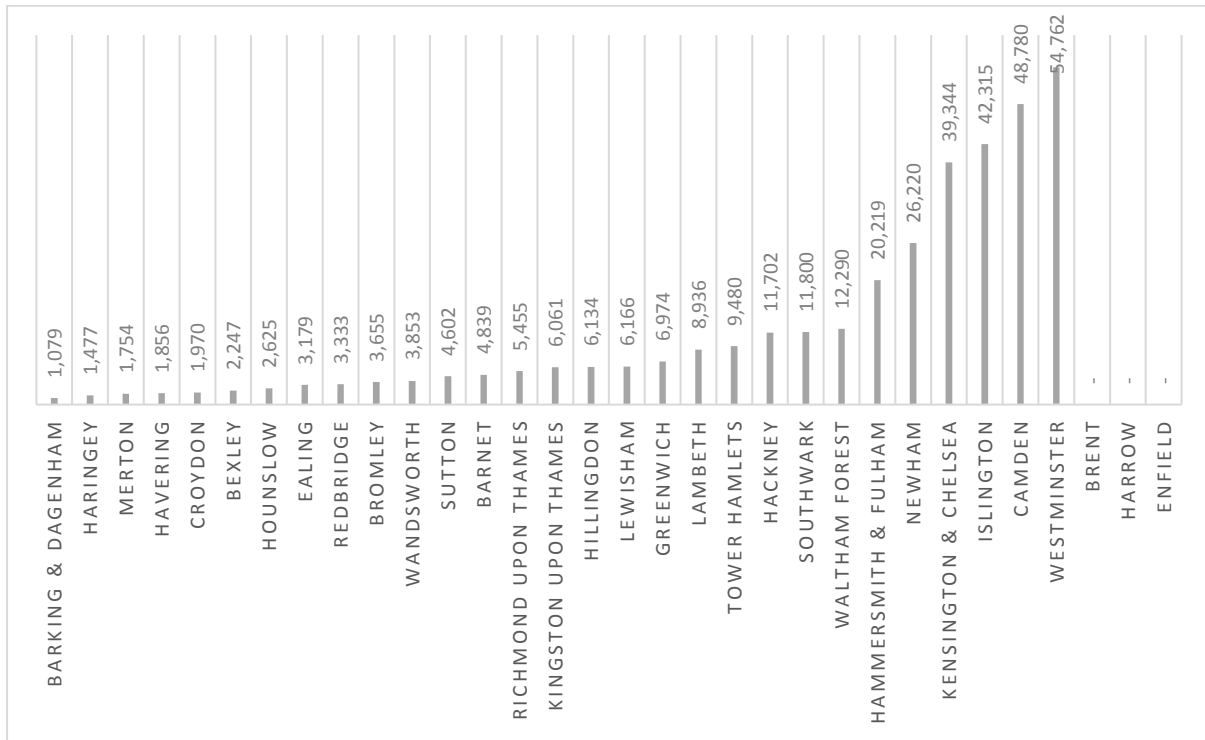


Fig 1: Cost £ per hectare for London Boroughs in 2018-19 for parks service

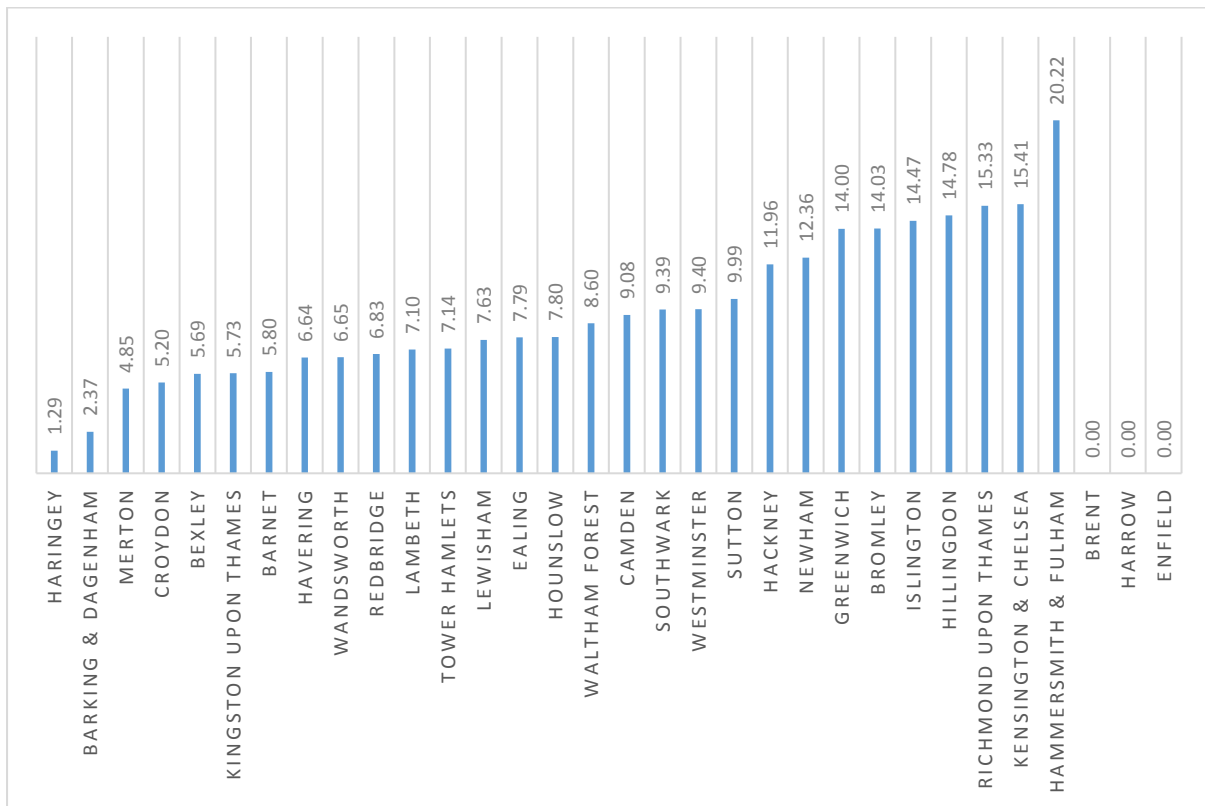


Fig 2: Cost (£) per head of population for London Boroughs in 2018-19 for parks service

1c Local context and demographic change matter – Respondents frequently mentioned local context, emphasising that a one-size-fits-all approach to green space management is not effective. Demands on and supply of green space differ across London because of the demographic and socioeconomic makeup of a Borough or because of differing planning, housing, environment or other policies.

Indeed, differences between Inner and Outer London population density can be significant. Inner London accounts for 20 percent of the area of Greater London, yet 40 percent of its population.^{6,7}

Inner London also has denser development with smaller green spaces, whereas in Outer London green spaces are larger and residents are more likely to have their own gardens. Inner London is 21.7 percent green, compared to 42.5 percent for Outer London.⁸ With higher population and densification, Inner

“I think now there's a greater understanding of firstly the change in demographics and the change in density of population and therefore what people might want to use parks for” (interview respondent 10).

London councils generally face different pressures on their green spaces than Outer London councils. Nevertheless, some of the fastest-growing areas in the capital are in the Opportunity Areas in Outer London, which are often areas with limited existing green space.⁹

Inner London Boroughs also have higher jobs densities, which can lead to a higher intensity of use of green space during the working day especially at lunchtime and early evening during the summer months, by non-Borough residents. In Inner London, there are 3.5 million jobs, equalling a jobs density of 1.4.¹⁰ In Outer London, the 2.4 million jobs result in a jobs density of 0.7.¹¹ Moreover, some Boroughs' green spaces and the Royal Parks have a high intensity of use by tourists, also peaking in the summer months. Further, strategies focusing on London's night-time economy have an impact on London's parks and green spaces. The Mayor's office, for example, has noted that parks “could also offer more at night, building on the success a number are already having by extending their opening hours.”¹² Thus, integrating London's green spaces into the city's growing night-time economy has the potential to put more demand on these spaces.

⁶ Greater London Authority (GLA), 2018. *Land Area and Population Density, Ward and Borough*. Available: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/land-area-and-population-density-ward-and-borough>. Accessed: 8 July 2018.

⁷ Greater London Authority (GLA), 2017. *London Borough Profiles*. Available: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/london-borough-profiles>. Accessed: 18 June 2018.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Greater London Authority (GLA). The Opportunity Areas. <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/implementing-london-plan/opportunity-areas/opportunity-areas-map-0>

¹⁰ Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2018. *Jobs and Job Density*. Available: <https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/jobs-and-job-density-borough/2018-02-26T13:11:43.31/jobs-and-job-density.xls>. Accessed: 2 July 2018.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Mayor of London, 31 January 2019. “London's night-time economy can help save the high street” [press release]. Available: <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/night-time-economy-can-help-save-the-high-street>. Accessed: 2 February 2019.

Changing populations and demographics across London affect use of and demand on green space. Also, innovations in planning and development are affecting how green spaces are provided and managed, e.g. creation of more private green spaces within developments and privately-owned public spaces (POPS). Most respondents commented on the current pace of growth and development as well as the growth predicted to occur in their Borough over the next 10-20 years. This applied to both Inner and Outer London Boroughs. Such growth and development will continue to add

*“More city people use Finsbury Square, with no benefit to residents. It's largely been created for the benefit of workers, none of whom are local residents. And, yet, more city firms are developing, ... more businesses are being created, with more influx of workers, who are going to make use of the local parks to eat lunch and whatever”
(interview respondent 9).*

pressure on green spaces and will likely have an impact on other council services. For example, a lack of access to green space could result in an increase in poor mental and physical health for more vulnerable or disadvantaged Londoners.

CHALLENGE 2 – GOVERNANCE

2a Governance arrangements and methods of service delivery vary greatly and change often – Where a parks and green space service is located within a local council, organisational structures vary from Borough to Borough. Green space services are in many different departments, but most commonly are located within environment (waste), or community and cultural services, which typically includes discretionary services such as libraries, sport and leisure. See Appendices 5 & 6.

In addition to where the parks service sits within a council, a range of methods for delivering parks and green space services has been adopted across London. These include traditional in-house provision or outsourced to a contractor, the use of service-level agreements and partnerships with third parties (e.g. charities and user/friends groups), joint service (e.g. with one or more other councils), and trusts. Two-thirds of Boroughs are currently re-evaluating how their services are provided.

Table 1: How London’s parks and green space services are delivered

Parks & green space service	Grounds maintenance function	Client function outsourced	Joint Borough service	Boroughs
In house	Direct labour			15 Boroughs
	Trading company			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ealing • Hounslow
Outsourced	Contractor(s)			13 Boroughs
		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bromley • Wandsworth
		✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Richmond & Wandsworth
Trust	Whole service			Redbridge

The operational and delivery side of parks and green spaces services in London fall into one of three categories :

- (i) *In-house*: Currently, 15 of London’s 33 Boroughs provide green space services in-house. However, a trend towards in-sourcing is growing because of the greater workforce flexibility it provides, as well as the fact that the profit margins of the private sector are being squeezed and large contractors are now viewed as a riskier option in light of the Carilion collapse. While the structure of a council’s organisation does not prohibit collaboration, it can make it more difficult, particularly if communication and high-level support are not robust. A further two Boroughs, Ealing and Hounslow, have set up in-house trading companies.

- (ii) *Outsourced:* Currently 13 Boroughs have their (blue collar) grounds maintenance service outsourced to one or more contractors. A further two Boroughs, Bromley and Wandsworth, have also outsourced their (white collar) client function; the former to its grounds maintenance contractor and the latter to a mutual.
- “Strong cross-department working with a wide range of services/departments [is] more important for outcomes than the departmental location of the service. Links with wider place management functions appear to offer greater opportunities to maximise a wider Green Infrastructure approach to green space management” (Camden Council).*
- (iii) *Trust model:* Redbridge is the only Borough that has moved all its parks, leisure, sport and libraries into a standalone trust. Respondents who had experience with a trust model had varying opinions on its success. For example, a trust can be entrepreneurial in a way a local council cannot. While the council dictates policy to the trust, the trust can make its own decisions within that policy, providing flexibility. The trust model provides good value for money, some respondents said. Also, a trust is a dedicated service that focuses on the development of open spaces, whereas council officers cannot afford to be as attentive, given that council green space staff and budgets are shrinking.
- With a trust the council may have limited strategic oversight or direct control over its green spaces. Trusts also may be operationally focused and not concerned with strategy, further minimising a strategic approach to green space planning within the Borough or across multiple Boroughs. A trust is unlikely to interact with other functional teams within a council, further limiting opportunities for an integrated, strategic approach to green space. By shifting green-space delivery to a trust, a council may lose officers who have client-side expertise to oversee the contract, resulting in an inability for the council to provide thorough, long-term and ongoing oversight and direction.
- Some respondents said a trust model would not work in their Borough, as their council preferred to maintain a direct relationship with residents instead of having an intermediary body. Trusts are sometimes established with a plan to secure additional contracts, such as with other councils, but this rarely works because other councils are unlikely to procure services from a trust perceived to essentially be run by another council.

Within these three main categories are a range of partnerships with the third sector. All respondents discussed partnerships with other organisations, particularly third-sector/charities, as essential to delivering their green spaces. Such partners have taken up the slack of resource reductions, particularly to outreach and play and management of allotments and bowling greens. Partnerships typically are established on a space-by-space basis, with local residents initiating the relationship with the council, or conversely the council actively devolving allotments and discrete sports clubs. In some instances, broader partnerships that transcend a single space exist. For example, Islington partners with Octopus Network to manage the council’s community centres and to promote the “We can grow” campaign to encourage people to get outside and enjoy nature in the council’s green spaces. However, most councils do not have a Borough-wide policy to proactively incorporate partners into green space management. As such, these types of partnerships are provided inconsistently.

Service delivery is further complicated by layer of joint services whereby several councils share staff. This may have limited benefits for green space management, as green spaces can remain separately managed, with each council making separate decisions for its system of parks and green spaces. Richmond and Wandsworth councils, for example, share staff, however, this is further complicated because of Wandsworth's outsourced contract with Enable.¹³ Indeed, respondents said the two councils manage and make decisions about their green spaces with differing approaches, in part due to differing resident demands and socioeconomic and demographic makeups of the Boroughs.

Moreover, these joint services are yet to demonstrate staying power for sufficient time to assess their effectiveness. Originally conceived in 2011 as a tri Borough partnership including Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster with projected efficiency savings, Westminster declined to join and the remaining Boroughs merged their parks services in the autumn of 2013. The arrangement continued until Christmas 2018 when Hammersmith & Fulham decided to sever the partnership with each reverting to individually run Borough services.



Map showing grounds maintenance delivery in London Boroughs (February 2019)

DSO = Direct Service organisation, ie, In-house

During the interviews the following ideas were raised as possible new ways of delivering parks services:

¹³ Enable is a mutual created in October 2015 to provide leisure, sports, arts and cultural services for Wandsworth Council. Public-service mutuals are organisations that formerly were part of the public sector but continue delivering public services. Such public-sector mutuals are supported by a cabinet-level office. Enable's initial contract runs for four years. Enable gained not-for-profit status in March 2017.

- (i) Collaborate with a range of third-sector organisations, community groups and other council teams, such as libraries, as a social model to deliver green spaces along with other services, such as arts and adult social services.
- (ii) Involve more people in green space management and maintenance, which could lead to more support for green spaces (e.g. community investment and ownership models such as community interest companies).
- (iii) Focus on larger spaces and delegate management of smaller spaces to the community, such as neighbourhood organisations or friends groups.
- (iv) Build on low-quality, low-value open spaces, but develop something that provides revenue for a parks trust (e.g. social housing, healthcare, retirement homes, etc.). This is unlikely to work in areas that have green space deficiencies (e.g. primarily Inner London), where selling or developing on green space is unlikely to be permitted.

2b Increasing involvement of additional organisations and stakeholders – Although local authorities are the traditional providers of London’s green spaces, additional actors are increasingly involved in providing, managing, maintaining and funding green spaces.

In particular, user groups, notably friends groups, play a varying, but increasingly prominent role as local authorities seek to shift some of the resource burden to other partners. However, partnering with these groups, or delegating more responsibility to them, does not necessarily lead to cost-savings for the council, as supporting and managing friends groups, volunteers or community-based groups requires officer time and resources to build capacity and coordinate activity.

While all respondents said their Boroughs work with friends groups and other community-based organisations, they were varied in their openness to extending such partnerships. Some welcomed more user group involvement whereas others regard these groups as potentially

“The Friends groups have ...differing perceptions as to what’s important about their parks. ... Some emphasize the nature conservation aspects of it, others see it more as a jolly place to go and have an ice cream and a go on the roundabouts. So you could say that they’re not all meeting their nature conservation potential there. There’s a limit to which we can go against the grain with people who have chosen to get involved in running them” (interview respondent 7).

unhelpful or as a distraction. User groups tend to think locally, e.g. about only their specific local space, which can conflict with a council’s efforts to take a more strategic approach to the planning, design and management of the green space network as a whole. User groups also can have differing opinions on how a green space should be used and managed, e.g. for local amenity rather than as strategic green infrastructure and this can cause tension with the local authority.

Respondents also noted that user or friends groups are reluctant to take over tasks they see as the council responsibility (e.g. core day-to-day grounds maintenance), countering perceptions that community groups want to take on full, long-term responsibility for green space management.

2c Politics, politicians and election cycles influence the priority local authorities give to green space – Politicians, notably local Councillors, respond to issues of public interest and concern at the neighbourhood level and this is a powerful driver for green space management, particularly every four years when local elections take place. Nearly every respondent mentioned how important parks and green spaces are to residents. This is made clear to officers and elected officials, they said, through resident surveys, which often rank parks as one of a council’s most-valued services, and through elections, as green space is considered a local issue that emerges during local elections. Respondents said residents care most about whether green spaces are clean and well-maintained; whether they are safe spaces, including free from crime and with safe equipment (e.g. playgrounds); and whether they remain free and accessible. Thus, political attention focuses largely on amenity, sport and recreation, and providing related facilities that can be addressed within an elected official’s term.

“We politicians can be so short-sighted because we just look at the next thing” (interview respondent 3).

Quality of the environment, including parks, was mentioned as a manifesto pledge by several respondents, i.e., Lambeth. Again, this typically was discussed in terms of amenity and sport, not environmental services. Political considerations contribute to a short-term approach to green space, with elected officials and their staff concerned about projects that can be delivered during their term in office, such as pledges to plant more trees, which can be accomplished within an election cycle. Further, respondents said green spaces are unlikely to be used to their full potential because the political winds and the “the flavour of the day” (respondent 4) constantly are changing, thus potentially undermining continuity.

CHALLENGE 3: RECOGNISING VALUE

3a Local authorities have difficulty demonstrating the value for money when investing in green spaces

–The value of the services provided by green spaces is not recognised, in part because local authorities are unable to attribute an economic value to green space. Although the concept of natural capital accounting is gaining traction it has not yet been fully embraced by Government or accepted by those with responsibility for financial accounting. Furthermore there is a lack of robust data regarding green space and number of green space users, which affects the reliability of economic data derived from natural capital accounting. This affects green space's priority on a council's agenda. For example, proving value for money is difficult when a green space-related project goes before the council's finance committee. A lack of data to show the value of green spaces also affects decisions about green space management and planning. Seven Outer London Boroughs are considering disposing of excess green space and 12 are looking for alternative uses for some or part of their parks. This is driven by the need for short-term capital receipts and revenue savings. Being able to clearly articulate the value of the services provided by green space would influence such decisions.

Further, the contributions green space makes to other, often statutory, council strategies is not acknowledged, or benefits are not attributed to green space. For example, green space

“If I wanted to do something really massive it would go through the finance committee and I would have to, to some extent prove value for money, but it's very difficult.... It's not what it costs it's what the value is, and that may not be in monetary terms” (interview respondent 4).

contributes to physical and mental health and well-being, which can reduce the burden on other services, such as adult and social care. However, the green space service does not reap any benefit or recognition from this. As noted previously, the example of collaboration respondents mentioned most often involved working with public health; yet, the ability of council

green space teams to attract health funding is proving a challenge. Two thirds of Borough parks services receive no funding at all from health or education budgets and those in receipt of such funding cannot guarantee its continuance.

Over the last seven years, 90 percent of Boroughs have introduced reductions to their revenue budgets. These budgets vary greatly across the London Boroughs, partly due to differing extent of land-holdings, but also because of a varied ways in which budgets are set and calculated. There is increasing pressure to raise earned income primarily from sports lettings, concessions and events. Additional ad hoc income comes from friends groups, grants and planning gain. Seventy percent of parks heads of service think that their current arrangements are making the best use of their resources, but only 50 percent say these arrangements are sustainable, adding that the range and quality of green space will suffer long term.

Barnet and Barking & Dagenham were optimistic about natural capital accounting (see box below) and had applied it to green spaces strategies in their Boroughs. Others were sceptical about putting a price on nature the way it is done with other infrastructure. Instead, it should be accepted that green spaces have an indirect or intangible value, they said.

What is Natural Capital?

'Natural' capital is made up of the elements of nature that benefit people directly or indirectly. These assets include ecosystems, species, fresh water, land, minerals, the air and oceans, as well as natural processes and functions. Benefits can include goods (such as timber and food) and services (such as clean air and water). In an urban context, these assets are our parks, rivers, trees, and features such as green roofs that collectively form an essential green infrastructure. Designed and managed as green infrastructure, natural capital can:

- promote healthier living
- lessen the impacts of climate change
- improve air quality and water quality
- encourage walking and cycling
- store carbon
- improve biodiversity and ecological resilience

What does the natural capital account tell us?

Reducing funding for parks and green spaces is a false economy

- London's public green spaces have a gross asset value of more than £91 billion, providing services valued at £5 billion per year
- for each £1 spent by local authorities and their partners on public green space, Londoners enjoy at least £27 in value
- Londoners avoid £950 million per year in health costs due to public green space
- the value of recreational activities is estimated to be £926 million per year
- for the average household in London, the monetary value of being in close proximity to a green space is over £900 per year

Public green spaces offer other services too, such as temperature regulation and carbon storage. Green spaces in urban areas counter higher temperatures in summer months that can lead to ill health.

The economic benefits are not spread equally across or within London Boroughs. The account also indicates that there is a fairness and equality agenda that must be addressed in future funding and investment.

Promoting the natural capital accounting approach

The Government has committed to including natural capital accounts in the UK [Environmental accounts](#) by 2020. This means natural capital accounts can be used alongside other key indicators of economic performance.

The Natural Capital Committee has flagged the development of natural capital accounts as a signal to decision-makers that monitoring and valuing natural assets is important. The Office for National Statistics has been charged by Government to [develop a roadmap](#) to enable this. They have also produced a [natural capital overview](#) of the work towards this objective.

This natural capital account for London's public green spaces report contributes to this work by showing that natural capital accounting makes sense in an urban context and can be applied effectively to urban green infrastructure.

3b More benefits could be realised from green space – When asked if green spaces are realising their full potential, nearly all respondents answered no, although they said the spaces are well-used and well-maintained, particularly in light of decreasing budgets. Green spaces fall short of realising their full potential largely because of the issues discussed above: lack of strategic approach, and resource challenges that focus on immediate budgets and revenue potential, rather than long-term investment and benefits. Respondents discussed the need for green spaces, particularly in dense areas, to accommodate multiple uses, with most saying doing so is challenging because of conflicting user and resident expectations about the purpose of a space. For example, nearby residents may prefer that a green space is managed for amenity, such as quiet reflection, while users from a wider area may prefer that space is used more actively, such as for sport, music concerts or barbecues.

Additionally, the range of green space users is not maximised. Some groups do not use parks or are under-represented in green spaces. For example, young Londoners (age 14-19) are less likely to engage with

green spaces. One reason for this is local authorities do not keep up with how changing demographics affect the use of and demand on green spaces. Local authorities have tended to focus on the physical recreation and sporting functions of parks and green spaces rather than some of the cultural,

“Where there's a gap, probably, is in the youth category. ... I think if you're going to gain their successful engagement with parks and open spaces, you have to involve a wider range of people The only time we engage young people in parks is through football or something like that. But is there another way of engaging young people, so they feel a sense of belonging, and they feel it's part of theirs to look after? ... The best way for parks to thrive and to benefit and to grow is if there is community ownership, but that community has to include everybody” (interview respondent 9).

environmental or health- related activities that might appeal to a wider range of potential park users. This is in part because of the funding streams available from Sport England and the Football Foundation, for example, and the perception by many people that a primary purpose of parks is to provide space for sport and physical activity. Opportunities to engage the public in a much more varied way have been limited, in part, by the removal of outreach workers, rangers and park keepers as a result of funding cuts but also because of the lack re-imagining the purpose or re-commissioning the function of parks and ensure the staff that are retained are given the skills and training to respond to a new agenda for parks.

Appendices

1 Interview questions

1. Are your Borough's green spaces being used/managed to their full potential (e.g. benefits beyond simply residential amenity)? If not, what limits this?
2. Is there a strategic approach to green space planning, management and funding in your Borough? Why do you say this?
3. What would need to be done to integrate green space delivery, management and funding more in line with the demands put on these spaces and the benefits they provide across the council's functions (e.g. changes in council organisation, changes in funding streams, etc.)?
4. Are there other models/structures for managing and funding green spaces that you are considering for your Borough? What are these and why do you think they are better than the existing ways?
5. Should funding from development (S106/CIL) be directed more towards supporting ongoing maintenance (instead of simply capital) investment in green space?
6. What could a London-wide Green Spaces Commission do that would help you deliver your green space services well into the future?

Question for Heads of Service

7. How engaged is your CE/Portfolio holder with your service?

2 Interview respondents

- 1 – Redbridge
- 2 – Redbridge
- 3 – Redbridge
- 4 – Wandsworth
- 5 – Wandsworth/Richmond
- 6 – Richmond
- 7 – Richmond
- 8 – Islington
- 9 – Islington
- 10 – Barnet
- 11 – Barnet

3 [Borough Heads of Service survey results](#)

4 London Boroughs net revenue expenditure 2018/19 (amended 2/4/19)

Borough	Net revenue budget 2018/19	Notes
Barking & Dagenham	500,000	
Barnet	2,250,000	
Bexley	1,400,000	GM contract
Brent	Nil return	
Bromley	4,620,000	GM including parks
Camden	2,300,000	Trees, Housing Green Space, Play, Grounds Maintenance and Parks maintenance and development
City of London (City Gardens)	1,125,000	
Croydon	2,000,000	for grounds maintenance specifically, which sits alongside various smaller budgets to maintain play spaces, buildings and supporting Friends groups.
Ealing	2,670,000	
Enfield	Nil return	
Greenwich	3,960,000	
Hackney	3,300,000	
Hammersmith & Fulham	3,700,000	
Haringey	350,000	Gross is £4.3m Income of £3.95m. Goal is to be zero cost, then free from any further cuts.
Harrow	Nil return	The budget is wrapped up under a universal Streets and Grounds budget head and it is neigh on impossible to extract the parks maintenance element (I head up the FOIA team and have tried).
Havering	1,700,000	
Hillingdon	4,467,900	includes grounds maintenance, allotments, trees/woodlands, countryside/conservation, playgrounds & green spaces technical team
Hounslow	2,100,000	
Islington	3,400,000	maintenance (including income and all overheads). It does not include our events, projects or ranger service costs
Kensington & Chelsea	2,400,000	
Kingston Upon Thames	1,000,000	
Lambeth	2,300,000	
Lewisham	2,300,000	

Merton	1,000,000	cover allotments, cemeteries, arboriculture, highways verges and not simply parks, us being "Greenspaces". Does not include corporate overhead figures
Newham	4,300,000	
Redbridge	2,060,000	
Richmond upon Thames	3,000,000	
Southwark	2,950,000	
Sutton	Nil return	
Tower Hamlets	2,200,000	
Waltham Forest	2,368,000	Excludes sports grounds
Wandsworth	2,150,000	
Westminster	2,000,000	

5 Position of parks and green spaces within London Borough

Borough	Position of parks and green spaces within London Borough
Barking & Dagenham	SPLIT: Strategic management (including Ranger Service, events etc): Directorate - Policy and Participation / Service – Culture and Recreation / Team - Parks Commissioning AND Maintenance: Public Realm / Service - Parks and Environment
Barnet	Environment Commissioning Group
Bexley	Place Communities & Infrastructure
Brent	Highways & Infrastructure
Bromley	Environmental Services
Camden	Place Management – alongside environmental services and highways teams
City of London (City Gardens)	Open Spaces Department
Croydon	Client role sits within the Active Lifestyle service (in Council Homes, District Centres and Regeneration), grounds maintenance contract sits within Streets, leases/ licences for parks buildings and supporting utilities sits within Facilities Management.
Ealing	Environment & Customer Services
Enfield	Regeneration & Environment
Greenwich	Directorate of Communities & Environment
Hackney	Libraries, Leisure & Green Spaces Service; part of the Public Realm Division (Neighbourhoods and Housing Directorate)
Hammer-smith & Fulham	Transport, Highways, Leisure & Parks; part of Residents' Services
Haringey	Environment and Neighbourhoods
Harrow	Community Directorate along with Housing, Planning, Regen, Highways, Libraries, Estates and Capital projects
Havering	Public Realm Department, Environment Service Area and Neighbourhoods Directorate
Hillingdon	Green Spaces, Sport and Culture; part of Residents Services
Hounslow	Preventative Health and Leisure
Islington	Public Realm (Greenspace & Leisure)
Kensington & Chelsea	Transport, Highways, Leisure & Parks and above that Environment & Communities
Kingston Upon Thames	Corporate and Commercial Directorate
Lambeth	Neighbourhoods and Growth; but that will change to Residents' Services on 1 January; Parks will remain in the Environment Division
Lewisham	Customer Services
Merton	Environment & Regeneration
Newham	There is no 'Parks Service' as such – the constituent functions sit in different areas of the Council

Red-bridge	Culture & Leisure Trust
Richmond upon Thames	Environment
South-wark	Environment and leisure department and leisure directorate
Sutton	Environment, Housing and Regeneration Directorate
Tower Hamlets	Public Realm
Waltham Forest	Neighbourhood and Commercial Services Directorate
Wands-worth	Environment
Westmin-ster	Parks & Waste within City Management & Communities Directorate

6 Position of park portfolio holders within London Boroughs

Borough	Position of Portfolio holders within London Boroughs
Barking & Dagenham	Chair of Environment Committee
Barnet	Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Community Leadership & Engagement
Bexley	Cabinet Member for Places
Brent	Lead member for the Environment
Bromley	Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services
Camden	Chairman of the Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee
City of London (City Gardens)	Cabinet Member for Improving Environment
Croydon	Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport
Ealing	Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways
Enfield	Cabinet Member for Environment
Greenwich	Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and the Third Sector
Hackney	Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods Transport and Parks
Hammersmith & Fulham	Cabinet Member for Environment
Haringey	Cabinet Member for the Environment
Harrow	Portfolio Holder for Environment
Havering	Cabinet Member for the Environment
Hillingdon	Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services
Hounslow	Cabinet Member for Leisure Services
Islington	Executive Member for Environment & Transport
Kensington & Chelsea	Lead Member for Healthy City Living
Kingston Upon Thames	Portfolio Holder for Environment & Sustainable Transport
Lambeth	Cabinet Member for Equalities and Culture
Lewisham	Cabinet Member for Parks, Neighbourhoods and Transport
Merton	Cabinet member for Community & Culture
Newham	Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways
Redbridge	Leader of the Council/Cabinet Member for Growth & Leisure and Leader of Labour Party
Richmond Upon Thames	Cabinet Member for the Environment, Planning and Sustainability
Southwark	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Equalities and Communities
Sutton	Chair, Environment & Neighbourhood Committee
Tower Hamlets	Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit
Waltham Forest	Deputy leader
Wandsworth	Cabinet Member for Community Services and Open Spaces
Westminster	Cabinet Member for Environment and City Management