

House of Commons

Communities and Local Government Committee

Public parks

Seventh Report of Session 2016–17

HC 45

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Communities and Local Government Committee

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Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/clg and in print by Order of the House.

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The current staff of the Committee are Mark Etherton (Clerk), Tamsin Maddock (Second Clerk), Craig Bowdery (Committee Specialist), Nick Taylor (Committee Specialist), Tony Catinella (Senior Committee Assistant), Eldon Gallagher (Committee Support Assistant), Gary Calder (Media Officer) and Alexander Gore (Media Officer). Helen Finlayson was second Clerk of the Committee during this inquiry.

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Summary

Our inquiry into public parks asked three key questions: why parks matter, what challenges are facing the parks sector, and how we can secure a sustainable future for parks. The level of response has clearly demonstrated the strength of the feeling people have for their local parks and green spaces, and how much parks are valued by individuals, families and communities.

Parks and green spaces are treasured assets and are often central to the lives of their communities. They provide opportunities for leisure, relaxation and exercise, but are also fundamental to community cohesion, physical and mental health and wellbeing, biodiversity, climate change mitigation, and local economic growth. These benefits have long been recognised, but within a context of budget reductions and tightening financial circumstances it is increasingly important that we find ways to quantify the wider value of parks in order to access new sources of funding and target investment in areas of greatest impact.

Parks face considerable challenges. As shared community assets, they must serve many different purposes, and be able to respond to the different and sometimes clashing needs of local communities. They must compete with other services for investment to secure their short and long term sustainability. Distribution of parks is unequal across the country, with many deprived communities struggling to access the benefits which green spaces can provide. Planning policy, particularly as a result of pressures to increase housing supply, may not always give enough priority to parks and green spaces, or to other elements of our green infrastructure.

Meeting the challenges which face our parks and green spaces and securing a sustainable future for them will require responses on many levels. Communities have a role to play, whether through friends, volunteers, or other community groups. We welcome and appreciate the contribution such groups make, and believe that the time and efforts which people give to their local parks should not be overlooked; but it would be unfair and short-sighted to lay responsibility for resolving the challenges parks face wholly at their doors. Innovation in management models and funding sources is also needed. We have received a wide range of suggestions for alternative funding sources and management models, and we urge the Minister, the Local Government Association, and local authorities to reflect on them.

We do not underestimate the challenges and the risks of transforming services. Local authorities will require both financial and expert support. They will also need leadership and coordination at a national level. We therefore welcome the Minister's commitment to establishing a cross-departmental group. We believe the group should have a continuing role in providing the coordination and the leadership which many of our witnesses want. We call on the Minister, in his response to our report, to set out the details of how this group will operate, and how it will work with stakeholders from across the parks sector to deliver a sustainable future for our parks and green spaces.

We heard many calls throughout our inquiry for a statutory duty on local authorities to provide and maintain parks in order to raise the profile of parks within local authority prioritisation and budget allocation. We recognise that reductions in local authority

budgets may disproportionately disadvantage discretionary services, such as parks. However, we are not persuaded that such a statutory duty, which could be burdensome and complex, would achieve the outcomes intended. Instead, we recommend that the Minister publishes guidance to local authorities that they should work collaboratively with Health and Wellbeing Boards to prepare and publish joint parks and green space strategies that clearly articulate the contribution of parks to wider local authority objectives, and set out how parks will be managed to maximise such contributions. We believe that this would increase joint working within local authorities, raise the awareness of parks and green spaces and their contributions to wider goals, and facilitate support for parks and green spaces from other service areas.

Parks and green spaces matter. They make a vital contribution to many of our most important strategic objectives, such as climate change mitigation, public health and community integration. However parks are at a tipping point, and failure to match their value and the contribution they make with the resources they need to be sustained could have severe consequences. We believe that our recommendations will help to ensure that parks receive the priority they deserve, and to prevent a period of decline.

Throughout our inquiry we have heard the passionate voices of many individuals, friends and community groups, and other parks stakeholders. We will return to the issue of parks before the end of this Parliament to assess what progress has been made, but in the meantime we call on those who care about parks to maintain momentum, to continue to hold local and national government to account, and to carry on their work to support, promote and enhance our parks and green spaces.



1 Introduction and background

> "Our public parks and open spaces play a major part in helping to shape our cities, improve the quality of life and play a central role in making our cities great places. In our often very heavily developed and crowded cities, the parks and open spaces provide clean fresh air in which to play sport, get fit, meet with friends, attend memorable events and they also provide a place to appreciate local heritage, engage with nature and relax. As a result it comes as no surprise that they are much loved and well used places."[1]

1. According to research by the Heritage Lottery Fund, over 37 million people—more than 57 per cent of the UK population—regularly use parks in the UK.[2] Parks are a heavily-used, much-valued service. They are treasured assets which are frequently central to the lives of their communities. The level of response to our inquiry, and the strength of feeling and passion with which people have described their parks makes this very clear. In undertaking our inquiry we did not consider whether parks are important—we believe this is self-evident. Instead, at the heart of our inquiry has been the question: '**Why do parks matter?**'. We ourselves greatly value the parks we knew as children, and the parks we use now. We acknowledge, and are grateful for, the way in which the parks in our constituencies enhance our lives, and those of our constituents. However, our examination in Chapter 2 of why parks matter so much to so many people has helped us to:

a) consider the many different types of parks upon which our communities rely, and

b) think in broader terms about the many roles which parks play, the varied contributions which they make, and how their value should be assessed.

We have, therefore, approached parks not as a problem to be solved, but rather as assets which support and further the achievement of many of our local, regional and national policy objectives.

2. Reductions in local authority budgets in recent years have faced councils with difficult choices. In their legacy report, our predecessors in the last Parliament highlighted the increasing financial pressures on local authorities, and identified the potential risk to parks.[3] In Chapter 3, we have therefore explored the question: '**What challenges are facing the parks sector?**'.

3. However, understanding the challenges is not enough. If a sustainable future is to be secured for England's parks,[4] and they are to prosper, we must also find ways to address these challenges. The third key question, which we explore in Chapter 4, was therefore, '**How can we secure a sustainable future for parks?**'. In answering this question we looked not only at innovation within the sector, but also at the arguments for and against the imposition of statutory duties on local authorities.

1 Core Cities Parks and Greenspace Group (PKS092)
2 Heritage Lottery Fund (PKS275)
3 Communities and Local Government Committee, Tenth Report of Session 2014–15, *The work of the Communities and Local Government Committee since 2010*, HC 821, para 123
4 Parks are devolved in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Our inquiry therefore focuses on England. Where appropriate we have drawn on evidence from across the UK and beyond, and our conclusions and recommendations may also have broader applicability.

4. We are not the first House of Commons Select Committee to recognise the importance and value of parks, or to explore how they can be supported. The 1833 Select Committee on Public Walks had a remit to "consider the best means of securing open spaces in the immediate vicinity of populous towns, as public walks calculated to promote the health and comfort of the inhabitants".[5] Much more recently, in 1999, the then Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee held an inquiry into town and country parks, which considered the benefits and the condition of parks, park funding, and the roles and responsibilities of Government in protecting and maintaining parks.[6] It is, perhaps, disappointing that many of the issues arising from our inquiry are so similar to those which were highlighted by our forebears, for example the need to recognise the many benefits which parks provide to our communities, and the risk of decline without sufficient investment.

5. Nevertheless, our work seeks to build on previous inquiries, not least the 2003 report by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee on the ODPM's policy document, *Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener*, which concluded that a statutory duty of care for public spaces might encourage local authorities to give them greater priority when making funding decisions.[7]

Our inquiry

6. In our work we are always keen to hear from a broad range of people. One of the key features of parks is their accessibility to everyone. It was, therefore, especially important for us to find out what people from different backgrounds, ages and places think about their parks. To enable as many people to take part in our inquiry as possible, we employed a range of evidence gathering approaches, resulting in:

- nearly 400 formal written evidence submissions;
- over 13,000 survey responses;[8]
- over 900 tweets on our hashtag (#myparkmatters);[9]
- a visit to Newcastle to explore the challenges and opportunities first hand;
- four formal oral evidence sessions involving 27 witnesses.

In addition, during our inquiry we also received:

- a petition signed by more than 322,000 people calling for protections for parks;[10]
- more than 4,000 emails campaigning against any privatisation of parks.

5 HC Deb 21 February 1833 vol 15 cc1049–59; and Report from the Select Committee on Public Walks, Session 1833, HC 449,

6 Environment, Transport and Rural Affairs Committee, Twentieth Report of Session 1998–99, *Town and Country Parks*, HC 477-I

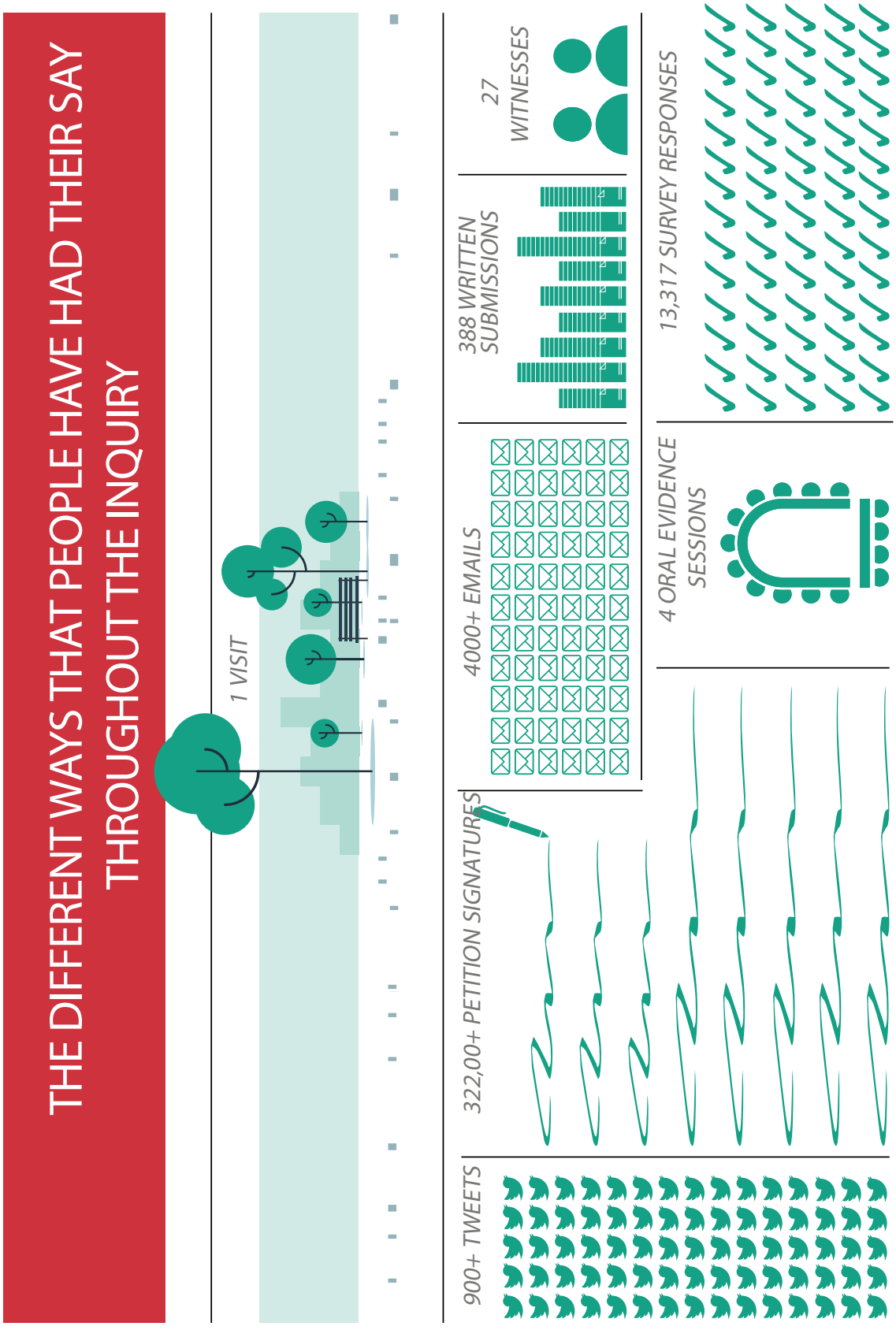
7 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Eleventh Report of Session 2002–03, *Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener*, HC 673-I

8 Communities and Local Government Committee, *What do people think about their local parks? Results of a survey by the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee* (November 2016)

9 Communities and Local Government Committee, *Inquiry into public parks #myparkmatters*, or *#myparkmatters*

10 38 Degrees, *Save our parks petition*

Figure 1: Our inquiry in numbers



7. We are grateful to everyone who took the time to take part in our inquiry. We believe that such a high level of participation by park stakeholders and the public is a clear indication of how much people's parks matter to them and to their communities. Many of those who have provided evidence have emphasised the importance of parks to children and young people, and we were particularly pleased, therefore, that so many children and young people have been able to share their views with us, by completing our survey, writing to us,[11] sending us pictures,[12] taking part in discussions at their schools,[13] and giving formal written[14] or oral evidence.[15]

Ministerial responsibility

8. One of the concerns which was raised with us was a lack of clarity about where responsibility for parks sits within central Government. Sue Ireland, Vice Chair of the Parks Alliance, told us that the Alliance had initially found it challenging to find out which Minister had responsibility for parks:

> If you look at what is provided nationally, there is very little; it is very silent. If you go to the website for the Department, there is nothing about parks. All you find is a link directly to the local authority.[16]

We were therefore pleased to hear Andrew Percy MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary in the Department for Communities and Local Government, declare his passion for parks so emphatically when he gave evidence to us:

> I have already said very clearly that I am keen to bring people together across Government and across the sector, in order to share best practice and to consider the recommendations of this Committee. I have said already that I want to look at the alternatives to a statutory duty. Neither of those things has happened up to now. […] I want to be that champion across Government and bring Government Departments together. […] I am keen to collect and receive the examples of best practice and make sure that we spread them across the network. We are doing some of that through the website, and there are more opportunities to do it.[17]

We welcome the Minister's commitment to bring together a cross-departmental group to consider our report and recommendations. We will consider the group, and the role it might play, in more detail in Chapter 4.

11 Correspondence from Year 5 pupils at Greystones Primary School, September 2016 (Part 1, Part 2)
12 *Birley Community Primary School*, September 2016
13 For example, Pupils 2 Parliament (PKS283) and Gilbrook and Kilgarth Schools (PKS411)
14 Miss Poppy Morgan (PKS364)
15 Q3 [Baxter McLewin-Freund]
16 Q15 [Sue Ireland]
17 Qq 180–1



2 Why do parks matter?

The role of parks

9. There are estimated to be more than 27,000 parks and green spaces across the UK.[18] These spaces are diverse, ranging from large principal parks with many facilities and amenities, to small neighbourhood or pocket parks. The recent Heritage Lottery Fund's *State of UK Public Parks 2016* report found that three quarters of local authority park managers had reported increases in visitor numbers over the past three years. Usage was particularly high among:

a) people between the ages of 25 and 34 (70 per cent use their park at least once a month);

b) households with children under the age of five (90 per cent use their park at least once a month);

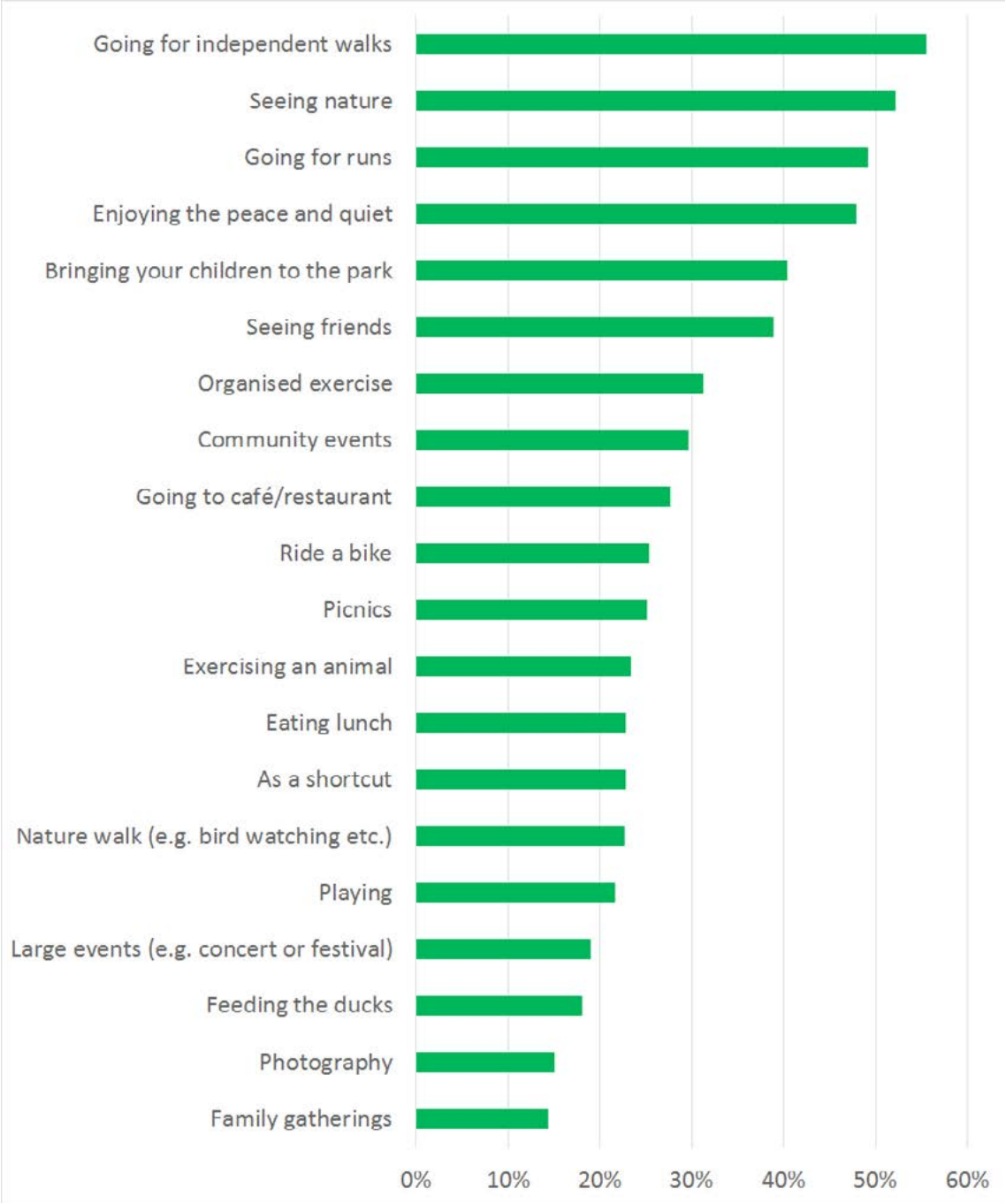
c) people identifying as Black and Minority Ethnic (of whom 71 per cent use their park at least once a month compared to 56 per cent of people identifying as White).

Park usage is also higher among those living in urban areas than those living in rural areas (61 per cent compared to 51 per cent use their parks at least once a month).[19] Different parks play different roles in their communities, and people use different parks in different ways. In our survey, we asked people to select the uses they made of their local park from a list of suggestions. The top twenty options selected by respondents are shown in Figure 2.

18 Urban Parks Forum, *Public park assessment: a survey of local authority owned parks focusing on parks of historic interest* (May 2001)

19 Heritage Lottery Fund, *State of UK Public Parks 2016* (September 2016)

Figure 2: The top twenty most selected uses made of local parks by respondents to our survey



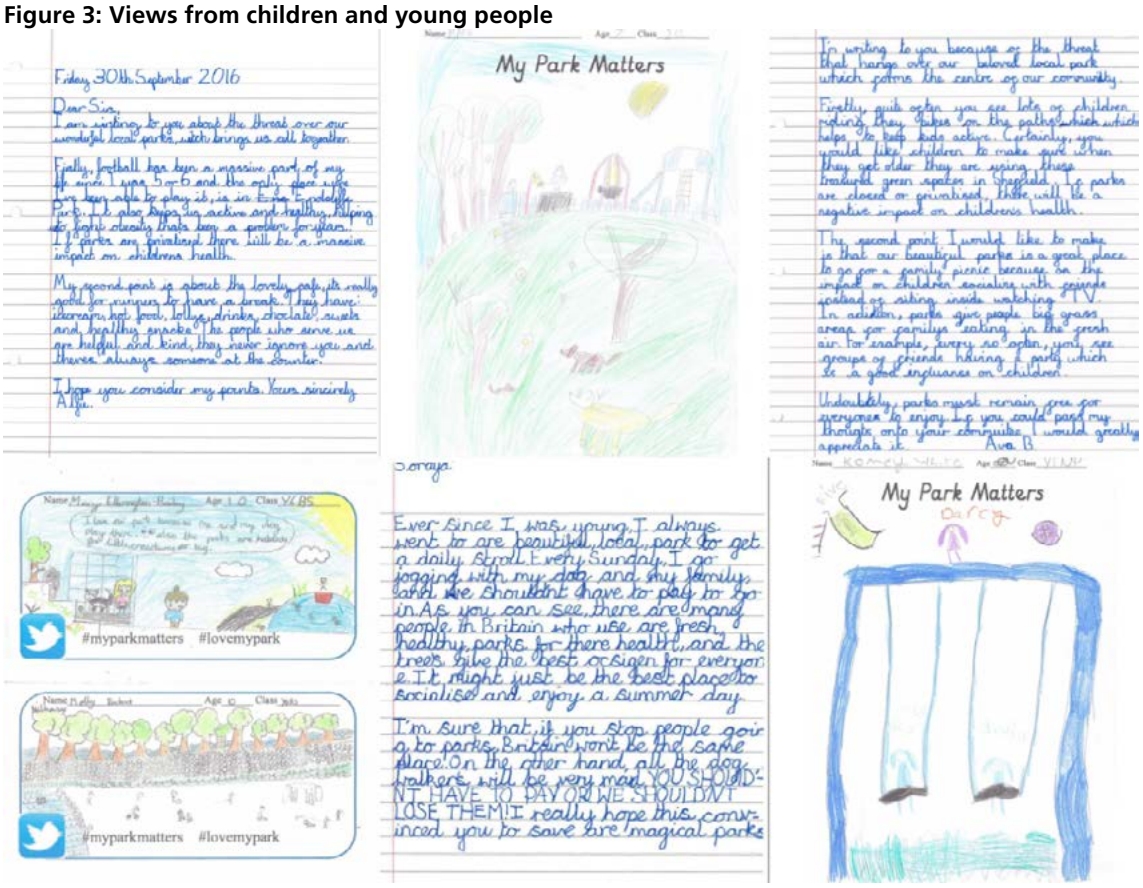
Source: Communities and Local Government Committee, *What do people think about their local parks? Results of a survey by the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee* (November 2016)

Children and young people

10. A survey undertaken by Fields in Trust in November 2015 found that 69 per cent of respondents believed that the loss of parks could be detrimental to children's development.[20] The letters we received from young people themselves has very clearly demonstrated how strongly they feel about their parks.

20 Fields in Trust, *Nearly 1 in 5 believe local park threatened* (November 2015)

Figure 3: Views from children and young people



Source: Correspondence from *Birley Community Primary School*, September 2016 and Year 5 pupils at Greystones Primary School, September 2016 (Part 1, Part 2)

11. We also asked many of those who gave oral evidence what made parks so important to them. The evidence we heard from 10 year-old Baxter McLewin-Freund was particularly compelling. He explained that he went to the park to spend time with his family and friends:

> I think I have over 20 friends who I just don't see every day, because we go to different schools. Parks are the main reason we are friends, because we only see each other there.
>
> Another big thing is that, while I am 10 now, I have had nine birthdays in the park, probably in the same place. It has just become practically a part of me. If I didn't have parks I don't know what I would do. I honestly think I would have to go outside of Lambeth to get some fresh air—maybe even outside of London—because I think that parks are the best way that I can be close to nature and to everything that I like in my life—maybe not everything I like in my life, but parks are the best way to connect with everything that is outside and outdoorsy.[21]

12. The rights of children to play and join in other recreational activities are enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Play Wales noted that UN General Comment No. 17 on the UNCRC states that measures likely to impact on children's Article 31 rights, including those relating to the provision of

21 Q3 [Baxter McLewin-Freund]

parks and green spaces, must take into account the best interests of children.[22] Many of those who gave evidence to our inquiry highlighted the importance of parks for children and young people, for example for learning and education, play, and children's mental and physical health. The Field Studies Council emphasised the role of parks as a relatively inexpensive way for children to explore wildlife, biodiversity and the natural environment as part of their education, arguing that "learning outside the classroom not only brings subjects to life, but often engages learners who sometimes struggle in a conventional school setting".[23] The benefits of playing outside for children and young people include positive impacts on their physical and mental health and wellbeing, improved dexterity and coordination, and the opportunity to build social connections and relationships.[24] One parent told us that:

> Having such a good park so close to our home is a real benefit to us all, as it gives my son the opportunity to run around in the fresh air away from cars. As a result of such exercise he is growing well, eating well, and often sleeps well, which is of course beneficial for my husband and me![25]

Physical and mental health and wellbeing

13. Almost everyone who took part in our inquiry raised the contribution of parks and green spaces to physical and mental health. ResPublica found in July 2015 that 61 per cent of respondents who said that they had good access to green spaces were satisfied with their physical health compared to only 44 per cent of those who had poor access. In the same survey, only 14 per cent of people with good access to green spaces were dissatisfied with their mental health, compared to 22 per cent who had poor access to green spaces.[26] One park user described his use of a local park:

> I had an operation and was off work for a few months. It was an isolating experience, but I found solace in my park and it became the main focus of my daily routine. Only then did it become clear that parks are such vital spaces for people who've been dealt a bad hand. During the working week I'd notice an abundance of people like myself, using the park as their sanctuary.[27]

14. Mind, the mental health charity, arranged an online postcard campaign in spring 2016. It asked its supporters to identify places in their communities which helped them to feel better. Over 10 per cent of respondents named a park as "the place they would go when they wanted to improve their wellbeing".[28] This was echoed by evidence from one carer:

> I am in recovery from severe depressive illness and taking time out from the demands of my daily challenges as the carer of a high-dependency,

22 Play Wales (PKS185)
23 Field Studies Council (PKS055)
24 See, for example, Play Wales (PKS185), Little Forest Folk (PKS228), or Playboard NI (PKS279)
25 Mrs Julia Trocme-Latter (PKS085)
26 ResPublica (PKS149)
27 Mr Ruari Muir (PKS098)
28 Mind (PKS323)

> vulnerable adult is vital to maintaining my mental health. Being a volunteer in a green space gives me the opportunity to be part of a group and work alongside friends I have made through this activity.[29]

15. Parks also encourage physical exercise and activity, whether through organised sports such as football, crown green bowls or athletics, or through informal activity such as walking, running or playing. We heard parks described as "free gyms […] a cost effective means of maintaining physical and psychological wellbeing".[30] This echoed research undertaken in 2015 by Fields in Trust (formerly the National Playing Fields Association), which found that 50 per cent of people said they would be less active without their local parks and green spaces, and 48 per cent said that using their local park made them feel healthier.[31] The OPENspace Research Centre at the University of Edinburgh noted that the health benefits linked to urban green space include:

- improved social functioning;
- improved functioning of the immune system;
- reduced exposure to air pollution;
- optimised exposure to sunlight and improved sleep;
- improved mental health and cognitive function;
- reduced cardiovascular morbidity;
- reduced prevalence of type 2 diabetes;
- improved pregnancy outcomes and reduced mortality.[32]

16. We received written evidence from a group of people in Greater Manchester who are living with dementia. The group told us it meets for weekly walks in local parks, which gives its members a safe and inexpensive place to exercise while also enabling them to benefit from peer support and social interaction. In addition to physical health benefits, the group noted that parks provided its members with opportunities to have contact with, and feel part of, their local community, without experiencing the stigma which people living with dementia often feel:

> In a park setting, people will often 'stop and talk.' The group felt that this something special about parks that may not ordinarily happen in another setting.[33]

29 Heather Martin (PKS249)
30 The Parks Alliance (PKS084)
31 Mr Christopher Worman MBE (PKS058)
32 OPENspace Research Centre, University of Edinburgh (PKS109)
33 Sue Clarke (PKS328)

Active travel

17. Parks play a role in encouraging active travel,[34] for example, by forming part of "safe green corridors that encourage people to walk or cycle to work".[35] The Birmingham and Black Country Local Nature Partnership told us that the importance of green infrastructure in providing safe networks for people to travel actively can be overlooked, suggesting that:

> New cycle routes can be mirrored by ecological networks as investment is taking place, in turn providing access, health, and wider green infrastructure benefits.[36]

Community cohesion and identity

18. We invited respondents to our survey to use a free text box to tell us anything else that they wanted us to know about their park. We created a word cloud from their responses (Figure 4). The size of the words indicates the frequency with which respondents used them. Among the largest is: "community".

Figure 4: Word cloud of free text responses to the parks survey


people
community
local
space
important
parkrun
many
London
volunteers
activities
council
spaces
place
used
run
health
Council
children
nature
area
well
green
play
public
maintained
access
Hampstead
beautiful
maintenance
facilities
need
part
Great
funding
events
much
enjoy
dogs
social
running
exercise
mental
Health
benefits
wellbeing
friends
time
one
small
town
free
dog
year
walk
take
really
together
wildlife
friends
wonderful
walking
lovely
keep
grass
vital
will
ages
also
everyone
help
city
work
see
parks
kids
money
get
just
old
now
around
Council
groups
even
different
benefit
planting
resource
large
without
fantastic
amazing
provide
good
family
government
volunteers
places
meet
maintain
support
always
make
dogs
love
fresh
parking
social
running
Great
funding
events
much
enjoy
exercise
part
need
facilities
benefits
mental
Health
summer
years
group
walking
every
wonderful
friends
wildlife
football
residents
essential
physical
environment
especially
using
keep
lovely
parkrun
grass
important
vital
will
many
London
volunteers
places
government
family
good
activities
council
provide
amazing
often
asset
resource
large
friends
spaces
place
used
run
work
city
help
everyone
also
ages
space
community
people
local
area
well
green
play
public
maintained
access
Hampstead
beautiful
maintenance
together
management
organised
really
take
look
walk
dog
year
free
town
nature
children
Council
health
time
groups
around
even
different
benefit
planting
resource
large
friends
spaces
place
used
run

19. The University of Leeds described parks as:

> places where history is made, both in terms of major public events—political rallies, mass meetings, demonstrations and civic celebrations—and in terms of people's intimate lives—their romances, friendships, family outings and personal commemorations.[37]

20. The role of parks within local communities, as spaces which are open and available to all was a common theme throughout our inquiry, whether as a refuge from stress and the busyness of modern life, or as a social space for people of different ages or from different backgrounds to come together.[38] The Improving Wellbeing through Urban Nature project highlighted a 2006 study which had found that the social aspects of public open spaces, including parks, were "crucial to local identity and people's attachment to place. […] parks and green spaces as places in which ethnic diversity was routinely experienced and negotiated and which therefore foster inter-ethnic understanding".[39] Dr Ian Mell of Liverpool University noted that while different ethnic groups make different uses of parks, "south Asian and African communities use spaces for public and community events which promote social inclusion".[40]

21. The role of parks in community integration was raised by many: for example the Friends of Page Park told us:

> The park breaks down the barriers of ignorance and fear, it's somewhere we can all enjoy and our children can play together. Our parks and open spaces are vital in bringing our communities together and acceptance of our different ways we live, accepting the different religions and ways of others.[41]

22. Many of those who responded to our survey described their parks as being at the heart of their communities, and places where they could meet and connect with people whom they otherwise would not encounter. ukactive stated that parks "provide areas for physical activity, play, social gatherings, as well as helping to define the cultural identity of many neighbourhoods, towns and cities".[42] Imogen Taylor, a member of 38 Degrees, told us:

> I live on my own, and sometimes I do not know if I will see anyone all day, but I go to the park most days, and I generally get chatting with people. […] Last year, one time, I took some balls to throw for my dogs, and I ended up sitting on the grass while some East European boys threw the balls for my dogs. That was quite a positive thing.[43]

Similarly, the Sport and Recreation Alliance highlighted the role which parks can play in reducing social isolation. It described the activities of a local Green Gym, which brought volunteers from the local community with people with learning disabilities, with mental

37 University of Leeds (PKS156)
38 Friends of Mewsbrook Park (PKS072)
39 Improving Wellbeing through Urban Nature (PKS322)
40 Dr Ian Mell (PKS187)
41 Friends of Page Park (PKS026)
42 ukactive (PKS320)
43 Q2 [Imogen Taylor]

ill health, or who have experienced strokes together to create a community and wildlife garden. The result was "an engaging space and also helped people to be less socially isolated, be more active and have improved self-esteem".[44]

Biodiversity and access to nature

23. The need for parks to act as "vital green corridors and stepping stones to enable wildlife to move around within their territory" has been heightened by increasing urbanisation, reduced greenspace, and smaller gardens.[45] The Conservation Volunteers noted that parks and green spaces "support vital biodiversity, such as threatened pollinators, which are key to our food supply and vital to supporting our food economy".[46] The Friends of Victoria Park Leicester similarly underlined the benefits of parks as habitats for urban wildlife:

> As urban living becomes more concentrated and intense, the casualties include different forms of wildlife. Many of their habitats have been lost as green spaces go and land is increasingly brought into use as housing, roads, or for industry. […] Our own park now has bird boxes, bat boxes, homes for owls, bug hotels, and an area of the park designated as an ecological zone to encourage natural growth and wildlife.[47]

24. Parks and green spaces, particularly those in urban areas, are vital for providing access to nature and opportunities for people to enjoy wildlife. Some witnesses emphasised the importance of building a connection with nature from a young age:

> Parks with lakes and ponds provide children with a wonderful introduction to nature from feeding the ducks and other water birds. Parks with even small areas of trees and shrubs offer the opportunity to learn about nature in many ways—the changing seasons, leaves and seeds or fruits. Probably most people's first introduction to nature comes from collecting conkers![48]

The Froglife Trust told us that "Parks with well managed wildlife areas are invaluable as outdoor learning resources, these can be used by local schools, youth groups, families and others".[49] This is particularly important for deprived urban communities, who may otherwise encounter barriers to access, such as the distance from the countryside or the cost of transport.[50]

Local economy and growth

25. Cllr Lisa Trickett of Birmingham City Council emphasised the importance of parks to sustainable growth:

> Where we have cities—and cities are going to be the engines of growth over the next decade—what we have to look at is our green space, our park space.

44 Sport and Recreation Alliance (PKS186)
45 Dorset Local Nature Partnership (PKS294)
46 The Conservation Volunteers (PKS318)
47 Friends of Victoria Park Leicester (PKS223)
48 Mrs Stephanie Roberts (PKS107)
49 The Froglife Trust (PKS033)
50 Dorset Local Nature Partnership (PKS294)

> It is a fundamental part of the growth of our cities, and unless we see green space alongside grey space, such as roads, and blue space, such as rivers and canals, we will not have inclusive sustainable growth in our cities.[51]

The Birmingham and Black Country Local Nature Partnership agreed, stating that parks "play an important role in retaining investment and jobs, encouraging inward investment and providing for attractive environments which also benefit the health and wellbeing of communities".[52]

Climate change and the environment

26. Parks and urban green spaces are likely to play an increasingly important role as part of our urban infrastructure, not least because of their potential to absorb excess rainwater as part of sustainable urban drainage systems, and the ability of their plants and trees to act as "natural air conditioning" during heatwaves or dry spells.[53] Staffordshire County Council stated that its parks and green spaces provide "a range of benefits beyond [their] recreational value. These include natural or 'ecosystem' services such as flood regulation, water quality regulation, carbon storage, wild species diversity, etc".[54] Public Health England similarly highlighted the positive impact of parks and green spaces on air quality, water quality, noise absorption, and flood risk mitigation. Public Health England is clear that the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect—the higher temperatures in towns and cities as a result of overheating caused by buildings and roads, exacerbated by the properties of urban building materials and a lack of moisture—may have:

> significant impacts on health as extreme temperatures contribute directly to deaths from cardiovascular and respiratory disease, particularly among elderly people. A retrospective study of the attribution of UHI to heat related mortality in the West Midlands during the heatwave of August 2003, suggested that UHIs contributed around 50% of the total heat related mortality. Natural spaces such as city parks can alleviate these factors, and provide localised cooling and shading for park users.[55]

27. Mrs Michelle Furtado, an environment and sustainability consultant, told us that parks and green spaces can cool the urban environment by as much as 2–8°C.[56] The London Tree Officers Association highlighted the role which trees can play in "'diluting' concentrations of atmospheric pollutants and mitigating overheated hotspots, and generally air conditioning our city. Green open spaces are often accurately referred to as the green lungs of the city".[57]

28. In addition to combating the UHI effect, parks can be effective in mitigating flood risk by "acting as holding areas for water run-off and reducing flow through non-permeable surfaces".[58] The Improving Wellbeing through Urban Nature project cited research which showed that following heavy rainfall approximately 10 per cent of rainwater may exit

51 Q41 [Cllr Trickett]
52 Birmingham and Black Country Local Nature Partnership (PKS145)
53 Urban Pollinators Ltd (PKS046)
54 Staffordshire County Council (PKS104)
55 Public Health England (PKS264)
56 Mrs Michelle Furtado (PKS134)
57 London Tree Officers Association (PKS060)
58 Mrs Michelle Furtado (PKS134)

a park as surface run-off, whereas 55 per cent of rainwater may run-off from a highly urbanised city-centre location with impermeable surfaces.[59] Parks and green spaces, in addition to helping to reduce the impact of flood damage by absorbing run-off water, may be less expensive to construct or maintain than conventional flood defences.[60] Urban green spaces and parks, particularly those containing trees or woodland, help to improve air quality by absorbing pollutants and releasing oxygen. The positive effect can be particularly strong in urban areas where trees are "close to sources of pollution and nearer to people who might be affected".[61]

The diverse role of parks

29. The evidence that we have received clearly shows that while parks are diverse, varying in size, scale and scope, all parks are greatly valued by their communities. Different spaces may be used for different purposes, but what they have in common is how much they contribute to a wide range of policy objectives and agendas. Parks are an essential part of our contemporary urban infrastructure. In addition to providing spaces for people to exercise and relax, they provide environmental services, including water filtration, flood protection, and climate change mitigation.[62] **We strongly agree with those who have emphasised the importance and value of parks to individuals, communities, and to wider national agendas such as public health, and climate change and flood risk mitigation. Parks are a treasured public asset, which are greatly valued by their communities. They help to bring communities together, and should remain freely accessible to everyone.** However, our essential green spaces may be under threat, as we will explore in more detail in Chapter 3.

Assessing the value of parks

30. The Parks Alliance told us that "Parks deliver a range of benefits to society, but in our experience, these are not properly understood or acknowledged".[63] While the value of parks and green spaces as treasured community assets is indisputable, witnesses suggested that traditional accountancy methods focus on parks' saleable value as physical assets,[64] or on the operational costs associated with parks maintenance.[65] This overlooks the wide range of benefits which parks provide, and can result in parks and green spaces being considered as financial liabilities to local authorities. We take a different view, and agree with Urban Pollinators Ltd that:

> England's parks are long term assets whose value can be measured on multiple scales: ecology and biodiversity, health and wellbeing, leisure and recreation, quality of place and attractiveness, and climate change adaptation and mitigation.[66]

31. For example, traditional accounting methods for assessing the value of parks and open spaces fail in our view to fully capture the impact of access to high-quality green

59 Improving Wellbeing through Urban Nature (PKS322)
60 The Conservation Volunteers (PKS318)
61 Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Forum (PKS286)
62 Mrs Meredith Whitten (PKS314)
63 The Parks Alliance (PKS084)
64 Leicestershire Local Access Forum (PKS015)
65 Professor Robert Lee (PKS250)
66 Urban Pollinators Ltd (PKS046)

space on physical and mental health. Such effects include reductions in the loss of productivity as a result of ill-health, and reductions in NHS waiting lists.[67] The Land Trust highlighted research from the University of Exeter which concluded that green spaces in England contribute £2.2bn to public health. It also cited the conclusions of the UK Natural Environment Assessment that neglecting the UK's ecosystems could result in an economic cost of £20bn per year, whereas caring for them properly could "add an extra £30bn a year to the UK's economy".[68]

32. We heard about one park, Mayesbrook Park in Barking, which has been intentionally re-landscaped to combat flooding and climate change, while still providing the amenity and leisure facilities people expect from their park.[69] However, in the majority of cases, as Julia Thrift, Project and Operations Director at the Town and Country Planning Association, told us:

> we know about all the benefits that green spaces and green infrastructure provide. They are providing that without us really trying. We are not designing, managing and maintaining green spaces for optimum value for society. We are piddling around doing this and that. If we really, really tried, the potential is enormous.[70]

We believe that assessing the value of parks in more nuanced and appropriate ways could assist local authorities in prioritising and targeting investment to yield the most effective benefits. For example, Rugby Borough Council, while noting that "Maintaining public sports pitches is a highly expensive use of taxpayers' money with little or no outcome for the health of the wider community", suggested that thinking instead about parks in terms of their wider contribution to physical activity and public health outcomes could yield greater returns:

> For example; every £1 spent on establishing healthy walking schemes the NHS could save £7.18. […] £400K awarded by Sport England for a new 4G sports pitch could deliver much wider and better health outcomes if it was invested in a green space infrastructure instead. In our experience new play equipment, green gyms, measured miles or even just improved footpaths and more pleasant environments can increase the number of people getting outside and more active.[71]

33. Assessing the value of parks in terms of the health and other benefits which they can provide may also help local authorities to access sources of funding which have not previously been available. For example, Ian Walmsley of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council told us that:

> The value of parks to mental and physical wellbeing has been known for years, but they always seem somewhat abstract arguments, and are certainly not taken into account when we review the budgets. It is the parks budget that gets cut, and an argument has never been successfully made that if you

67 Mr Christopher Worman MBE (PKS058)
68 The Land Trust (PKS136)
69 Mr Christopher Worman MBE (PKS058)
70 Q105 [Julia Thrift]
71 Rugby Borough Council (PKS241)

> spend x on a park, there will be a saving in the health budget, and therefore you should take the money out of the health budget and put it into parks. It just does not work.[72]

34. Quantifying the value of the contribution of parks and green spaces to the public health agenda could therefore help to provide evidence for money allocated by the NHS to preventative health initiatives or to public health to be invested in parks infrastructure, maintenance or programmes.[73] Similarly, assessing the value of parks in terms of their synergies with green infrastructure planning or water management can highlight their contribution to community resilience against, for example, flooding.[74] Andrew Hinchley from the London Borough of Camden told us that "We are starting to understand much better the variety of roles that our parks play. Those parks departments, in a way, need to evolve into more of a green space management function, and learn new ways of valuing, sharing and advocating, if you like, the benefits of those spaces".[75] This, in turn, could assist local authorities to access private finance: "For example, if the quality of the local water supply is sustained or improved by the environmental protections parks confer then water companies could be asked to contribute a one-off payment or continuous stream of payments which can be used to fund maintenance and upkeep of the park".[76]

35. **We recognise that parks have traditionally been seen as financial liabilities for local authorities, and understand that assessing the value of parks to their communities in wider terms can be complex. However, we strongly believe that without being able to demonstrate the contribution made by parks to broader agendas, local authority parks departments will find it difficult to secure sufficient priority for their parks, or to access alternative funding sources. For this reason, we welcome the new models which are emerging to help assess the value of parks' broader contributions in a more nuanced way.**

36. Many of those who responded to our call for evidence highlighted work undertaken by Edinburgh City Council to measure the outcomes of spending on its parks services. Edinburgh City Council has employed a social return on investment model which assessed the "social, environmental and economic benefits that a service or activity delivers". In relation to parks, this model concluded that for every £1 of investment, around £12 of benefits are delivered.[77] Peter Neal, independent landscape consultant and author of the *State of the UK Public Parks* reports, told us that this rises to £17 of benefits per £1 invested in the city's premier central parks.[78]

37. As part of its work with Sheffield City Council, the National Trust commissioned Vivid Economics to use a natural capital accounting approach to capture the overall economic, social and environmental value of Sheffield's public parks and green spaces. Sheffield City Council's balance sheet currently shows its parks as a £16 million liability. However, the model found that the contribution of parks and green spaces was worth £34 to the city for every £1 spent. Ellie Robinson, Assistant Director of External Affairs at the National Trust emphasised that the assumptions underpinning the model were

72 Q43 [Ian Walmsley]
73 Durham County Council (PKS135)
74 Arup (PKS297)
75 Q52 [Andrew Hinchley]
76 ResPublica (PKS149)
77 For example, PlayBoard NI (PKS279)
78 Q8 [Peter Neal]

based on "cautious estimates".[79] Indeed, when we met Vivid Economics during our visit to Newcastle, we heard that the model had been updated, and now suggested that the return was £36 for every £1 invested. The National Trust concluded that the model demonstrated the "true value of the parks to the people of Sheffield". In addition, stakeholders would be able to be more involved in investment decisions, which in turn would more effectively target resources in areas of greatest impact:

> These accounts may now be used to inform the parks management strategy, health services providers' engagement with the future of parks services, funding arrangements and institutional arrangements for the future of the parks service.[80]

38. Eddie Curry, Chair of the Core Cities Parks and Greenspaces Group, told us that work was still in progress to develop models such as natural capital accounting to assist local authorities to assess the value of their parks. He described it as "a model that still needs to mature", but highlighted the lack of "any real advocate and voice for parks at a national level to get that message out and keep it consistently in the public eye and the political viewpoint".[81] Similarly, while welcoming the emergence of models such as natural capital accounting to assess the value of parks, Julia Thrift of the Town and Country Planning Association told us that:

> I am worried about the little district authorities, who have one person who is supposed to be facing the local community and meeting its needs, and understanding some of this new economic thinking. Will they really be able to do all of that, too? Vivid Economics are doing some fantastic work, but you cannot expect the local park manager to understand how to turn that theoretical economics into money for their park.[82]

39. **The amenity and leisure value of parks is important and should not be overlooked. However, taken in isolation, this value does not accurately reflect either the wider value and purpose of parks or the full contribution they make to local and national agendas. We believe that thinking differently about how to assess the value of parks and their broader contribution could help both to access alternative funding sources and to target investment more effectively. However, the models which are emerging, such as natural capital accounting and social return on investment are complex, and may not be accessible to local authority parks departments. *The Minister's cross-departmental group*[83] *should prioritise support for the development of robust and accessible transferrable models which local authorities in England can use to assess the value of their parks. The Minister's group should work with the Local Government Association to support and encourage local authorities to use such models to assess the real value of their parks, and to take account of such assessments in their strategic planning and prioritisation.***

79 Q8 [Ellie Robinson]
80 National Trust (PKS408)
81 Q111 [Eddie Curry]
82 Q98 [Julia Thrift]
83 The Minister's cross-departmental group, and other issues relating to national coordination and leadership, are explored in more detail in Chapter 4.



3 What challenges are facing the parks sector?

Competing demands and tensions between park users

40. As with any shared asset, tensions can sometimes arise between different groups of park users, or between different uses to which parks are put. We acknowledge the strength of feeling in some communities about the events which take place in their local parks. Common themes in their concerns include the impact on community access to parks, disruption or nuisance to local communities, and damage to the park during or after the event.[84] The University of Westminster told us that the negative impacts of events, for example noise, disruption and damage, are "usually temporary and can be managed, but the symbolic effects of exclusive events are more significant and enduring".[85] The Open Spaces Society highlighted an increase in the number of events being held in parks, and the impact on local communities who may be unable to access large areas in the park during set up, the event, and clear up. If multiple events are held during the summer period, for example, this can result in significant disruption.[86] On the other hand, we understand the importance of such events for income generation for local authorities, and for the local economy. Live Nation Entertainment Inc noted that its parks events contribute to local culture, tourism, job creation, and supply chain benefits for local businesses.[87]

41. We heard from some park user groups that they work with their local authorities to determine what events and activities would be appropriate for the park, but that the community may sometimes be dissatisfied with the decisions taken by the local authority to charge for events, the impact of events on the park, or the effect on particular groups of park users. For example, the Clissold Park User Group suggests that:

> Local authorities are best placed to hold the ring against the demands of sectional interests which while often well-intentioned, nevertheless often define themselves against other park user interests—eg parents of young children versus dog walkers, sports enthusiasts versus quiet recreational users, cyclists versus pedestrians on the footpath network, residents of neighbouring streets who value beauty and tranquillity versus users from further afield attending sports events or community festivals.[88]

42. Some witnesses told us that different parts of our communities may have different requirements for parks and green spaces, and that our parks may not currently be meeting those needs. Dr Bridget Snaith noted that in parks design and management, "we have unintentionally been creating and sustaining parks in ways that appeal most to white British people, overlooking the preferences of other ethnic groups". She suggested that a consequence of this is that some sectors of the community may be less able to benefit from

84 See, for example, Mrs Susan Lofthouse (PKS003)
85 University of Westminster (PKS257)
86 Open Spaces Society (PKS161)
87 Live Nation Entertainment Inc (PKS261)
88 The Clissold Park User Group (PKS281)

the health and wellbeing benefits which parks can provide.[89] The London Borough of Camden told us that it could be challenging to balance the different demands on its parks, and ensure that the benefits to the environment and to communities were maximised:

> This brings its own challenges however, particularly when working with small, heavily constrained green spaces, in which different functions are not always easily compatible and can lead to conflict. 34% of Camden residents are from black or minority ethnic groups and the different needs and values of our communities can also be hard to meet and reconcile.[90]

43. We asked Andrew Hinchley how the London Borough of Camden tries to balance the competing needs of different groups of park users. He told us that when establishing agreements for exclusive use of sports facilities, periods of general access were included. He said that such periods, for example between 4pm and 6pm to coincide with the end of the school day, could maximise income generation without a disproportionate impact on the accessibility of the space to the community. Mr Hinchley told us that when reconciling the different demands on parks and green spaces, and the potential effect of creating barriers to free access, particular attention needed to be given to the impact on more deprived communities:

> The things that prevent people from going to use a space are particularly damaging—as much so as conflicts within space—and can often affect the more deprived communities much worse. They are particularly susceptible to changes in maintenance regimes, so if the quality of the space declines, people feel less secure, women and children are less likely to use it, and ethnic minorities are less likely to go and use that space.[91]

44. Cllr Lisa Trickett of Birmingham City Council suggested that parks could serve to connect communities which might otherwise be separate or in tension with one another. She described place shaping as "an act of reconciliation" between competing priorities, and told us resolving tensions between the needs of different user groups required mutual respect:

> If the cyclist cannot respect the dog walker, then we have a problem in our society. We should not be shy about bringing those things out. […] the beauty of the parks and the green space is their openness and connectivity. Once they start being given over to just one group or usage, you lose the underlying benefit. You manage it through, again, sharing; it is about mutual respect and sharing.[92]

45. **We recognise that a community asset which is freely available to all will, quite naturally, give rise to some tensions when the requirements and wishes of different sections of the community, or different groups of park users, come into conflict. We accept that striking the right balance between open access to parks, and revenue-raising activities such as events or granting exclusive use to particular groups is challenging. However, it is necessary. We believe that if parks are to truly serve the communities within which they are located, local authorities must take into account the needs of**

89 Dr Bridget Snaith (PKS308)
90 London Borough of Camden (PKS335)
91 Q54 [Andrew Hinchley]
92 Qq53–4 [Cllr Lisa Trickett]

all of their residents. In the planning and management of parks, local authorities must engage effectively in dialogue with their communities to assess and understand their needs, and to explain the decisions which they take. We recognise that it may be appropriate at times for local authorities to grant exclusive access to a park or a part of a park, whether on a temporary or a permanent basis, to particular user groups or organisations. It may also be appropriate for local authorities to charge for some uses of a park, especially when parks are used by commercial ventures as part of their business models. However, such exclusive use or charging must not disproportionately affect or hinder access to the park for other uses. *To ensure transparency for local communities, and to enable them to hold their local authorities to account for the decisions which are made, local authorities should consult on, and publish, policies which set out the criteria upon which:*

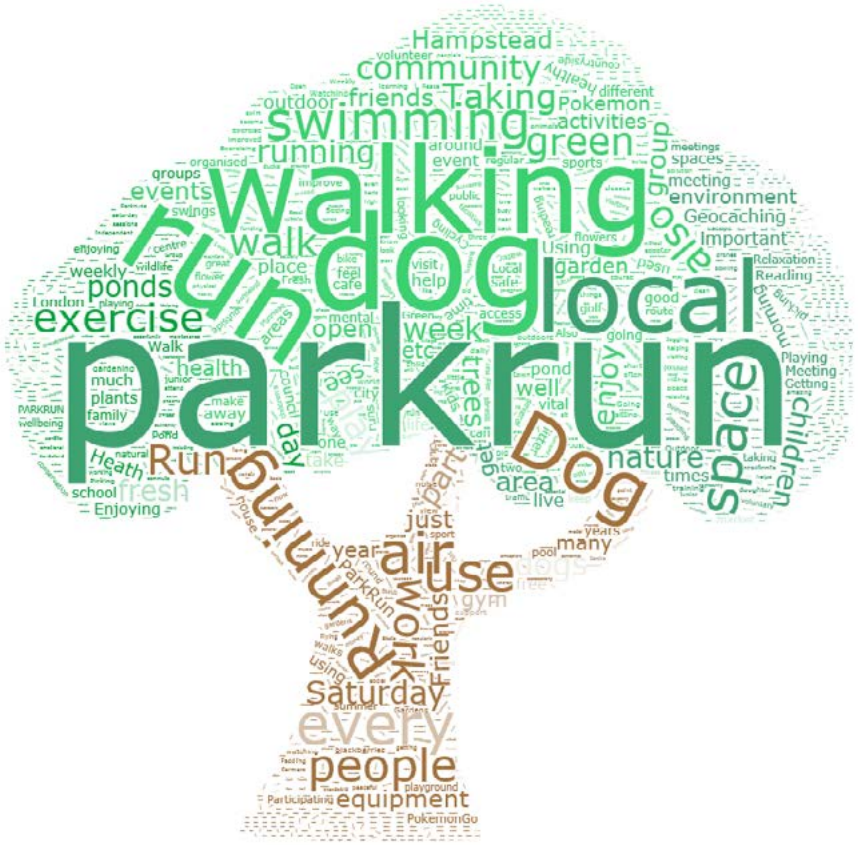
a) ***any application for exclusive use of a park or part of a park will be determined;***

b) ***any decisions about whether park users will be charged for the use of the park, park facilities, or clean-up costs will be based.***

parkrun

46. A high profile example of competing demands on parks is parkrun. parkrun is a weekly mass participation 5km run which takes place in parks across the world. Many of those who responded to our call for evidence and our survey were very positive about the benefits of parkrun for runners, volunteers and communities. In our survey, we asked people to use a free text box to describe what they used their park for: parkrun was by far the most common response (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Word cloud of free text responses about the use people make of their local park



Source: Communities and Local Government Committee, *What do people think about their local parks? Results of a survey by the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee* (November 2016)

47. However, others highlighted concerns about the impact of parkrun on them and their parks. For example:

> Many people in urban areas use parks for sport activities and this should be encouraged but the increase in organised groups of runners for example (parkruns) should be managed somehow, not stopped. It is quite intimidating to be walking on a path when hordes of people are running towards you.[93]

> parkrun is a case in point. A wonderful national campaign which has had a lot of press coverage in recent months. The problem with such an event is that whilst staging it is organised by the groups themselves, experience has shown there is almost always an extra cost for the authority afterwards. 200+ runners will leave a mess even if it's just mud on the footpaths, which needs to be cleaned up to make the paths safe. These events always take place at weekends which require extra staff coming in.[94]

48. Such tensions became visible in April 2016 when Stoke Gifford Parish Council decided to charge for the use of the park for parkrun. Announcing its decision, the Council said that the runners monopolised the park, residents had complained about litter and parking, and it was unfair that residents should pay when parkrun was an organisation with paid directors, fundraisers and sponsors. Commenting on parkrun, ukactive told us:

93 Mrs Anita Grice-Goldsmith (PKS014)
94 Greenspace Wales (PKS127)

> the park has to be a space that is available to all people in the community to use and benefit from. As ukactive, we can understand both sides of that perspective. parkruns are a great, fantastic model, which appeal to a very broad audience, with […] over 18,000 people using them on weekly basis. What we would like to see is support for local authorities to ensure that for other people, dogwalkers and people who do not want to take part but are with their families just going for a walk or a picnic, the space is there and available for them to use and left in a really good state.[95]

49. We asked local authorities about parkrun. Ian Walmsley of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council told us he had met his local parkrun organisers the previous week. He described the need to find practical solutions and reconcile the needs of different user groups, and noted that his authority was intending to formalise the way in which parkrun used its parks by developing an agreement:

> The agreement is about, on an annual basis, coming to talk to us to agree routes and agree B routes. We are putting them in direct contact with the people who tend not to like them, the Friends. […] It is about managing those agreements and a method by which they feed back into the park. They are all there for free, to run, so we try to introduce that if they have a damaged path, we will drop some stone off, and they will go and put the stone up for themselves. It is a little bit of payback, so that other people who do pay can see that park runners who go for free are contributing in some other way, but not necessarily through a set fee.[96]

We heard from parkrun itself that while it was not in a position to offer financial support to parks, it was "keen to investigate other forms of local support that we could provide (eg litter-picking, simple maintenance etc.)".[97]

50. **In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for local authorities to seek non-financial contributions from some park users to the upkeep and maintenance of parks and green spaces. For example, community activities which do not charge members for participation or raise revenue, such as parkrun, might nonetheless be encouraged to contribute volunteer time for park maintenance or fund-raising activities. *As part of developing their exclusive use and charging policies for parks and green spaces, local authorities should work collaboratively with relevant groups of park users to identify the range of ways in which they can contribute to their parks.***

The impact of funding reductions

51. The reductions in local authority budgets in recent years have left local authorities facing difficult choices. The *State of UK Public Parks 2016* report found that 92 per cent of local authority parks departments have experienced budget reductions in the past three years, and that 95 per cent of parks managers expect to be faced with further reductions in the next three years.[98] The scale of budget reductions has varied between different local authorities. For example, Newcastle City Council told us that its parks management budget

95 Q26 [Will Smithard]
96 Q55 [Ian Walmsley]
97 parkrun Limited (PKS298)
98 Heritage Lottery Fund, *State of UK Public Parks 2016* (September 2016)

had been reduced by 97 per cent over the past five years, whereas Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council's budget for green space management and maintenance has reduced by 30 per cent over the past six years.[99] Different local authorities have responded differently to the reductions in their budgets, for example by reducing costs, or increasing the income generated by their parks. Many of those who responded to our call for evidence suggested that a statutory duty to provide parks would increase the priority afforded to them during local authority budget allocation. We explore this question in more detail in Chapter 4.

52. Friends, volunteers, and other community groups have played a key role in mitigating the impact of budget reductions on local parks. Some local authorities are working innovatively with such groups, or with local businesses, to access volunteer time, expertise, or fundraising. However, as the Parks Alliance told us: "a side effect of this has been to disguise the depth of the crisis facing parks and open spaces".[100] We explore the role of communities in meeting the challenges facing the parks sector in more detail in Chapter 4.

53. Despite the hard work of local authorities and communities, many of those who contributed to our inquiry highlighted short and longer term effects resulting from the difficult financial circumstances. These include:

- temporary or permanent closure of park facilities, for example turning off water fountains and paddling pools, removal of flower beds, green gyms, or play equipment, or closure of public toilets;[101]
- downgrading of park facilities, for example replacing paved areas with tarmac, replacing equipment with cheaper options, or fewer and cheaper bands being commissioned to play on bandstands;[102]
- deteriorating standards of maintenance, for example increased algae in ponds, reduced grass-cutting, deterioration of bowling greens, overgrowth in planting, or increasing prevalence of nuisance plants such as Japanese Knotweed or vermin such as rats;[103]
- reductions in service levels or parks programmes, for example reduced opening hours for facilities in parks, or the ending of school or corporate volunteering programmes;[104]
- prioritisation of investment in or maintenance of one park over another;[105]
- decreased ability to enforce park bylaws and regulations, leading to increased antisocial behaviour, litter, vandalism and other crime;[106]

99 Newcastle City Council (PKS319) and Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (PKS252)
100 The Parks Alliance (PKS084)
101 For example, Clapham Park West Residents Association (PKS013), Esther Priestley, Landscape Architect, City of York Council (PKS017), Friends of Leazes Park (PKS057), Heather Williams (PKS083)
102 For example, Esther Priestley, Landscape Architect, City of York Council (PKS017), Malmesbury Concert Band (PKS035)
103 For example, British Crown Green Bowling Association (PKS034), Newcastle Parks Forum (PKS038), Friends of Moss Bank Park (PKS051), Heather Williams (PKS083)
104 For example, Derbyshire County Council (PKS099), The Clissold Park User Group (PKS281)
105 For example, Friends of Moss Bank Park (PKS051), Mrs Jane Edwards (PKS078)
106 For example, Derbyshire County Council (PKS099), Friends of Kennington Park (PKS113), Friends of Saltwell Park (PKS216)

- loss of staff capacity, skills and expertise reducing the quality of parks maintenance and affecting local authorities' abilities to build relationships with the local community, to support and coordinate friends or other volunteer groups, to be proactive, and to respond quickly to concerns or issues;[107] and
- reduced ability to apply for or maintain Green Flag Award status due to costs and staff time required.[108]

54. Like many of those who responded to our inquiry, we are concerned that the impact of budget reductions could herald a return to the period of neglect which our parks experienced in the 1980s and 90s. Since then, some £850 million has been invested in parks and green spaces by the Heritage Lottery Fund alone—a period of decline would put this investment at risk. We agree with Derbyshire County Council's assessment that:

> Many of these changes can appear small scale at first but have an insidious effect with longer term results […] as sites become less welcoming, due to vandalism or their unkempt appearance, this confidence is knocked and users can be put off coming, then as the site has fewer visitors, this can itself dissuade further visitors creating a vicious circle of decline.[109]

The short-term effects of budget reductions, such as reduced grass-cutting, increased litter, and temporary closure of some facilities will undoubtedly affect the communities who use and value their parks. However, some of the effects of the budget reductions described above will not be immediate. Sue Ireland, Vice Chair of the Parks Alliance, gave the example of weed reseeding, which she said means that

> more plants for the future are the wrong sorts of plants. It is things like that; it is a gradual thing, because if you are managing landscapes, they are there for the long term, so you can put those things right. What we are doing at the moment is becoming much more reactive in the way in which we manage.[110]

55. We are also, therefore, concerned about the medium and longer term effect of, for example, staff reductions which limit the capacity of local authorities to build relationships, and provide support to community groups to help them to organise and contribute to the upkeep and enhancement of their local parks. We heard concerns about whether local authorities currently have the strategic capacity and skills to take advantage of new opportunities.[111] Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council told us that the reduction in parks management roles within its parks service meant that it had to a focus on reactive work at the expense of strategic planning, ability to apply for grant funding, and third sector relationship building. In addition, it emphasised the impact of staffing reductions and reduced capacity on staff morale:

107 For example, Friends of Trafford's Parks and Green Spaces (PKS042), Mrs S Witney (PKS045), Friends of Leazes Park (PKS057), Durham County Council (PKS135), Parks for London (PKS229), Friends of the Carrs (PKS329)

108 For example, Friends of Moss Bank Park (PKS051), Bristol Parks Forum (PKS227). Despite a 37 per cent increase in the overall number of parks achieving the standard across the UK, the number of winning sites has declined in the North West by 19 per cent, and changed little in the North East, or Yorkshire and Humberside. Keep Britain Tidy, which runs the Green Flag Award Scheme, noted that "A number of local authorities have been unable to maintain the Green Flag Award standard and have significantly reduced the number of applications to the scheme" (Keep Britain Tidy (PKS147))

109 Derbyshire County Council (PKS099)

110 Q10 [Sue Ireland]

111 Q21 [Drew Bennellick, Sue Ireland, Ellie Robinson]

> The inability to carry out work to the standards needed at all times and in all parks also causes frustration for Council Officers who want to do a good job but see the improvements made over the years being lost with little chance of reversing the trend.[112]

56. Many of our witnesses told us about the importance of community and volunteer groups in mitigating the impact of budget reductions, and enhancing parks and green spaces. However, park managers are expecting anticipated budget reductions to lead to decreases in park quality, and further reductions in skills, morale, support for park friends and user groups, and volunteer recruitment and training.[113] For example, Birmingham City Council told us that:

> Without a staff resource to offer supervision and guidance this activity [volunteering by individuals, community groups, friends groups and corporate groups] and the resulting help in kind (approximately 60,000 hours per annum worth approximately £550,000) would not take place.[114]

57. The Parks Alliance told us that where there were strong friends groups operating, parks were more likely to weather budget reductions, but that if momentum was to be maintained, there needed to be sufficient local authority funding and support to establish a strong partnership between the local authority and the community group.[115] By working with friends or volunteer groups, local authorities may be able to access funding sources which were not available to them directly as local authorities. However, we also heard that the limited availability of capital and revenue funding could result in individual parks, or friends groups, coming into competition with one another. In addition to hindering the ability of such groups to work together, the result of such competition is that parks with less well-resourced groups, or groups with less expertise or experience, can lose out. Fields in Trust noted that lobbying and campaigns could result in areas with active campaigns securing protections for their parks, while "other neighbourhoods, equally in need, are less well-served".[116] The Department of Landscape at Sheffield University argued this can deepen inequalities, as "invariably the better-resourced group with stronger capacity (often on the richer side of town/ the city) will fare better".[117]

58. This is illustrated by the evidence that we heard from Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, which told us that it had mitigated the impact of staff reductions and skill losses in part through new ways of working with volunteers which helped them to work more independently. While this is, in general, positive, the Council told us that:

> the sections of our community most affected by the loss of direct support by council staff are often those least able to help themselves. This includes school groups who require on site direction, provision of tools, equipment and materials and volunteers from more deprived backgrounds who may

112 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (PKS252)
113 Heritage Lottery Fund (PKS275)
114 Birmingham City Council (PKS381)
115 The Parks Alliance (PKS084)
116 Fields in Trust (PKS311)
117 Department of Landscape, Sheffield University (PKS373)

> not have the resources to work independently. It is possible that it is these same members of the community that stand to gain the most from the benefits that voluntary work can bring.[118]

59. Similarly, the London Borough of Camden said that expecting volunteers to come forward proactively could mean that "it can be some of the perhaps better-off areas, which have more confidence and skills, that step up to the plate. Deprived communities without those skills do not necessarily have the capacity".[119] Bringing friends groups or other community groups into competition in this way, whether for funding, or for support from the local authority, therefore risks deepening the inequalities between our communities by contributing to the emergence of a multi-tier parks system. The Friends of Grangewood Park described their parks as "second class citizens", located within an area which "has relatively high levels of poverty, with increasing numbers of houses in multiple occupation with children living in accommodation with little or no outdoor space".[120] The Better Archway Forum suggested that one means to overcome "the potential uneven quality of local representation might be to require such representatives to work with a number of parks in a wider area".[121]

60. We asked Dave Morris, the Chair of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, how local authorities should try to work with friends and community groups. He told us that the way forward was for friends groups to come together to form forums, which could then provide the basis for interaction with the local authority.[122] For example, the Harrow Recreation Ground Steering Group told us that, as a Green Flag park, while it is still underfunded, "We know we get a disproportionate share of the resources […] But other parks are worse off and as a Member Group of Harrow Parks Forum we argue that more resources are needed for all Harrow's parks. […] Harrow Parks Forum is an umbrella forum through which different park user groups can share knowledge, support new groups and enjoy events at each other's parks".[123]

61. When he came before us, the Minister emphasised that the allocation and prioritisation of their budgets is a matter for local authorities, but said that the longer-term settlements taken up by 97 per cent of local authorities and the retention of 100 per cent of business rates by the end of this Parliament should, in his opinion, "give councils a stable position to plan for into the future".[124] The Parks Alliance acknowledged the retention of business rates, but told us it wanted to see a commitment from local authorities that some of the proceeds from business rates would be spent on parks so that lottery funding could "primarily be about enhancing the offer of many public parks and open spaces; rather than maintaining existing green infrastructure".[125]

62. **The level of response which we have received to our inquiry, and the evidence which so many people have provided, is a clear indication to us of the strength and depth of concern which people and communities across the country have about the effect of budget reductions on their treasured parks and green spaces. We share these**

118 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (PKS252)
119 Q88 [Andrew Hinchley]
120 Friends of Grangewood Park (PKS284)
121 Better Archway Forum (PKS053)
122 Q38 [Dave Morris]
123 Harrow Recreation Ground Steering Group (PKS105)
124 Q168
125 The Parks Alliance (PKS084)

concerns. We too are worried about the potential deterioration or even loss of a service which is of great value, both as an amenity, and for the contribution which parks make to wider policy objectives including community cohesion, improvement of air quality, and biodiversity. The actions taken thus far by local authorities and volunteers have mitigated the effect of budget reductions in the short term, but this support may not be sustainable in the longer term. The contributions made by friends groups, and other volunteer and community groups, are very important: but they must not be taken for granted. While we recognise the difficult choices with which local authorities are faced, we believe that when planning their parks services, or taking decisions about funding allocations, they must give sufficient priority to supporting, building relationships with and coordinating volunteers.

63. **We understand how strongly local friends and community groups feel about their own local parks. However, it is a matter of concern that friends groups may be forced into competition with each other for scarce resources and that some parks are losing out to others. We believe that local authorities should consider their parks to be part of one portfolio, rather than as disparate individual sites. In this way, we believe that they can manage their parks more efficiently and effectively. We welcome the growth of parks forums, in which friends and community groups can come together to share resources, ideas and learning. We believe that such forums will improve the way in which local authorities can work with their communities in coordinated and efficient ways. *Local authorities should encourage and support the development of friends group forums, and work with them in a coordinated way to ensure that needs are properly assessed, and resources are prioritised and targeted appropriately. Where local circumstances require it, this may include coordination and cooperation across local authority boundaries.***

Health and safety in parks

64. Budget reductions have already had a range of effects on parks, and on the communities which use them. At times, the potential consequences of such effects can, unfortunately, be dangerous. Table 1 sets out a few of the potential health and safety risks witnesses highlighted.[126]

Table 1: Health and safety risks

Facility	Example
Paths	"Over time, we expect serious maintenance issues to become apparent in parks, such as keeping tarmac paths in good condition, replacing play equipment, and tree maintenance. Gradually, the decline in the condition of parks will make parks more difficult, less pleasant and less safe to use, impacting on the health and wellbeing of communities that rely on them. This decline will be very challenging and expensive to reverse".[127]

126 In July 2015, five-year old Alexia Walenkaki died after play equipment collapsed on her in Mile End Park. As the inquest has not yet taken place, it would not be appropriate for us to comment on the events which led to the sad loss of Alexia. However, we do want to offer our sincere condolences to Alexia's mother, Ms Vida Kwotuah, and her family for their loss.

127 The Ramblers (PKS151)

Buildings and structures	"In the last 10 years there have been two failed heritage lottery bids to improve some of the important heritage areas of the park. This includes a Shippon Complex and Stable buildings, which have links to the former ownership of the park by John Rylands one of the founders of the weaving industry during the industrial revolution. These buildings are now becoming unsafe due to lack of repair/capital investment to replace the leaking roof".[128]
Trees	"Tree maintenance has also suffered, leading to potentially dangerous situations where dead trees and trees with dead limbs sway in high winds with no intervention. The council state that they rely on the public to report dangerous trees, which on one occasion we did, but it took over a month for the council to attend to it".[129]
Lakes and ponds	"The water in the lake comes from road run-off from the local catchment area, which is the largest in London, and so brings rubbish, cigarette ends, rubber bands, oil, cacogenics and anything else put down the drains in the local roads. Household misconnections to the rain water drains rather than the sewers also cause major problems. We have had two very serious outbreaks of botulism during the last 5 years during which approximately 120 wildfowl died. The advice is that the lake badly needs desilting but as the silt is contaminated it will need to be sent to a special waste disposal site that deals with contaminated waste and estimates of the cost range from £600,000 to £2 million. The Council does not have this sort of money to spend as the Tarn is one of 22 parks in Greenwich and their budget also has to cover the maintenance of cemeteries, and any trees along the roads".[130]
Lack of repairs and maintenance	"Safety has become an issue. Damaged play equipment was not repaired, despite many requests to the local authority, and was eventually just taken away. Two dogs have been injured–one from an ill-fitting screw on a bench, and one from a piece of metal cut by the grass-cutter because litter-picking is no longer carried out before mowing. Paths become slippery, not only from cut grass in the summer, but fallen leaves that aren't swept up in the winter".[131]

65. Local authorities are responsible for carrying out risk assessments on their parks to ensure that they are as safe as possible for those who use them. Birmingham City Council stated that:

> This is a critical area of work which we must ensure continues to reduce the risk to the City Council of claims for litigation and damage. Any substantial employee headcount reductions will affect the ability of the service to undertake these risk assessments. A further headcount reduction will also impact upon the management of the large number of volunteer staff that provide added value to the Parks Service. The management of our Parks sites often include additional incidents such as the management of Ash Dieback, E.coli, water safety, infectious diseases etc. These need careful management to prevent harm to parks visitors and the environment.[132]

128 Friends of Longford Park (PKS155)
129 Friends of Blythe Hill Fields (PKS199)
130 Friends of the Tarn (PKS219)
131 Friends of Moor Nook Park (PKS299)
132 Birmingham City Council (PKS381)

In their evidence to us, local authorities emphasised the priority they give to health and safety in their parks. Andrew Hinchley from the London Borough of Camden summarised the position:

> I do not necessarily think there is an increased risk. Health and safety inspections, and addressing high risk items, will always be top of the agenda. Perhaps the difference now is our ability, once we have shut a space down and made it safe, to do something about that quickly—how fast it could perhaps be replaced, or where we find capital investment to do something about that.[133]

66. The Minister told us that his impression was that local authorities were more aware of their safety responsibilities than they had been in the past, but that he was willing to ask his officials to look at the evidence base to identify any trends in safety incidents in parks.[134] **We acknowledge the difficult choices with which local authorities are faced. However, it is essential that our parks are places which are safe for our communities to enjoy. When planning parks maintenance, and allocating funding, local authorities must prioritise safety, especially in relation to children's play equipment. *To ensure that health and safety in parks is given appropriate priority, the Minister should collect data on the number and distribution of accidents in parks across England centrally. He should monitor this data, identify any trends or patterns, and work with relevant local authorities to address problems.***

Access to revenue and capital funding

67. Parks across the country have benefited from capital investment from bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund. There was consensus that this investment has been beneficial in restoring and enhancing many of the UK's parks. However, we also heard that the reliance of parks on capital funding from grants of this nature has had unintended consequences. The Town and Country Planning Association argued that the resulting focus on the heritage and history of parks had meant less attention had been given to parks' role in the future of towns and cities, for example as part of climate change mitigation or spaces to facilitate active travel.[135] Mrs Michelle Furtado, a sustainability consultant, suggested that it might well be suburban parks which lack the required heritage or landscape features to attract grant funding or generate income through concessions which were most in need of capital investments or ongoing revenue maintenance as:

> These are used heavily but don't meet the requirements for funding or have the interest afforded by the local community for an active 'friends' group. Here maintenance cuts are felt more quickly, as infrastructure and equipment loss is not as visible or key to a town's image. Yet these are the vital spaces where significant numbers of people would benefit from the addition of green gyms or new play spaces, improving local health outcomes and facilities.[136]

133 Q75 [Andrew Hinchley]
134 Q189
135 Town & Country Planning Association (PKS368)
136 Mrs Michelle Furtado (PKS134)

68. Britain Thinks found that flagship parks were less likely to be a priority for people (28 per cent) than neighbourhood children's playgrounds (56 per cent).[137] However, some witnesses argued that decreases in revenue budgets could lead to the emergence of a two-tier parks system in which larger, flagship parks are prioritised for investment and smaller, neighbourhood parks are overlooked, with a corresponding detrimental impact on their communities.[138] The Heritage Lottery Fund acknowledged that this could be an unintended consequence of its focus on principal parks, as local authorities might try to protect past investment within a context of reducing resources.[139] Haringey Friends of Parks Forum told us that this had happened to its local parks, as the allocation of match funding to parks in receipt of Heritage Lottery Fund grants over an agreed period meant that parks which have not received Lottery funding are disproportionately affected when overall budgets are reduced.[140]

69. During our inquiry, we heard that while overall parks budgets are reducing, local authorities may find it particularly challenging to access ongoing revenue and maintenance funding. Eddie Curry, Chair of the Core Cities Parks and Greenspaces Group, told us that:

> From a capital funding perspective, there seems to have been very little change in terms of our ability to access capital funds to drive forward improvements in parks. The real challenge for us is having the capacity and the skills in house to deliver those projects.[141]

Arup told us that increasingly, when commissioning its services, local authorities were "responding to on-going revenue cuts as well as the historically weak relationship between capital investment and revenue funding. Finding new, sustainable ways to manage parks in the face of ever more severe funding reductions is often a focus of such commissions".[142] Peter Neal, an independent landscape consultant and the author of the *State of the UK Public Parks* reports, argued that this could result in "costly and demoralising cycles of investment followed by decline".[143] Newcastle City Council summarised the issue:

> A number of successful Heritage Lottery bids have seen considerable capital investment in 6 of the principal parks. Heritage Lottery expect that these parks are maintained to a high standard and regularly monitor the levels of maintenance. It is a challenge to maintain the lottery funded parks to the levels expected and a failure to do so can potentially result in claw back of funds. Although capital injections in parks are welcomed the real issue for the future is ongoing maintenance. There are very few funding sources available for revenue projects. A change in emphasis from funding bodies to revenue would be welcomed.[144]

70. The Bristol Parks Forum similarly highlighted concerns about a mismatch between capital investment and ongoing revenue funding, telling us that "Bristol City Council is increasingly reluctant to sign up for Lottery funded projects because it cannot be sure that

137 Britain Thinks, *Heritage Lottery Fund: State of the UK's Public Parks II Public Survey: A report prepared by Britain Thinks* (June 2016)
138 Mr Peter Neal (PKS324)
139 Heritage Lottery Fund (PKS275)
140 Haringey Friends of Parks Forum (PKS391)
141 Q107 [Eddie Curry]
142 Arup (PKS297)
143 Mr Peter Neal (PKS324)
144 Newcastle City Council (PKS319)

it will be able to meet its maintenance commitments in the future".[145] Describing a lack of ongoing maintenance of their park's infrastructure, the Friends of Kingswood Park suggested that:

> New parks must be designed for low maintenance. This means careful choice of boundary structures, features and pathways so that they are sustainable and maintain their appearance for years to come. There is nothing so sad as a relatively new green space losing its initial lustre and becoming unused.[146]

We also heard suggestions that greater flexibility in the use which can be made of planning gains, for example allowing Section 106 or the Community Infrastructure Levy to be put towards revenue spending might be more beneficial to local parks and green spaces than new capital enhancements.[147]

71. **Sufficient priority must be given to the sustainability of ongoing maintenance and the revenue funding needed. When commissioning new park facilities or elements local authorities should ensure that the level of ongoing maintenance required is feasible, and that plans for capital investment are accompanied by sustainable plans for ongoing revenue requirements. We believe that local authorities should be allowed to use Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funds to cover parks' revenue requirements.**

Unequal distribution of parks and green spaces

Access to green spaces in deprived areas

72. Access to high quality green space has been linked to better health outcomes. People are more likely to be physically active if they live close to accessible green space. However, access to green space across England currently varies. The Department for Communities and Local Government acknowledged that the most affluent 20 per cent of wards in England have five times the amount of green space as the most deprived 10 per cent.[148] In its research on public perceptions of parks, Britain Thinks found that middle class adults were more likely to think that their local parks were in a good condition than working class adults, and that council tenants were more likely to think that their parks were in poor condition than residents of any other form of tenure.[149] One respondent to our call for evidence told us:

> My park is in an area which could be considered as deprived. There is high unemployment in the area and little potential for economic growth. Finding private funding for a park in such an area is difficult, one off payments may be gained from local businesses and funds could be raised in the short term by community groups but in a situation of economic hardship it is difficult to see how long term funding could be sought and sustained. This would

145 Bristol Parks Forum (PKS227)
146 Friends of Kingswood Park (PKS130)
147 Friends of Vauxhall Park (PKS203)
148 Department for Communities and Local Government (PKS315)
149 Britain Thinks, *Heritage Lottery Fund: State of the UK's Public Parks II Public Survey: A report prepared by Britain Thinks* (June 2016)

> result in my local park falling back into disrepair and therefore the use by the community would be lost, with negative effects on both physical and mental wellbeing.[150]

73. Many people of Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds live in the most deprived wards in the UK, which have, on average, a fifth of the green space available in the most affluent wards. A 2010 study showed that in areas where Black and Minority Ethnic groups comprise 40 per cent or more of the population, the available green space is of a poorer quality. A similar study found that "the quality of, access to, and use of urban green space was a significant predictor of general health for people of African Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Pakistani origin and other BME groups, who were also those with the poorest health". That study concluded that the provision and maintenance of good quality urban green space could contribute to the reduction of health inequalities.[151]

74. The Centre for Diet and Activity Research at Cambridge University found proximity to green space was not sufficient—that green space also needs to be accessible. In a study in Bristol it found that:

> those living in more deprived areas tended to live closer to green spaces than those in more affluent areas. However, those in more deprived areas were less likely to use green spaces, reported poorer perceived accessibility to these spaces, and reported lower physical activity levels. Therefore encouraging the use of public parks by those living in more deprived neighbourhoods may need to include improving perceptions of accessibility of local green spaces.[152]

The Better Archway Forum suggested that "those in most need of greenspace are often those least willing or able to travel to find it. They will barely go the distance of two bus stops to do so, which means it is important to provide regularly spaced elements of greenspace".[153] The Sport and Recreation Alliance highlighted the need for local authorities and health professionals to signpost people to the parks and green spaces in their areas, how to get there, and what activities or facilities are available.[154]

75. The Heritage Lottery Fund told us that analysis of 135 of its investment projects had shown that "50 per cent of the funding for those projects was going to the 20 per cent most deprived communities".[155] Similarly, programmes like the Department for Communities and Local Government's Pocket Parks initiative have sought to target capital investment in deprived areas, and to improve provision. The Minister told us that the Pocket Park programme was specifically aimed at improving the provision of green spaces for deprived communities and added:

> We have now provided the public health grant to local authorities. It is possible for that public health funding to be used to target support at the

150 Mrs Mechelle Jacques (PKS0023)
151 OPENspace Research Centre, University of Edinburgh (PKS109)
152 Centre for Diet and Activity Research, University of Cambridge (PKS292)
153 Better Archway Forum (PKS053)
154 Sport and Recreation Alliance (PKS186)
155 Q8 [Drew Bennellick]

> most deprived and vulnerable communities, where often you have the greatest health inequalities. I would hope that the green space and parks available in communities can be part of that too.[156]

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11.7

76. In September 2015, the UK was one of 193 countries which adopted the Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in New York.[157] The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include SDG 11.7, which requires that states will:

> By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.[158]

77. The Minister noted that there is no defined metric or measure for assessing whether SDG 11.7 has been achieved.[159] Even so, we have heard evidence which concerns us about the extent to which the UK is on track to achieve SDG 11.7 by 2030. For example, the Friends of Bromley Town Parks and Gardens told us that one of the impacts of budget cuts was poorer maintenance which would "gradually degrade our parks and so make them less attractive to park users, seem more threatening and less biodiverse".[160] Newcastle University told us that one of the most common reasons people give for not using parks and green spaces is fear of antisocial behaviour. Those most likely to be discouraged by this fear are "the most vulnerable members of society who are discouraged from using parks and open space by poor maintenance and whose confidence is then difficult to regain".[161] Similarly, one local authority green space officer told us that when park facilities were removed or in poor condition as a result of budget reductions "the young and disabled suffer the worst implications of poor access to facilities, being less able to independently travel to alternative facilities further away".[162]

78. Parks for London noted that one impact of the reductions in park budgets was reduced enforcement of bylaws. It stated that this could make parks less safe, and therefore have a particular impact on vulnerable groups, including women, children, older people, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.[163] One resident told us that neglect had led to her park becoming used for drug-related activity and rough sleeping. The formation of a friends group had led to the council providing funding for policing, but this had since been withdrawn because of budget cuts. The result was that gang and drug-related activity was increasing, and local residents were being put off using the park at some times of the day.[164] This was not, unfortunately, an isolated case. We also heard from the Lambeth Parks and Open Spaces Forum that budget reductions were leading to changes to arrangements for locking parks, which could lead to greater risk of damage or antisocial behaviour, with

156 Q150
157 UN, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (September 2015)
158 UN, *Sustainable Development Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*, (September 2015)
159 Q147
160 Friends of Bromley Town Parks and Gardens (PKS201)
161 Newcastle University (PKS173)
162 Mr Colin Horton, Green Spaces Officer, Rugby Borough Council (PKS214)
163 Parks for London (PKS229)
164 Lynda Cole (PKS037)

a corresponding impact on amenity, access and park safety.[165] Similarly, the Friends of Saltwell Park told us that before holding nature sessions for young children in the park, the programme organiser has to check the park and remove evidence of drug and alcohol-related activity.[166] The London Borough of Camden noted that increases in antisocial behaviour and deposits (e.g. abandoned sleeping materials, discarded drug paraphernalia) were coinciding with potential reductions in its community safety service.[167]

Impact on children and young people

79. Groundwork told us that children and young people are particularly affected by the unequal distribution of quality green space:

> The importance of green spaces to young people's social and physical development is well understood. For example, studies show that outdoor play patterns established in childhood are directly linked with adult health. However, according to the National Children's Bureau's 2013 report 'Greater Expectations', children living in deprived areas are nine times less likely than those living in affluent areas to have access to green space and places to play.[168]

Young people from lower income families are less likely to access parks and green spaces than those from higher income families. StreetGames told us that 20 per cent of young people from lower income families have no access to local green space to play outdoor sport, compared with 12 per cent from higher income families. Of those young people with access to parks and green spaces, 32 per cent of 16–24 year olds from lower income families say that they never visit it, compared with 14 per cent of young people from higher income families.[169] Speaking about the barriers to access to green spaces for young people, Cllr Trickett of Birmingham City Council told us:

> There was a film done recently about green space and play areas, and there was a lad interviewed from Tottenham. This lad was referring to the signs saying, "No ball games here". How can we do that? There are tower blocks; the only green space available to those children is outside those tower blocks, and the first thing we do is slap a sign on it with, "No ball games here". Those young people are growing up with an identity that says, "You are not welcome here". It is not just what we do on the green space; it is how we make children and young people feel part of their communities. Again, when we look at our inner-city areas and high-density inner-city estates, we have to look at that totality of green space and make sure that it is accessible and inclusive to all.[170]

165 Lambeth Parks and Open Spaces Forum (PKS377)
166 Friends of Saltwell Park (PKS216)
167 London Borough of Camden (PKS335)
168 Groundwork (PKS256)
169 StreetGames (PKS321)
170 Q86 [Cllr Lisa Trickett]

Impact on people with disabilities

80. Ceri Love, a 38 Degrees member, highlighted the benefits of access to parks and green spaces for mental and physical health, both for herself and for the refugee women she works with:

> For me particularly, because I use a wheelchair, there are safe, smooth paths for my wheelchair, so I can get close to nature and I can go by myself, which is one of the few times that I can go solo with my electric wheelchair. When I lived in the countryside, I could not get close to nature, because the paths that you take off on are too rugged.[171]

Some of those who responded to our call for evidence highlighted the barriers which can prevent people with disabilities from accessing parks and green spaces and the benefits which they can provide. For example, the Tyne and Wear Joint Local Access Forum told us that parks may be the primary way in which many people with disabilities can experience rural or semi-rural settings. However, to ensure that they are able to do so, basic requirements need to be met, for example accessible parking, accessible toilets, benches at reasonable intervals, obstruction-free footpaths, and accessible information about facilities and routes to enable people to plan their visits in advance. Unfortunately such requirements are not always met.[172]

81. **We recognise the importance of parks and green spaces to national strategic issues such as obesity, flooding and climate change. We are therefore concerned about the unequal distribution of parks and green spaces in England, and the consequent impact on the ability of all of our communities to benefit from the many advantages of access to quality green space. We are concerned that the UK may not meet UN Sustainable Development Goal 11.7 in respect of safe and inclusive access to parks and green spaces by 2030. *The Minister and the cross-departmental group should identify what action can be taken to improve the provision of parks and green spaces, for example by accessing funds available under public health strategies such as the Obesity Strategy. The Minister should also monitor the provision and distribution of green space across England, and provide Parliament with annual updates, by way of written statements, on whether equality of access is improving. If access to high quality parks and green spaces does not improve for deprived communities, the Minister should identify local authorities where provision is inadequate, and work with them to improve access.***

Planning policy

82. Public parks are included within the definition of 'open space' in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).[173] The NPPF provides that existing open spaces should not be built on, unless assessment clearly shows them to be surplus to requirements or the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision elsewhere. The NPPF also requires local authorities to consider appropriate climate change mitigation and adaptation measures when making their Local Plans or other planning decisions. Parks which are identified as 'significant'—as defined by the NPPF—may be included on the register of parks and gardens of special

171 Q2 [Ceri Love]
172 Tyne and Wear Joint Local Access Forum (PKS100)
173 Department for Communities and Local Government, *National Planning Policy Framework* (March 2012)

interest. Such parks and gardens are then subject to additional consultation requirements before any proposed development can take place. Local Green Space Designation status and Neighbourhood Planning can also assist communities to protect their parks and green spaces. The Department for Communities and Local Government stated that Neighbourhood Planning means:

> community groups have far greater influence in deciding on the location of new shops, offices, homes or recreational facilities including green spaces and what to protect […]. There are 197 neighbourhood plans made and more than 50 of these include the protection or creation of green space in their area.[174]

83. The Minister told us that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy was working with the Ordnance Survey to develop a tool to map green spaces across the country. He said that:

> If we know where all our green spaces are, it helps in terms of the public identifying what is and what is not in their area. We then have to make information easily available to the public in terms of what they can do to protect that green space that is not already protected.[175]

84. However, the Friends of Langmeads told us that they were concerned about the extent of the protections provided by Neighbourhood Plans:

> while Neighbourhood Plans (NPs) have helped highlight the value of specific local green spaces, the implementation of NPs has proved patchy in some respects. In our area that has not yet affected parks or open spaces. However, the fact that some policies of our NP, for example on housing design and materials, have not been respected—even if only in what might seem small details—does not inspire confidence.[176]

85. Many of those who contributed to our inquiry raised the potential conflict between green spaces and housing development:

> The country is facing a housing shortage, particularly for affordable housing. Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and housing providers are considering new developments. The Government is committed to building a million homes over five years. The pressure for new housing, particularly in the south of England, is therefore intense. Whilst the focus tends to inevitably come down to how many houses can be built, there is a need to consider the well-being of the communities being created, as well as the impact on existing residents.[177]

Birmingham City Council told us that pressure for housing development was "nibbling away" at existing green space, and increasing demand for new public open spaces.[178] Pressure on green spaces from housing development is especially acute on smaller green spaces, which are less likely to receive protections under planning policy. Housing development

174 Department for Communities and Local Government (PKS315)
175 Q194
176 Friends of Langmeads (PKS245)
177 The Parks Alliance (PKS084)
178 Birmingham City Council (PKS381)

can be a source of additional funding for parks and green spaces, through S106 payments in lieu of open space provision, or through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). We heard from the London Borough of Camden that much of its capital funding for parks is raised in this way, with a portion of S106 monies reserved for maintenance and renewal of project sites to reduce pressure on the revenue budget.[179] However, the introduction of CIL, which is not ringfenced, means that parks are increasingly having to compete with other service areas for the funding.[180]

86. Birmingham City Council acknowledged that the NPPF provides some opportunities to secure open space provision from the private sector, but stated that some developers were resistant to putting long term management and funding arrangements in place, wanting instead to "discharge their liabilities once their development is complete and the properties sold".[181] Sefton Council noted that budget reductions created difficulties for developers, who would usually expect to hand responsibility for green spaces within new developments over to the council.[182] Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council suggested that it would be helpful if planning guidance could be interpreted more broadly, to allow planning gains to be used to enhance existing green space provision and facilities, where this would offer greater sustainability, rather than providing new play areas as part of new housing developments.[183] Conversely, the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association suggested that the pressure to develop urban green spaces might provide "an opportunity to replace poor quality or poorly sited existing green spaces with superior alternatives within new areas of urban expansion".[184]

87. Many witnesses highlighted increasing housing densities in new developments in towns and cities, or as a result of office to residential conversion through Permitted Development Rights, and argued that the lack of access to private gardens made access to parks and public green spaces increasingly important:

> the properties being built are mainly flats, with little or no provision for gardens for children to play in. These residents need parks as they are the only places they can go for their children to play, often the only places with grass in an otherwise concrete jungle.[185]

> Increasingly people are being crammed into small flats and many local residents have no other access to green open spaces. It is well known that the physical and mental health of everyone is improved by being outdoors in a green environment, taking appropriate exercise, having fun and mixing with other park users.[186]

> [Parks] become an even more vital lifeline when developers incorporate nearby green spaces into their designs, using them to mitigate against the negative impacts of the high-density housing they are building.[187]

179 London Borough of Camden (PKS335)
180 Borough of Poole (PKS191)
181 Birmingham City Council (PKS381)
182 Sefton Council (PKS146)
183 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (PKS252)
184 Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association (PKS309)
185 Ms Rosemary Perkins (PKS0043)
186 Harrow Recreation Ground Steering Group (PKS105)
187 Save Lea Marshes (PKS169)

88. We heard from some witnesses that provision of green space is not always central to planning and development. Some suggested that it is seen as "a cosmetic afterthought", whereas the growth of our towns and cities, and the corresponding increase in demand for parks and green spaces, could provide an opportunity to strengthen the links between development and green space provision.[188] Some, including Birmingham City Council, have suggested that in the design of towns and cities, a whole-place approach should be taken. Such an approach would consider parks as:

> part of a holistic and inter-connected green estate […] given equal weight, thought, design and resources, as all other parts of the wider platforms of city infrastructure, and totally integrated.[189]

89. **We agree that green space should be at the heart of planning as it is fundamentally important to creating and shaping communities where people want to live, and where they are able to thrive. *When preparing or updating their Local Plans, local authorities should take a whole-place approach which recognises the importance of parks and green spaces both to existing and to new communities, in accordance with paragraphs 73 and 76 of the National Planning Policy Framework. This will require effective fulfilment of their duty to cooperate with other local authorities, whether on a bilateral basis or within the structures of devolution deals.***

Green infrastructure

90. The London Borough of Camden noted that development opportunities do not always align with the areas in greatest need of open spaces. To mitigate this, the Council is pursuing alternative ways to improve access to green spaces, including securing access to previously locked private squares, and looking for 'greening' opportunities through the planning system, including reimagining highways and applying green roof requirements.[190] The Leicestershire Local Access Forum outlined the benefits of such greening approaches:

> Green corridors are very desirable on many counts not least for allowing wildlife to migrate between parks, small green spaces and gardens and the open countryside. Isolated pockets of wildlife reduce the gene pool and lead to local extinctions. They can in effect be linear parks and can double up as greenways providing off road routes to work, school, shops etc. and to also allow people to gain access to the wider countryside.[191]

91. We were told that parks were "significant larger nodes in the network of green infrastructure connecting people and wildlife to other places".[192] However, the Land Trust argued that, at present, there is insufficient political will to champion parks, and suggested that "Parks and other green spaces and green infrastructure need to be considered at the same level as grey infrastructure, taken seriously and have the political support".[193] For example, Sue Ireland, from the Parks Alliance, noted that the emphasis on meeting housing need created pressures on planners which made it challenging to achieve the necessary focus on green infrastructure:

188 Mrs Meredith Whitten (PKS314)
189 Birmingham City Council (PKS381)
190 London Borough of Camden (PKS335)
191 Leicestershire Local Access Forum (PKS015)
192 Urban Forestry and Woodlands Advisory Committee Network (PKS278)
193 Land Trust (PKS136)

> There is a willingness, but the priority is so much more focused on housing that what green infrastructure is about is not really understood. It is partly because it is not a very sexy title, "green infrastructure"—that is why we talk about parks much more. When we talk about parks we mean more than parks, but it is the importance of getting them to understand that if they plan road traffic, all those sorts of things, green infrastructure should be in there right at the beginning. If it is, it can do so much more for the whole development.[194]

92. James Harris from the Royal Town Planning Institute told us that one of the benefits of considering parks in the context of a wider approach to green infrastructure was the ability to access economies of scale which:

> allow you to pull in other revenue streams from, say, the healthcare sector or water and sewage companies, which might benefit from reduced drainage into their sewer network because you have a network of parks. You can start to build that evidence that all these green infrastructure assets bring on a much wider scale. You need to have the good evidence behind you, and a good plan for how you will invest in them and make them better and better. You can then start having those discussions with health and wellbeing boards, water and sewage companies, and transit authorities that are looking to take cars off the road, and to promote active travel and people walking and cycling. You can start to bring in those kinds of strategic partners, and then you get towards the point where you can start to request contributions and funding towards the upkeep.[195]

The Town and Country Planning Association agreed that understanding parks as a part of wider green infrastructure networks might help local authorities to access alternative funding sources, as well as help to avoid the marginalisation of parks by encouraging them to be understood as "a vital element in the future success of our towns and cities".[196]

93. **Parks are not synonymous with green infrastructure—parks deliver important leisure, health, wellbeing and amenity benefits which other types of green infrastructure may not, and large green spaces like parks make particular contributions to absorbing water run-off to mitigate flood risk and combating the Urban Heat Island Effect—but we believe that thinking about parks as one element of wider green infrastructure networks may be beneficial both to parks, and to the profile of other types of green infrastructure. For example, understanding parks as part of wider networks of green infrastructure helps to highlight the value of green corridors and networks for biodiversity, wildlife, and active travel networks.**

94. Considering parks as a part of wider green infrastructure networks is likely to be a positive approach, but it will not be a panacea to resolve all of the challenges facing the parks sector. Traditional grey infrastructure, such as roads, is in our view often prioritised over green infrastructure, and many of our witnesses argued that planning policy needs to give greater recognition to green infrastructure. For example, Urban Pollinators Ltd stated that: "National investment decisions prioritise highly visible structures such as roads and railways, supporting interventions in landscapes while neglecting

194 Q16 [Sue Ireland]
195 Q98 [James Harris]
196 Town and Country Planning Association (PKS368)

the landscapes themselves".[197] Similarly, Merrick Denton-Thompson, President of the Landscape Institute, told us that planning policy currently gives insufficient attention to green infrastructure master planning: "there is a need to be much more proactive, and to see green infrastructure as infrastructure, in the same way that hospitals and roads are. These are now very, very important public facilities".[198] In February 2016, the House of Lords Committee on the Built Environment concluded that:

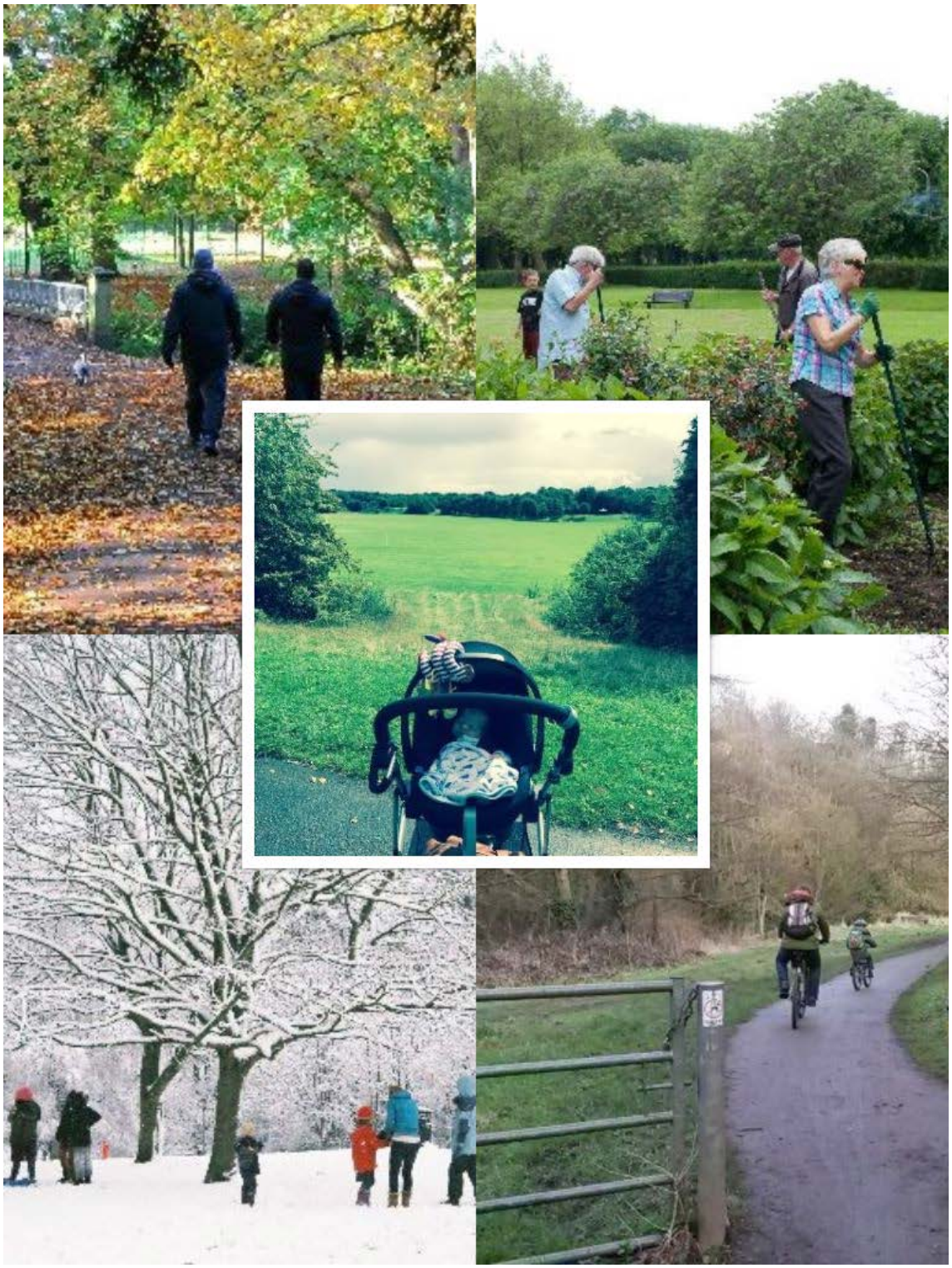
> The Government must do more to protect and promote Green Infrastructure in national policy and guidance, including setting out its benefits for sustainability. […] Within and beyond Government, there must be wider recognition of the fact that Green Infrastructure is an asset, and offers wider economic, health and social benefits.[199]

We agree with the Committee that the benefits of green infrastructure need to be more widely recognised, and that planning policy should support and encourage green infrastructure more effectively.

95. In its response to the Lords' report, the Department for Communities and Local Government said that "The Government recognises the important role of green infrastructure in delivering sustainable development".[200] We welcome this acknowledgement. We also note that the Department stated that it had expanded the planning practice guidance for the preparation by local authorities of green infrastructure frameworks to inform their Local or Neighbourhood Plan-making.[201] However, in a joint letter to us, the Town and Country Planning Association and the Landscape Institute have raised concerns about whether this is sufficient.[202] We have also heard concerns from Dr Katy Layton-Jones that failing to acknowledge the particular role of parks or distinguishing them from other types of green infrastructure could lead to parks being overlooked.[203] ***We recommend that the Minister's cross-departmental group should engage with the parks sector to assess whether the expanded guidance for local authorities on green infrastructure frameworks published in February 2016 adequately provides both for parks as such, and for their role as a part of green infrastructure networks.***

96. Defra is currently leading in the development of the Government's 25-year Environment Plan, and the Town and Country Planning Association and the Landscape Institute suggest that this may provide an opportunity to ensure "that GI is properly embedded in planning and decision-making in the longer term".[204] ***The Minister should work with his colleagues in Defra to ensure that parks, and green infrastructure more widely, are properly recognised in the Government's forthcoming 25-year Environment Plan.***

197 Urban Pollinators Ltd (PKS046)
198 Q94 [Merrick Denton-Thompson]
199 House of Lords Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment, Report of Session 2015–16, *Building Better Places*, HL Paper 100, para 224
200 Department for Communities and Local Government, *Government response to the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on the Built Environment*, Cm 9347, November 2016, para 158
201 Department for Communities and Local Government, *Government response to the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on the Built Environment*, Cm 9347, November 2016, para 159
202 *Correspondence from Merrick Denton-Thompson, Landscape Institute, and Julia Thrift, Town and Country Planning Association, to the Chair*, 8 December 2016
203 Q92 [Dr Katy Layton-Jones]
204 *Correspondence from Merrick Denton-Thompson, Landscape Institute, and Julia Thrift, Town and Country Planning Association, to the Chair*, 8 December 2016



4 How can we secure a sustainable future for parks?

The role of the community

97. Staffordshire County Council, which has been reviewing its approach to its parks, told us that the tight financial circumstances it was facing meant that it was "more important than ever for local people and communities to have a say and become involved in the management of our sites".[205] We agree that local communities have a key role to play in securing a future for England's parks, but they cannot do it alone. As the Parks Alliance told us:

> Momentum is maintained when Friends Groups and other user groups are able to work alongside well-resourced parks services teams. There is a thin line, however, between drawing on the enthusiasm and commitment of volunteers, and exploiting their time and energy. It is important that budget cuts do not force park managers over this line.[206]

This was echoed by the Friends of Waterloo Seafront Gardens, who told us that "the future of the parks and gardens cannot rely totally on the goodwill of volunteers. […] Many of the volunteers are elderly, and sometimes rely on one or two key people who hold the group together".[207] Similarly, the Friends of Longford Park said that an overreliance on volunteers might not be sustainable, as:

> it can't be assumed that when current volunteers retire they will always be replaced by others with the commitment, time and desire to do something for other people for free. In our experience there is nearly always a struggle to get enough volunteers, it is something that only a relatively small number of people will commit to on a regular and long term basis.[208]

98. It is not only friends groups who may be able to contribute to their local parks. Lydia Ragoonanan, who led the Rethinking Parks programme for Nesta, suggested that friends groups "do not necessarily always represent the breadth of experience, skills and passion in the community". She told us about the London Borough of Hackney's experience of engaging creative people and entrepreneurs to bring forward and develop ideas about how to improve and enhance their parks and open spaces.[209]

99. Volunteers undoubtedly play an important role in their local parks and we thank them for all that they do. However, it would be unfair and short-sighted to lay responsibility for resolving the challenges wholly at their doors, not least because the distribution of volunteer groups is patchy. The London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network told us that while many friends groups had been established in the last 15 years, "most spaces

205 Staffordshire County Council (PKS104)
206 The Parks Alliance (PKS084)
207 Friends of Waterloo Seafront Gardens (PKS117)
208 Friends of Longford Park (PKS155)
209 Q116 [Lydia Ragoonanan]

don't even have a Friends Group yet so are likely to be in a particularly poor state, or well on the way there".[210] Cllr Trickett of Birmingham City Council highlighted the difficulty of attracting volunteers to assist with all parks:

> people volunteer for the things that interest them. Those volunteers are fantastic and their contribution to the area is brilliant, but that does not make those volunteers want to contribute to the pocket park in the most deprived part of my ward where the drug dealers are. In part, if what you do is by total reliance on volunteers, you find that those excluded communities continue to be the most excluded.[211]

100. Where community or friends groups do exist, they may not have the appetite or the capacity to take on more formal management roles in relation to their parks. Peter Neal told us "Some would, but the proportion of Friends groups that have an appetite to take a formal lease or longer-term ownership is very limited".[212] Other witnesses highlighted that greater involvement of the community in the management or operation of parks would not necessarily lead to savings, or a reduction in local authority investment:

> Effective community participation requires more civic leadership not less. To see volunteer development as part of a process of civic disengagement is to court disaster: volunteers should be seen as an addition to, not a replacement for, local authority responsibility.[213]

101. **We welcome the contribution made to parks by friends, volunteer and other community groups and individuals across the country. The time and efforts which people freely give to their parks should not be underestimated, and nor should the benefits for parks, communities and for the individuals themselves.**

Innovation and alternative approaches

102. Local authorities, both individually and as part of wider programmes such as Nesta's Rethinking Parks, are exploring alternative models for the management of their parks, including, for example, parks trusts or formal partnerships with friends groups. Mark Walton, Director of Shared Assets, told us that there were a number of options open to local authorities, for example asset transfer or long leases to social enterprises or charitable trusts, or partnerships with community or other organisations. He argued that "It is about seeing a range of potential options that can either replace or add value to the existing local authority role".[214]

103. Eddie Curry, Chair of the Core Cities Parks and Greenspace Group outlined his experience of leases to community groups to manage specialist spaces. He noted that local authorities could encounter difficulties as a result of this approach because "there is only a limited amount of capacity in any authority to do the estates management, asset transfer

210 London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network (PKS164)
211 Q88 [Cllr Lisa Trickett]
212 Q22 [Peter Neal]
213 The Parks Agency Ltd (PKS103)
214 Q123 [Mark Walton]

and also the legal lease documentation".[215] Lydia Ragoonanan told us that, during its Rethinking Parks programme, Nesta had worked with local authorities to test the formal involvement of community groups in the management of parks:

> That is not without its difficulties. What we have tended to find is that, while parks groups and others have a real appetite to contribute back to their parks and public spaces, the level of skill, the level of effort and energy involved, really does require some sort of professional expertise that it is perhaps beyond the realms of parks groups necessarily to be able to have.[216]

104. We explored the parks trust model in detail during our evidence sessions. Some local authorities told us that they had rejected the idea of establishing trusts for some or all of their parks because raising a sufficient endowment would be prohibitive.[217] David Foster, Chief Executive of the Milton Keynes Parks Trust, acknowledged that the cost of raising an endowment for a trust could be a barrier for local authorities,[218] but told us that:

> The real benefit of having a trust is not so much about the funding; it is about setting the parks free and the people who run the parks—setting them free to be innovative and creative. […] an independent trust that has nothing else to do but promote the parks, get them well managed and bring the money in to manage them, with a single purpose, is much more likely to succeed in making them work.[219]

105. The Land Trust told us that its model, under which it only takes on the management of green spaces with long term financial strategies in place, was sufficiently flexible and adaptable to accommodate different types of land and landowners:

> This includes investing up front endowments and Section 106 payments, service charges from commercial and residential sectors, a mixture of both and other income which can be generated from our land, such as licences. We are then able to ensure there is income attached to each green space to protect it long term, whilst generating an annual maintenance budget to ensure each green space is well maintained for the benefit of local communities.[220]

106. A key issue in relation to the development of new management models for parks is the establishment of transparent governance and accountability structures. Local authorities are ultimately held accountable by their communities at the ballot box; changes to the model by which parks are managed can weaken or remove this link, and it is important that careful thought is given to establishing governance arrangements which provide appropriate oversight and involvement in decision-making for local people. For example, Urban Pollinators Ltd stated:

> A powerful argument in favour of local authority control of parks is that of democratic legitimacy. Parks are overseen—ultimately—by democratically elected councillors, and ward councillors can voice local residents' concerns

215 Q115 [Eddie Curry]
216 Q112 [Lydia Ragoonanan]
217 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (PKS252), Sheffield City Council (PKS310)
218 Q125 [David Foster]
219 Q123 [David Foster]
220 The Land Trust (PKS136)

> for the parks in their neighbourhoods. […] it must be accountable to the people who use the parks in as direct a manner as practicable, through transparent decision-making coupled with representative oversight.[221]

107. Alan Carter of the Land Trust acknowledged the importance of involving local people and communities:

> The liabilities that come and the legalities of dealing with land ownership can be tricky, but it is really crucially important to get the local community involved in making the decisions and having what I call the soft ownership: "It feels like it is mine; legally and technically it might not be, but it feels like it may be mine". They make the decisions about what that green space is used for and what benefits really come from that green space.[222]

Shared Assets worked with the National Trust and Sheffield City Council to explore whether a parks trust model might be appropriate for Sheffield's parks. Mark Walton told us that he remained concerned about the potential for charitable trusts to become "self-perpetuating oligarchies", which lacked suitable transparent governance and accountability to local communities.[223] However, David Foster of the Milton Keynes Parks Trust argued that the current challenges facing the parks sector suggested that democratic accountability through local authorities was not currently functioning well for parks because of the range of local authority responsibilities and priorities. He suggested that it was possible to provide for appropriate governance and accountability arrangements which ensure that there is suitable representation from the community among the trustees and that the trust's activities are in line with appropriate charitable and social objectives. The Charities Commission then has a role to play in ensuring that the trust's funds are spent only on delivering the trust's objectives.[224]

108. **Our review considered evidence on the governance of parks across the country. While many parks are very well run directly by local authorities in a traditional management structure, we also saw evidence that alternative management arrangements have been beneficial in some areas. We believe that these alternative management arrangements may have benefits in some additional other parts of the country, dependent on local circumstances, however, where they are used such arrangements must be suitably accountable to local people.** ***The Minister should issue guidance to local authorities setting out key principles for the appropriate governance and accountability arrangements in non-traditionally managed parks which could be put in place as part of any emerging or alternative model for parks management. Such principles might include the involvement of local people in the governance and oversight arrangements and decision-making, or the establishment of appropriate objectives with which the activities of the management model must be aligned. Whatever innovative arrangement may be adopted, ownership of parks should stay with local authorities, as democratically accountable bodies. A new trust, for example, should have a long lease of a park, rather than taking over the freehold.***

109. We welcome programmes such as Rethinking Parks, led by Nesta and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. However, it is clear that whatever models individual local

221 Urban Pollinators Ltd (PKS046)
222 Q123 [Alan Carter]
223 Q126 [Mark Walton]
224 Qq 137–9 [David Foster]

authorities explore or adopt, there are risks and costs associated with both the exploration and development of alternative arrangements. The Heritage Lottery Fund and National Trust suggested that there was a need for transitional support to be available to assist pathfinder local authorities.[225] We acknowledge the Minister's view that where service transformation is likely to unlock future savings, local authorities may need to find funds for invest to save projects locally.[226] During our visit to Newcastle, we also heard from the National Trust, Newcastle City Council and Social Finance about the potential for local authorities to raise funds to support their parks through a blended model including local authority funding, commercial income, external grants, fundraising, and social investors. They suggested that where external management models, such as parks trusts, were established, such bodies might be able to access alternative funding sources which were not available to local authorities. This was reflected in the evidence we heard about the challenges for local authorities in identifying funding, whether on a transitional or ongoing basis. For example the Herts Association of Cultural Officers Greenspace Managers Group told us that:

> while greenspace managers would like to be creative and have followed the research and pilot work undertaken by bodies such as Nesta, it is clear from Nesta's work there are no magic bullets to reducing revenue costs significantly and quickly, and a number of possible approaches require investment scenarios unlikely to be available from within existing parks budgets.[227]

We therefore welcome the indication from the Minister that he intended to announce a small amount of additional funding for local authority service transformation. He told us in December this would be made "in the next couple of weeks".[228] ***We hope that the additional funding for local authority service transformation will be made available without further delay, and expect the Minister to keep us updated on the allocation and impact of the funds in the development of sustainable parks management models.***

110. Transitional support for local authorities might also be in the form of expertise. For example, during our visit to Newcastle, we heard from Newcastle City Council about the work it is doing to develop a citywide trust model for its parks. The Council has been working with the National Trust and other partners to access expertise, but has nonetheless encountered some specific administrative and legal barriers and challenges. Such barriers include the complexity of conveyancing for multiple sites, and the impact of the restrictive covenants which apply to some of its parks which were gifted to the City by philanthropists. Eddie Curry of the Core Cities Parks and Greenspace Group told us that: "Many parks come with endowments or covenants from previous land, philanthropic transfers and gifts from past years, which can often make the transfer into a new trust model quite challenging to overcome. Unpicking all those legal conditions can be a bit of a challenge at times".[229] We asked the Minister whether he was aware of these barriers, or had had discussions with Newcastle City Council about possible solutions—he confirmed that he had not, but that:

225 Q15 [Ellie Robinson] and Q21 [Drew Bennellick]
226 Q185
227 Herts Association of Cultural Officers Greenspace Managers Group (PKS181)
228 Q185
229 Q121 [Eddie Curry]

> Where it is to do with trust law and deeds, some of these covenants are very difficult and require lengthy legal processes to overturn them. I am happy to look at them. If this is a general issue, I would hope, through the forum that I want to convene, that we could perhaps share practice and hear some of the problems, so that we get an impression of how big an issue this is generally.[230]

111. **We believe that addressing the challenges which face the parks sector in a way which secures a sustainable future for England's parks may require fundamental service transformation, which takes into account the wider value and benefits which parks deliver, beyond their amenity and leisure value. We have received a wide range of suggestions for alternative funding sources for parks, and examples of different approaches to parks management. We have not listed all of them, or explored the merits or otherwise of each in detail—the applicability of each for specific parks or local authorities will depend on local circumstances. However we would urge the Minister, the LGA and local authorities to read and reflect on the evidence we have received as part of our inquiry, and to consider whether and how to take forward the various suggestions made.**

112. ***To support service transformation which parks require, the Minister and his cross-departmental group 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. For example, the Minister should consider the proposals made by the National Trust and Newcastle City Council for indemnities for local authorities which wish to transfer land to parks trusts, and for the establishment of a public interest test to enable local authorities to overturn restrictive covenants, where such covenants hinder the authority's ability to safeguard public parks.***

113. ***The Minister and his cross-departmental group should encourage and facilitate the evaluation and benchmarking of emerging models for parks management, and the sharing of best practice within England and from elsewhere in the UK or internationally as appropriate.***

A statutory duty to provide and maintain parks

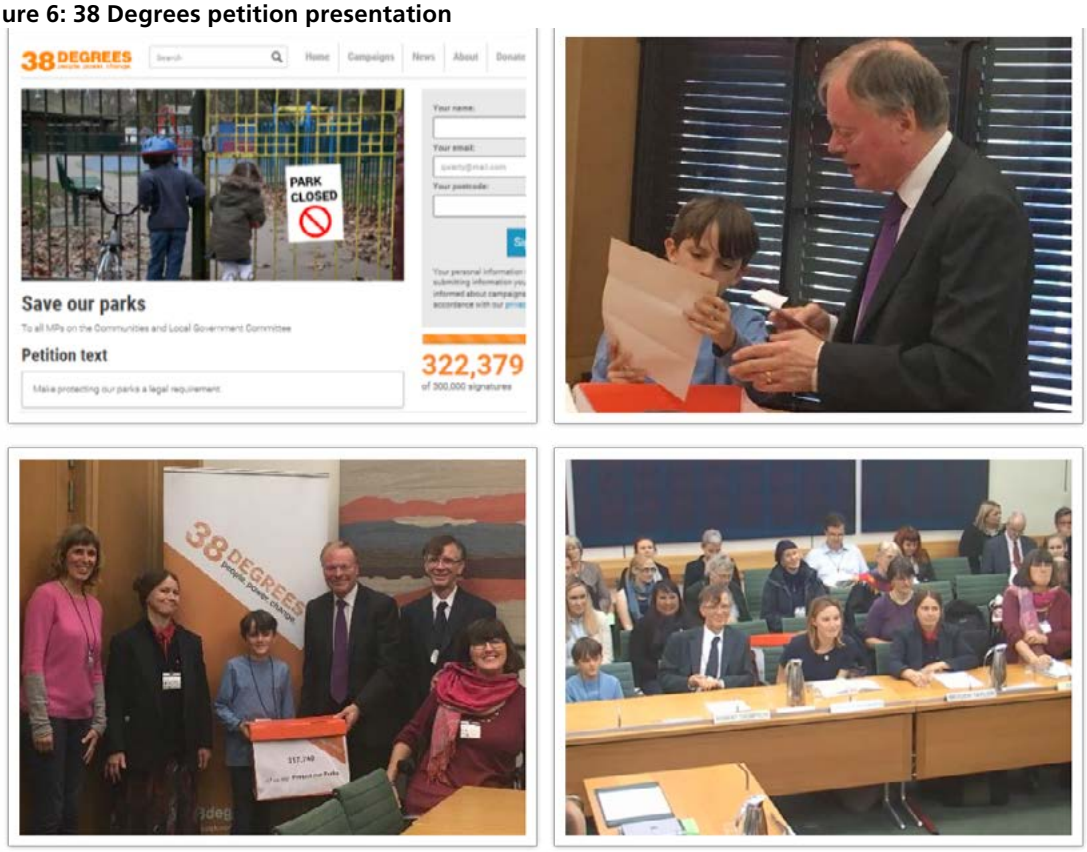
114. Responsibility for parks lies with local authorities. Many of those who submitted written evidence to our inquiry have called in the strongest terms for there to be a statutory duty on local authorities to provide and maintain public parks. Indeed, more than 320,000 people have signed a petition calling for such a statutory duty to be imposed:

> Parks matter, and they belong to all of us. Whether it's a playground to take our children to at the weekends, or a place to enjoy our lunch in the sunshine, parks are amazing places.
>
> We want the government to make protecting parks a legal requirement to make sure they're properly looked after and kept free for everyone to use.

230 Q191

> The committee can't personally create a statutory duty for the upkeep of our parks, but they can recommend one based on the results of their consultation. We're calling on the committee to make the strongest recommendations possible to protect our parks.[231]

Figure 6: 38 Degrees petition presentation



Source: 38 Degrees

115. Many of those who called for a statutory duty to be imposed on local authorities cited the difficult choices which local authorities are faced with in prioritising resources. The Association for Public Service Excellence's *State of the Market Report for Parks 2016* found that almost 80 per cent of parks managers felt that local authority budget reductions were falling disproportionately on parks and green spaces.[232] Urban Pollinators Ltd illustrated the issue:

> At a local level, councils must balance the stewardship of their parks with a host of statutory duties. As resources are squeezed the most urgent duties will take priority. A local authority forced to choose between safeguarding a child at risk of abuse today and caring for a green space tomorrow has no moral choice: the child must be safeguarded. To put councils in a position where such choices become routine is to cement the neglect of parks and green spaces into everyday practice.[233]

231 38 Degrees, *Save our parks petition*
232 Association for Public Service Excellence (PKS304)
233 Urban Pollinators Ltd (PKS046)

In their 2003 inquiry into green spaces, our predecessors concluded that a statutory duty of care for public spaces might encourage local authorities to give parks and open spaces greater priority when making funding decisions. They recommended that such a duty should be imposed.[234]

116. Dave Morris, the Chair of the National Federation of Parks and Greenspaces (NFPGS), told us that in his experience many members of the public did not realise that local authorities did not have a statutory duty to provide and maintain parks. Noting the relatively low cost of parks services when compared to other infrastructure services, for example transport or power, he highlighted the model statutory duty which his group had developed to require local authorities to "provide adequate funding levels to make sure that [parks] are properly managed to agreed standards".[235] Under the NFPGS's model, local authorities would be required to monitor all publicly accessible green spaces, and ensure that they were managed to a nationally agreed standard, similar to the Green Flag standard. The NFPGS suggested that the duty could be enforced through landowner self-assessments, annual reviews of parks by local authorities, and local authorities' annual audits. In addition, the model would require parks funding, including core local authority funding and additional capital grants, to be "sourced and ring-fenced from Central Government via existing budgets […] or additional national taxation sources. These could be supplemented in part by local authority additional taxation potential, and other sources".[236]

117. However, we also heard evidence about the potential challenges which would be presented by the imposition of such a statutory duty. Cllr Matthew Balfour of Kent County Council suggested that establishing a statutory common standard could result in a "race to the bottom", wherein budget pressures would mean that parks which currently exceed the standard would be managed down.[237] Drew Bennellick, Head of Landscape and Natural Heritage UK at the Heritage Lottery Fund, outlined the challenges of prescribing the standards which parks would have to adhere to, and the challenges of measuring and enforcing a statutory duty.[238] Similarly, Andrew Hinchley, Green Space Development Manager at the London Borough of Camden told us that:

> Personally, I think that the implications of a statutory function for parks is still very unclear, in terms of how it would function, what it would mean and how you would decide where to draw the line in terms of what priority it should provide, or what its character should be. How do you put a standard on the quality for all green spaces in an authority? I currently find it quite hard to see how that would transpire, and I think it would take a lot more work to explore the implications of it.
>
> I am also not clear what some of the implications are for some of the income generation methods that we use at the moment. I believe there are differences with a statutory function, in terms of whether you can charge for it or not.[239]

234 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Eleventh Report of Session 2002–03, *Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener*, HC 673-I
235 Q33 [Dave Morris]
236 National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces (PKS400)
237 Q62 [Cllr Balfour]
238 Q18 [Drew Bennellick]
239 Q59 [Andrew Hinchley]

118. Many of our witnesses argued that a statutory duty alone would not be sufficient to safeguard and protect parks, since the duty would need to be expressed sufficiently clearly, and accompanied by sufficient funding to support the service. The example of library provision was raised by some as a cautionary tale:

> the experience of library provision over the last decade suggests that even where a statutory duty exists, it is not sufficient to protect either the scope of the quality of a service. The story of libraries in the last six years has been one of creeping reductions in opening hours, staffing and branch provision, with local libraries morphing into vestigial 'community' services while the statutory duty box is ticked by maintaining a central library.[240]

119. The Minister told us that:

> The sheer variety of what is included when we talk about green space in general means that having a statutory duty could be quite challenging. I am not convinced that it is needed. At a time when Government are requiring local authorities to make some relatively difficult decisions around funding, I do not think we should be placing upon them extra statutory burdens and duties, which may not do a great deal to protect green spaces or the amount of funding a local authority puts towards them.[241]

We agree with the Minister that local authorities are best placed to plan and prioritise the services they deliver and determine how they use the resources available to them to meet local needs. However, the scale of the reductions to local authority budgets in recent years means that local authorities are increasingly faced with difficult choices about how to prioritise resources. **We recognise that the pressures on budgets may disproportionately disadvantage discretionary services, such as parks. However, we are not persuaded that a statutory duty on local authorities to provide and maintain parks, which could be burdensome and complex, would achieve the intended outcomes.**

A workable alternative

120. We appreciate that our decision not to recommend a statutory duty to provide and maintain parks at this time may be disappointing to many of those who have given evidence to our inquiry. However, we believe that other mechanisms are more likely to achieve the outcomes we all want to see—greater recognition of the value and benefits of parks, and appropriate prioritisation in local authority planning and funding decisions. When representatives of the 322,000 people who signed the 38 Degrees petition calling for a statutory duty gave evidence to us, we asked them to tell us what they hoped that the imposition of a statutory duty to provide and maintain parks would achieve. Charlotte Woodworth, Campaign Director at 38 Degrees, told us:

> The bottom line is that we want to make sure that parks do not fall through the cracks, and a statutory duty seems to be something that a number of experts have recommended. I know you will be hearing from a number of

240 Urban Pollinators Ltd (PKS046)
241 Q153

> other people today who are talking about it, and at this juncture it is where our members are at. As I say, however, we would be prepared to consider other options and talk further with them around it.[242]

We share 38 Degrees' desire to ensure that parks do not slip through the cracks. However, we are not persuaded, for the reasons we have outlined above, that a statutory duty to provide and maintain parks is the most effective way to achieve this objective.

121. The Ramblers told us that they wanted to see local authorities providing "support for parks in a more joined up way, working across departments such as health, transport, planning and education to increase funding for parks and ensure that parks directly contribute to the objectives of the entire authority".[243] We agree that this joined up approach is vital. Parks and green spaces contribute to many local authority objectives, and many local authority services have contributions to make to parks and green spaces. We have considered two alternatives by which this joined up approach might be achieved:

a) nomination of a senior elected member and a senior official within each local authority as parks champions, with responsibility for ensuring that the local authority takes a coordinated and joined up approach to its parks and green spaces;

b) a statutory duty for local authorities, working with Health and Wellbeing Boards, to prepare and publish parks and green space strategies which clearly articulate the contribution of parks to wider local authority objectives and set out how parks will be managed to maximise such contributions.

Parks champions

122. Research shows that where local authorities appoint an elected member as a local parks champion, they report a higher proportion of their parks to be improving.[244] The designation of parks leads was supported by Eddie Curry, Chair of the Core Cities Parks and Greenspace Group, who told us that:

> the reality is that having a controlling mind and someone who can lead that strategic framework, and drive the partnerships and engagement with the community is absolutely critical. We have seen, time and time again over the last five or six years, where park departments have disappeared and the agenda suddenly slips off the political agenda and disappears in importance in terms of its profile. Parks deteriorate very quickly if they are not given a very clear profile.[245]

123. **We recognise, in principle, the benefits of designating senior elected members and officials as parks champions with responsibility for highlighting and coordinating the contribution which parks make to the achievement of broader council objectives, and for preparing strategies for their parks and green spaces. Local authorities which do not yet have such champions could consider appointing them. However, we are concerned that, in practice, the parks champion title would simply be applied to those**

242 Q5
243 The Ramblers (PKS151)
244 Mr Peter Neal (PKS324)
245 Q120 [Eddie Curry]

senior officers and members who already have responsibility for parks and green spaces, and would not, therefore, make a significant difference to the status quo. Local authorities which currently value their parks and green spaces and recognise the wider contributions they make would continue to do so, and those which do not would be unlikely to see significant changes.

Parks and green space strategies

124. The second alternative which has been suggested to us is the imposition of a statutory duty for local authorities to prepare and publish parks and green space strategies. Keep Britain Tidy, which runs the Green Flag Award scheme for parks in the UK, told us that it was beginning to see declining scores for the quality of parks management plans. It described this as concerning, noting that:

> Without these plans our parks will lack future focus, direction and a framework to maintain standards. The reduction in the quality of planning can only lead to the decline of parks in future years.[246]

Only 48 per cent of local authorities have current green space strategies—down from 76 per cent in 2014.[247] The Minister said that he was not persuaded that "it necessarily follows that having a formal plan adopted by the local authority means you are therefore doing a better job of maintaining your green spaces than authorities that do not".[248] However, evidence shows that local authorities which have up to date strategies in place are more likely to report their parks to be in a good or improving condition, whereas only 18 per cent of local authorities for whom parks are not a corporate priority reported their parks to be improving in 2016.[249] The Town and Country Planning Association explained the benefits of taking a strategic approach to an area's parks:

> If you take a strategic look at your green space, you can start to put the resources where they will have most effect. It might even be that some areas have an over-provision of green space while others have an under-provision. You may even have a good reason to sell off a small patch of green space in one area, and invest that money in improving and expanding green spaces in another area. If you have a strategic view you can do that, in consultation with your community. If you do not, it becomes a hotchpotch, and you end up with these tiny little playgrounds that nobody wants or uses, rather than thinking about how you can maximise the benefits.[250]

125. The Parks Alliance told us that there is currently a lack of routinely collated and analysed data on the state of parks in the UK, which makes it difficult to fully understand how they are used, managed or invested in. It suggests that one result of the lack of data is that parks receive a low priority in policy and decision-making.[251] To this end, the Heritage Lottery Fund suggested that a statutory duty should be imposed, requiring local authorities to produce and maintain a funding and investment strategy for their parks

246 Keep Britain Tidy (PKS147)
247 Heritage Lottery Fund (PKS275)
248 Q152
249 Heritage Lottery Fund (PKS275)
250 Q96 [Julia Thrift]
251 The Parks Alliance (PKS084)

and green spaces, and publish annual data on quantity, quality and funding for parks.[252] The Parks Alliance posed what we believe is the key question in relation to whether the provision of parks should be a statutory service: "The question boils down to is there a credible plan for ensuring the viability of our public parks and open spaces? If there is not, then the case for it to become a statutory service is considerably strengthened".[253]

126. **We acknowledge the argument that a statutory duty on local authorities and Health and Wellbeing Boards to prepare and publish parks and green space strategies could encourage greater joint working within local authorities, increase the profile of parks and green spaces and their contribution to wider local authority objectives, and facilitate the contribution by other service areas to parks and green space services. Such strategies might also serve to improve the quality of data available about parks and green spaces. We would expect local authorities and Health and Wellbeing Boards, in the preparation of such strategies, to include the amenity and leisure value of parks and green spaces, and how they will be managed to maximise their contributions to broader local authority responsibilities and agendas—for example public health and preventative health, the local economy, climate change and flood risk mitigation, air quality, and biodiversity—as well as to the responsibilities of other bodies, such as the Environment Agency. *We recommend that the Minister issues very clear guidance to local authorities that they should work collaboratively with Health and Wellbeing Boards, and other relevant bodies where appropriate, to prepare and publish joint parks and green space strategies.***

127. ***The Minister's cross-departmental working group should monitor the preparation and publication of joint parks and green space strategies, and report annually on progress made, by way of written statements to the House. If the guidance does not prove effective in encouraging local authorities and Health and Wellbeing Boards to collaborate on the production of joint strategies, or the joint strategies which are produced do not prove effective in raising the profile and priority afforded to parks, the Minister should consider legislating to place a statutory duty on local authorities to collaborate with Health and Wellbeing Boards to prepare and publish joint parks and green space strategies.***

Coordination and leadership

128. The then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister established CABE Space in 2003 as a specialist unit within the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)—the Government's adviser on architecture, urban design and public space between 1999 and 2011.[254] CABE Space acted as a national, Government-funded body with responsibility for supporting the development of strategic approaches for green spaces, publishing good practice guides, promoting participation and quality tools, publishing guidance on the benefits of good quality public space, and providing training for parks professionals.[255] In 2011, CABE was merged with the Design Council (a self-

252 Heritage Lottery Fund (PKS275)

253 The Parks Alliance (PKS084)

254 CABE was established in 1999 as an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. It also received funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government, and from other government departments and public agencies to run specific programmes. In 2011, following the Government's review of public bodies and the comprehensive spending review, Government funding was withdrawn and CABE ceased to be a non-departmental public body.

255 Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, *CABE Space* (January 2011)

sustaining charity), and ceased to be a non-departmental public body. The Design Council told us that "As part of this merger, some programmes were closed or changed, including CABE Space".[256] In addition to CABE Space, parks managers and community groups could access a national charity, Greenspace, for a knowledge base, guidance, and support and assistance to improve and enhance their parks. Greenspace closed in 2013 in England, although Greenspace Scotland and Greenspace Wales continue to operate. In 2015, Greenspace Scotland supported the development of a professional network for park managers from Scottish local authorities. The network's role is to support the professional and operational development of park managers, facilitate the sharing of best practice, and develop skills.[257]

129. Throughout our inquiry, witnesses have told us that addressing the challenges facing the parks sector in England will require greater coordination and leadership at a national level. As Ellie Robinson from the National Trust told us:

> there is nothing to bring the sector together at the moment. We know from [local authorities'] asks of us for help that they are all reinventing wheels: spending local taxpayers' money answering the same legal or tax questions, or areas of scope for their green space strategies. There is a desperate need to be able to provide a shared platform where they can share best practice, and you can innovate once and share.[258]

Andrew Hinchley of the London Borough of Camden acknowledged that in London there were a number of networks, for example to encourage benchmarking, and forums to help connect people, but said that:

> That is a helpful tool, but what is missing is something at a national level. There seems to be a void since CABE Space and Greenspace disappeared, which is not pulling together the best practice that we talked about earlier.
>
> Because of the shift to where we need to look at wider benefits of green space, there is a need to step back and take that strategic look, and that is more difficult when there is not someone collating it for you at a national level. There is a lot of repetition and reinventing the wheel going on at the moment among authorities, because that is not there.[259]

130. We heard from some witnesses that devolution in England could provide significant opportunities for a more coordinated approach to parks and green spaces. The Landscape Institute acknowledged the synergy between localism and parks, but argued that considering parks as part of wider, cross-boundary networks at a city region level would assist in targeting investment, focusing on solutions, and avoiding a piecemeal approach to neighbourhood planning.[260] The Royal Town Planning Institute suggested that devolution to date had not placed sufficient emphasis on the potential benefits of a strategic approach to green infrastructure:

256 Correspondence from Clare Devine, Executive Director at the Design Council, to the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee, 28 November 2016
257 Greenspace Scotland and Park Managers Forum (Scotland) (PKS177)
258 Q15 [Ellie Robinson]
259 Q87 [Andrew Hinchley]
260 The Landscape Institute (PKS300)

> I see potential from the devolution agenda in terms of places being able to bring together all of their funding for things like housing, transport, health and green space and combine them. […] Taking a place-based approach that combines lots of different local authorities and looks at the most efficient spend of all different types of budgets, I think you would probably find that there would be good evidence for spending health and transport money, etc, on strategic green infrastructure networks. However, it is better to do it at the scale of, say, a combined authority than at the scale of individual local authorities.[261]

131. We agree with the assessment of the Land Trust that:

> Government must recognise that funding parks is a cost effective means of delivering a range of its wider objectives relating to health, well-being, housing, economic development and more, and must therefore be supported for their continued evolution accordingly, as well as having greater synergy with the evolving public health and wellbeing agenda.[262]

132. **We welcome the steps taken by the parks sector in England to fill the gap left by CABE Space and Greenspace, such as the establishment of the Parks Alliance and the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, the Future Parks project led by the National Trust, and the work undertaken as part of Nesta's Rethinking Parks programme to bring together a database of people and groups with an interest in parks. However, these initiatives, although important and commendable, will not necessarily be enough to provide the coordination and facilitate the sharing of best practice which we believe is necessary to secure and support a sustainable future for England's parks. We believe that the importance of parks to national strategic objectives such as climate change mitigation and public health mean that there needs to be leadership and vision at the level of national government. We look to the Minister to provide this.**

133. The Department for Communities and Local Government is the Government department which has lead responsibility for green space in England. This role includes responsibility for coordinating with other relevant departments and agencies, including Natural England, the Forestry Commission, the Department for Health, Public Health England, and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. We have heard concerns about the extent to which that coordination role has been adequately performed. For example, Julia Thrift, Projects and Operations Director at the Town and Country Planning Association, told us:

> The problem is that parks are always, "Dah-di-dah-di-dah—and parks." They come bottom of the list and they are neglected and forgotten. It is a problem at a national level across Government. We have got Defra responsible for the natural environment, DCLG responsible for urban green spaces, DCMS responsible for playing fields, and NHS estates responsible for large quantities of green space around hospitals. We have BEIS mapping green spaces. It is a muddle and it is not coordinated. Whether it is a job

261 Q99 [James Harris]
262 The Land Trust (PKS136)

> for the Cabinet Office, I do not know, but we somehow have to get parks and green spaces out of this very marginal local authority leisure place, and right up to being really important national strategic infrastructure.[263]

134. **We welcome the Minister's confirmation that he recognises the current lack of coordination, and his intention to establish a cross-departmental group to consider our report and recommendations.**[264] ***We believe that the Minister's cross-departmental group should have an ongoing role in providing coordination and leadership within the parks sector to ensure that the Minister's vision for parks is delivered. We call on the Minister to publish, in his response to our report, details of the cross-departmental group's membership, terms of reference, initial priorities, how often it will meet, and how it will work collaboratively with the parks sector and the Local Government Association to secure a sustainable future for England's parks. We believe that early priorities for the group should include:***

- ***establishing and maintaining an online parks information hub to make it easier for local authorities to find out about what other authorities are doing, to facilitate the sharing of learning and good practice, and to provide signposting to other sources of information or advice;***
- ***working with the Local Government Association to develop and implement options for establishing and supporting national or regional park manager forums in England, learning from the approach taken in Scotland.***

263 Q105 [Julia Thrift]
264 Q144



5 Conclusion

135. The significant interest in, and the overwhelming response to, our inquiry is a clear indication of just how strongly people feel about their local parks, how much they value them, and how important it is that action is taken to safeguard and secure the future of England's parks and green spaces. Our witnesses—individuals, friends groups, local authorities, and other bodies—describe parks as being at a tipping point. As Cllr Trickett of Birmingham City Council told us: "We have been innovative and we have looked at alternatives, but the cuts are in very great danger of tilting the balance too far".[265] If action is taken, and appropriate priority given to parks, we do not believe it is too late to prevent a period of decline. However, if the value of parks and their potential contribution are not recognised, then the consequences could be severe for some of the most important policy agendas facing our communities today.

136. There is, clearly, no 'one size fits all' solution. Responsibility for parks lies primarily with local authorities. We believe that local authorities are best placed to make decisions which are appropriate for their local circumstances. However, within a context of declining local authority budgets, we believe that there is a role for central government to play in providing vision, leadership and coordination, facilitating the sharing of lessons learned and best practice, and ensuring that the role of parks, their contribution, and their function as just one element of our wider green infrastructure networks, is recognised.

137. ***We intend to return to the issue of parks before the end of this Parliament to assess the progress which has been made. To assist us with this, the Minister's cross-departmental group should publish annual written statements to the House providing an update on the group's activity, progress made against our recommendations, and the progress made by local authorities and Health and Wellbeing Boards in the preparation and publication of joint parks and green space strategies.***

265 Q80 [Cllr Lisa Trickett]

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who has kindly allowed us to use their photographs in our report:

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- Chapter 2: @LiverpoolParks, Autumn colour, beech leaves, Croxteth Hall and Country Park, Liverpool; www.fieldsintrust.org (@FieldsInTrust), Burgess Park, Southwark; Centre for Sustainable Energy, Bristol (@cse_bristol); Christopher Worman MBE (@CWParkman), St James Park; TreeHouse Liverpool (@TreehouseCIC).

- Chapter 3: TreeHouse Liverpool (@TreehouseCIC); @biscuitcatcher, St James and St Basil's Church Gardens, Newcastle upon Tyne; @StarbankPark, Starbank Park; Mark Whittaker, Friends of Marple Memorial Park (@marplewebsite), Marple Memorial Park; Christopher Worman MBE (@CWParkman), Nottingham.

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- Chapter 5: Christopher Worman MBE (@CWParkman), Caldecott Park; @LiverpoolParks, Croxteth Local Nature Reserve, Liverpool; @lizixer, Downhills Park, Tottenham; TreeHouse Liverpool (@TreehouseCIC); Paul Rabbitts (@BandMasta), Parsons Recreation Ground, Leighton Buzzard.

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction and background

1. We strongly agree with those who have emphasised the importance and value of parks to individuals, communities, and to wider national agendas such as public health, and climate change and flood risk mitigation. Parks are a treasured public asset, which are greatly valued by their communities. They help to bring communities together, and should remain freely accessible to everyone. (Paragraph 29)

Why do parks matter?

2. We recognise that parks have traditionally been seen as financial liabilities for local authorities, and understand that assessing the value of parks to their communities in wider terms can be complex. However, we strongly believe that without being able to demonstrate the contribution made by parks to broader agendas, local authority parks departments will find it difficult to secure sufficient priority for their parks, or to access alternative funding sources. For this reason, we welcome the new models which are emerging to help assess the value of parks' broader contributions in a more nuanced way. (Paragraph 35)

3. The amenity and leisure value of parks is important and should not be overlooked. However, taken in isolation, this value does not accurately reflect either the wider value and purpose of parks or the full contribution they make to local and national agendas. We believe that thinking differently about how to assess the value of parks and their broader contribution could help both to access alternative funding sources and to target investment more effectively. However, the models which are emerging, such as natural capital accounting and social return on investment are complex, and may not be accessible to local authority parks departments. *The Minister's cross-departmental group should prioritise support for the development of robust and accessible transferrable models which local authorities in England can use to assess the value of their parks. The Minister's group should work with the Local Government Association to support and encourage local authorities to use such models to assess the real value of their parks, and to take account of such assessments in their strategic planning and prioritisation.* (Paragraph 39)

What challenges are facing the parks sector?

4. We recognise that a community asset which is freely available to all will, quite naturally, give rise to some tensions when the requirements and wishes of different sections of the community, or different groups of park users, come into conflict. We accept that striking the right balance between open access to parks, and revenue-raising activities such as events or granting exclusive use to particular groups is challenging. However, it is necessary. We believe that if parks are to truly serve the communities within which they are located, local authorities must take into account the needs of all of their residents. In the planning and management of parks, local authorities must engage effectively in dialogue with their communities to assess and understand their needs, and to explain the decisions which they take. We

recognise that it may be appropriate at times for local authorities to grant exclusive access to a park or a part of a park, whether on a temporary or a permanent basis, to particular user groups or organisations. It may also be appropriate for local authorities to charge for some uses of a park, especially when parks are used by commercial ventures as part of their business models. However, such exclusive use or charging must not disproportionately affect or hinder access to the park for other uses. *To ensure transparency for local communities, and to enable them to hold their local authorities to account for the decisions which are made, local authorities should consult on, and publish, policies which set out the criteria upon which:*

a) any application for exclusive use of a park or part of a park will be determined;

b) any decisions about whether park users will be charged for the use of the park, park facilities, or clean-up costs will be based. (Paragraph 45)

5. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for local authorities to seek non-financial contributions from some park users to the upkeep and maintenance of parks and green spaces. For example, community activities which do not charge members for participation or raise revenue, such as parkrun, might nonetheless be encouraged to contribute volunteer time for park maintenance or fund-raising activities. *As part of developing their exclusive use and charging policies for parks and green spaces, local authorities should work collaboratively with relevant groups of park users to identify the range of ways in which they can contribute to their parks.* (Paragraph 50)

6. The level of response which we have received to our inquiry, and the evidence which so many people have provided, is a clear indication to us of the strength and depth of concern which people and communities across the country have about the effect of budget reductions on their treasured parks and green spaces. We share these concerns. We too are worried about the potential deterioration or even loss of a service which is of great value, both as an amenity, and for the contribution which parks make to wider policy objectives including community cohesion, improvement of air quality, and biodiversity. The actions taken thus far by local authorities and volunteers have mitigated the effect of budget reductions in the short term, but this support may not be sustainable in the longer term. The contributions made by friends groups, and other volunteer and community groups, are very important: but they must not be taken for granted. While we recognise the difficult choices with which local authorities are faced, we believe that when planning their parks services, or taking decisions about funding allocations, they must give sufficient priority to supporting, building relationships with and coordinating volunteers. (Paragraph 62)

7. We understand how strongly local friends and community groups feel about their own local parks. However, it is a matter of concern that friends groups may be forced into competition with each other for scarce resources and that some parks are losing out to others. We believe that local authorities should consider their parks to be part of one portfolio, rather than as disparate individual sites. In this way, we believe that they can manage their parks more efficiently and effectively. We welcome the growth of parks forums, in which friends and community groups can come together to share resources, ideas and learning. We believe that such forums

will improve the way in which local authorities can work with their communities in coordinated and efficient ways. *Local authorities should encourage and support the development of friends group forums, and work with them in a coordinated way to ensure that needs are properly assessed, and resources are prioritised and targeted appropriately. Where local circumstances require it, this may include coordination and cooperation across local authority boundaries.* (Paragraph 63)

8. We acknowledge the difficult choices with which local authorities are faced. However, it is essential that our parks are places which are safe for our communities to enjoy. When planning parks maintenance, and allocating funding, local authorities must prioritise safety, especially in relation to children's play equipment. *To ensure that health and safety in parks is given appropriate priority, the Minister should collect data on the number and distribution of accidents in parks across England centrally. He should monitor this data, identify any trends or patterns, and work with relevant local authorities to address problems.* (Paragraph 66)

9. Sufficient priority must be given to the sustainability of ongoing maintenance and the revenue funding needed. When commissioning new park facilities or elements local authorities should ensure that the level of ongoing maintenance required is feasible, and that plans for capital investment are accompanied by sustainable plans for ongoing revenue requirements. We believe that local authorities should be allowed to use Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funds to cover parks' revenue requirements. (Paragraph 71)

10. We recognise the importance of parks and green spaces to national strategic issues such as obesity, flooding and climate change. We are therefore concerned about the unequal distribution of parks and green spaces in England, and the consequent impact on the ability of all of our communities to benefit from the many advantages of access to quality green space. We are concerned that the UK may not meet UN Sustainable Development Goal 11.7 in respect of safe and inclusive access to parks and green spaces by 2030. *The Minister and the cross-departmental group should identify what action can be taken to improve the provision of parks and green spaces, for example by accessing funds available under public health strategies such as the Obesity Strategy. The Minister should also monitor the provision and distribution of green space across England, and provide Parliament with annual updates, by way of written statements, on whether equality of access is improving. If access to high quality parks and green spaces does not improve for deprived communities, the Minister should identify local authorities where provision is inadequate, and work with them to improve access.* (Paragraph 81)

11. We agree that green space should be at the heart of planning as it is fundamentally important to creating and shaping communities where people want to live, and where they are able to thrive. *When preparing or updating their Local Plans, local authorities should take a whole-place approach which recognises the importance of parks and green spaces both to existing and to new communities, in accordance with paragraphs 73 and 76 of the National Planning Policy Framework. This will require effective fulfilment of their duty to cooperate with other local authorities, whether on a bilateral basis or within the structures of devolution deals.* (Paragraph 89)

12. Parks are not synonymous with green infrastructure—parks deliver important leisure, health, wellbeing and amenity benefits which other types of green infrastructure may not, and large green spaces like parks make particular contributions to absorbing water run-off to mitigate flood risk and combating the Urban Heat Island Effect—but we believe that thinking about parks as one element of wider green infrastructure networks may be beneficial both to parks, and to the profile of other types of green infrastructure. For example, understanding parks as part of wider networks of green infrastructure helps to highlight the value of green corridors and networks for biodiversity, wildlife, and active travel networks. (Paragraph 93)

13. *We recommend that the Minister's cross-departmental group should engage with the parks sector to assess whether the expanded guidance for local authorities on green infrastructure frameworks published in February 2016 adequately provides both for parks as such, and for their role as a part of green infrastructure networks.* (Paragraph 95)

14. *The Minister should work with his colleagues in Defra to ensure that parks, and green infrastructure more widely, are properly recognised in the Government's forthcoming 25-year Environment Plan.* (Paragraph 96)

How can we secure a sustainable future for parks?

15. We welcome the contribution made to parks by friends, volunteer and other community groups and individuals across the country. The time and efforts which people freely give to their parks should not be underestimated, and nor should the benefits for parks, communities and for the individuals themselves. (Paragraph 101)

16. Our review considered evidence on the governance of parks across the country. While many parks are very well run directly by local authorities in a traditional management structure, we also saw evidence that alternative management arrangements have been beneficial in some areas. We believe that these alternative management arrangements may have benefits in some additional other parts of the country, dependent on local circumstances, however, where they are used such arrangements must be suitably accountable to local people. *The Minister should issue guidance to local authorities setting out key principles for the appropriate governance and accountability arrangements in non-traditionally managed parks which could be put in place as part of any emerging or alternative model for parks management. Such principles might include the involvement of local people in the governance and oversight arrangements and decision-making, or the establishment of appropriate objectives with which the activities of the management model must be aligned. Whatever innovative arrangement may be adopted, ownership of parks should stay with local authorities, as democratically accountable bodies. A new trust, for example, should have a long lease of a park, rather than taking over the freehold.* (Paragraph 108)

17. *We hope that the additional funding for local authority service transformation will be made available without further delay, and expect the Minister to keep us updated on the allocation and impact of the funds in the development of sustainable parks management models.* (Paragraph 109)

18. We believe that addressing the challenges which face the parks sector in a way which secures a sustainable future for England's parks may require fundamental service transformation, which takes into account the wider value and benefits which parks deliver, beyond their amenity and leisure value. We have received a wide range of suggestions for alternative funding sources for parks, and examples of different approaches to parks management. We have not listed all of them, or explored the merits or otherwise of each in detail—the applicability of each for specific parks or local authorities will depend on local circumstances. However we would urge the Minister, the LGA and local authorities to read and reflect on the evidence we have received as part of our inquiry, and to consider whether and how to take forward the various suggestions made. (Paragraph 111)

19. *To support service transformation which parks require, the Minister and his cross-departmental group 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. For example, the Minister should consider the proposals made by the National Trust and Newcastle City Council for indemnity for local authorities which wish to transfer land to parks trusts, and for the establishment of a public interest test to enable local authorities to overturn restrictive covenants, where such covenants hinder the authority's ability to safeguard public parks.* (Paragraph 112)

20. *The Minister and his cross-departmental group should encourage and facilitate the evaluation and benchmarking of emerging models for parks management, and the sharing of best practice within England and from elsewhere in the UK or internationally as appropriate.* (Paragraph 113)

21. We recognise that the pressures on budgets may disproportionately disadvantage discretionary services, such as parks. However, we are not persuaded that a statutory duty on local authorities to provide and maintain parks, which could be burdensome and complex, would achieve the intended outcomes. (Paragraph 119)

22. We share 38 Degrees' desire to ensure that parks do not slip through the cracks. However, we are not persuaded, for the reasons we have outlined above, that a statutory duty to provide and maintain parks is the most effective way to achieve this objective. (Paragraph 120)

23. We recognise, in principle, the benefits of designating senior elected members and officials as parks champions with responsibility for highlighting and coordinating the contribution which parks make to the achievement of broader council objectives, and for preparing strategies for their parks and green spaces. Local authorities which do not yet have such champions could consider appointing them. However, we are concerned that, in practice, the parks champion title would simply be applied to those senior officers and members who already have responsibility for parks and green spaces, and would not, therefore, make a significant difference to the status quo. Local authorities which currently value their parks and green spaces and recognise the wider contributions they make would continue to do so, and those which do not would be unlikely to see significant changes. (Paragraph 123)

24. We acknowledge the argument that a statutory duty on local authorities and Health and Wellbeing Boards to prepare and publish parks and green space strategies could encourage greater joint working within local authorities, increase the profile of parks and green spaces and their contribution to wider local authority objectives, and facilitate the contribution by other service areas to parks and green space services. Such strategies might also serve to improve the quality of data available about parks and green spaces. We would expect local authorities and Health and Wellbeing Boards, in the preparation of such strategies, to include the amenity and leisure value of parks and green spaces, and how they will be managed to maximise their contributions to broader local authority responsibilities and agendas—for example public health and preventative health, the local economy, climate change and flood risk mitigation, air quality, and biodiversity—as well as to the responsibilities of other bodies, such as the Environment Agency. *We recommend that the Minister issues very clear guidance to local authorities that they should work collaboratively with Health and Wellbeing Boards, and other relevant bodies where appropriate, to prepare and publish joint parks and green space strategies.* (Paragraph 126)

25. *The Minister's cross-departmental working group should monitor the preparation and publication of joint parks and green space strategies, and report annually on progress made, by way of written statements to the House. If the guidance does not prove effective in encouraging local authorities and Health and Wellbeing Boards to collaborate on the production of joint strategies, or the joint strategies which are produced do not prove effective in raising the profile and priority afforded to parks, the Minister should consider legislating to place a statutory duty on local authorities to collaborate with Health and Wellbeing Boards to prepare and publish joint parks and green space strategies.* (Paragraph 127)

26. We welcome the steps taken by the parks sector in England to fill the gap left by CABE Space and Greenspace, such as the establishment of the Parks Alliance and the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, the Future Parks project led by the National Trust, and the work undertaken as part of Nesta's Rethinking Parks programme to bring together a database of people and groups with an interest in parks. However, these initiatives, although important and commendable, will not necessarily be enough to provide the coordination and facilitate the sharing of best practice which we believe is necessary to secure and support a sustainable future for England's parks. We believe that the importance of parks to national strategic objectives such as climate change mitigation and public health mean that there needs to be leadership and vision at the level of national government. We look to the Minister to provide this. (Paragraph 132)

27. We welcome the Minister's confirmation that he recognises the current lack of coordination, and his intention to establish a cross-departmental group to consider our report and recommendations. *We believe that the Minister's cross-departmental group should have an ongoing role in providing coordination and leadership within the parks sector to ensure that the Minister's vision for parks is delivered. We call on the Minister to publish, in his response to our report, details of the cross-departmental group's membership, terms of reference, initial priorities, how often it will meet, and*

how it will work collaboratively with the parks sector and the Local Government Association to secure a sustainable future for England's parks. We believe that early priorities for the group should include:

- *establishing and maintaining an online parks information hub to make it easier for local authorities to find out about what other authorities are doing, to facilitate the sharing of learning and good practice, and to provide signposting to other sources of information or advice;*
- *working with the Local Government Association to develop and implement options for establishing and supporting national or regional park manager forums in England, learning from the approach taken in Scotland.* (Paragraph 134)

Conclusion

28. *We intend to return to the issue of parks before the end of this Parliament to assess the progress which has been made. To assist us with this, the Minister's cross-departmental group should publish annual written statements to the House providing an update on the group's activity, progress made against our recommendations, and the progress made by local authorities and Health and Wellbeing Boards in the preparation and publication of joint parks and green space strategies.* (Paragraph 137)

Formal Minutes

Monday 30 January 2017

Members present:

Mr Clive Betts, in the Chair

Bob Blackman	Melanie Onn
Helen Hayes	Mr Mark Prisk
Kevin Hollinrake	Mary Robinson
David Mackintosh	

Draft Report (*Public Parks*) proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 137 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned until Monday 6 February at 3.45 p.m.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

Monday 24 October 2016	*Question number*
Robert Thompson, Charlotte Woodworth, Imogen Taylor, Ceri Love, and **Baxter McLewin-Freund,** 38 Degrees	Q1–5
Sue Ireland, Vice Chair, The Parks Alliance, **Peter Neal**, Author of "State of UK Public Parks 2016", **Ellie Robinson**, Assistant Director of External Affairs, National Trust, and **Drew Bennellick**, Head of Landscape and Natural Heritage UK, Heritage Lottery Fund	Q6-22
Dave Morris, Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, **Ben Shimshon**, Founding Partner, BritainThinks, **Emma Boggis**, Chief Executive, Sport and Recreation Alliance, and **Will Smithard** and, Strategic Projects Director, ukactive	Q23–38

Monday 14 November 2016	
Councillor Lisa Trickett, Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Recycling and Environment, Birmingham City Council, **Andrew Hinchley**, Green Space Development Officer, London Borough of Camden, **Ian Walmsley**, Greenspace Manager, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, **Councillor Matthew Balfour**, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, Kent County Council	Q39–89
Dr Katy Layton-Jones, The Gardens Trust, **Merrick Denton-Thompson OBE,** President, The Landscape Institute, **Julia Thrift**, Projects and Operations Director, Town and Country Planning Association, **James Harris**, Policy and Networks Manager, Royal Town Planning Institute	Q90–105

Monday 23 November 2016	
Lydia Ragoonanan, Senior Programme Manager, Nesta, and **Eddie Curry**, Chair, Core Cities Parks and Greenspace Group	Q106–121
Mark Walton, Director, Shared Assets, **Alan Carter**, Director of Portfolio Management, Land Trust, and **David Foster**, Chief Executive, the Parks Trust Milton Keynes	Q122–142

Monday 5 December 2016	
Andrew Percy MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Minister for the Northern Powerhouse, Department for Communities and Local Government	Q143–199

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

INQ numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1 38 Degrees (PKS0392)

2 Alan Darnell (PKS0170)

3 Alec Samuels (PKS0390)

4 Alex Schneideman (PKS0288)

5 Ambassador for Art's and Dyslexia Paul Milton (PKS0260)

6 Angling Trust (PKS0351)

7 Ardington and Lockinge Parish Council (PKS0052)

8 Arup (PKS0297)

9 Association for Public Service Excellence (PKS0304)

10 Association of Bloomsbury Squares and Gardens (PKS0065)

11 Avenue House Estate Trust (PKS0280)

12 Bath & North East Somerset Council (PKS0253)

13 Berkshire Gardens Trust (PKS0132)

14 Bernays Gardens Community Group (Stanmore) (PKS0101)

15 Better Archway Forum (PKS0053)

16 Big Lottery Fund (PKS0337)

17 Biggin Hill Friends of the Parks (PKS0150)

18 Birmingham & Black Country Local Nature Partnership (PKS0145)

19 Birmingham City Council (PKS0381)

20 Birmingham City Council (PKS0420)

21 Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (PKS0415)

22 Borough of Broxbourne (PKS0343)

23 Borough of Poole (PKS0191)

24 Botanic Gardens Community Association. Reg Charity No 1164497 (PKS0108)

25 Bournemouth Borough Council (PKS0362)

26 Bristol Parks Forum (PKS0227)

27 British Crown Green Bowling Association (PKS0034)

28 Bryn Jones (PKS0418)

29 Centre for Diet and Activity Research, University of Cambridge (PKS0292)

30 Cheshire East Local Access Forum (PKS0158)

31 Cheshire Gardens Trust (PKS0265)

32 Children's Play Policy Forum (PKS0358)

33 Chippenham Town Council (PKS0386)

34 City of London Corporation (PKS0387)
35 Clapham Park West Residents Association (PKS0013)
36 Colin Stuart (PKS0370)
37 Consortium of Friends of Enfield's Parks (PKS0206)
38 Core Cities Parks and Greenspace group (PKS0092)
39 Coventry City Council (PKS0171)
40 CPRE Lancashire (PKS0269)
41 CPRE London (PKS0211)
42 Crystal Bowls Club (PKS0399)
43 David France (PKS0410)
44 David Harrison (PKS0018)
45 Deborah Jamison (PKS0380)
46 Department for Communities and Local Government (PKS0315)
47 Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield (PKS0373)
48 Derby and Derbyshire Local Access Forum (PKS0313)
49 Derbyshire County Council (PKS0099)
50 Dog owners against discrimination – stop the persecution of UK dog owners (PKS0062)
51 Dorset County Council (PKS0262)
52 Dorset Local Access Forum (PKS0153)
53 Dorset Local Nature Partnership (PKS0294)
54 Dr Abigail Gilmore (PKS0296)
55 Dr Bridget Snaith (PKS0308)
56 Dr Claudio De Magalhães (PKS0208)
57 Dr Dan Bloomfield (PKS0163)
58 Dr Ian Mell (PKS0187)
59 Dr Isabelle de Zoysa (PKS0010)
60 Dr Julian Kennedy (PKS0076)
61 Dr Lydia Plackett (PKS0049)
62 Dr Paul Norman (PKS0176)
63 Dr Peter Newton (PKS0385)
64 Dr Simone Fullagar (PKS0341)
65 Dr Terence Hegarty (PKS0172)
66 Dr Wendy Rees (PKS0110)
67 Dulwich Park Friends (PKS0277)
68 Durham County Council (PKS0135)
69 Elizabeth Lowe (PKS0384)
70 Eltham North Conservatives (PKS0225)

71 Enfield Council (PKS0205)
72 England Athletics (PKS0152)
73 Essex Bridleways Association (PKS0198)
74 Esther Priestley, Landscape Architect, City of York Council (PKS0017)
75 Felling Activity Project Group (PKS0168)
76 Field Studies Council (PKS0055)
77 Fields in Trust (PKS0311)
78 Francisco Aguilar (PKS0040)
79 Friends of Abington Park (PKS0073)
80 Friends of Barnes Park Sunderland (PKS0139)
81 Friends of Battersea Park (PKS0352)
82 Friends of Blythe Hill Fields (PKS0199)
83 Friends of Brockwell Park (PKS0138)
84 Friends of Bromley Town Parks & Gardens (PKS0201)
85 Friends of Caversham Court Gardens (PKS0248)
86 Friends of Chapeltown & High Green Parks (PKS0093)
87 Friends of Chapeltown & High Green Parks (PKS0095)
88 Friends of Chase Green (PKS0131)
89 Friends of Chiltern Court (PKS0413)
90 Friends of Gillespie Park (PKS0396)
91 Friends of Gladstone Park (FOGP) (PKS0235)
92 Friends of Grangewood Park (PKS0284)
93 Friends of Herrington Country Park (PKS0075)
94 Friends of High Hazels Park (PKS0188)
95 Friends of Hurst Park (PKS0416)
96 Friends of Kelvingrove Park (PKS0243)
97 Friends of Kennington Park (PKS0113)
98 Friends of Kingswood Park (PKS0130)
99 Friends of Langmeads (PKS0245)
100 Friends of Leazes Park (PKS0057)
101 Friends of Lilford Park CiC (Leigh) (PKS0079)
102 Friends of Longford Park (PKS0155)
103 Friends of Longrun Meadow (PKS0141)
104 Friends of Lordship Rec (PKS0166)
105 Friends of Mewsbrook Park (PKS0072)
106 Friends of Moor Nook Park (PKS0299)
107 Friends of Moss Bank Park (PKS0051)
108 Friends of Moss Bank Park (PKS0063)

109 Friends of Normanton Park (PKS0088)
110 Friends of Old Sneed Park Nature Reserve (PKS0202)
111 Friends of Onchan Park (PKS0231)
112 Friends of Page Park (PKS0026)
113 Friends of Penge Green (PKS0312)
114 Friends of Queens Park (PKS0004)
115 Friends of Queens Park (PKS0071)
116 Friends of Queensbury Recreation Ground (PKS0401)
117 Friends of Robinswood Hill (PKS0021)
118 Friends of Saltwell Park (PKS0216)
119 Friends of Shepherds Hill Gardens (PKS0196)
120 Friends of St George's Gardens (PKS0375)
121 Friends of St James' Garden (PKS0086)
122 Friends of St. Nicholas Park (PKS0360)
123 Friends of the Arno and Oxton Fields (PKS0398)
124 Friends of the Carrs (PKS0329)
125 Friends of the Tarn (PKS0219)
126 Friends of the Vines Rochester (PKS0217)
127 Friends of Trafford's Parks and Green Spaces (PKS0042)
128 Friends of Trendlewood Park (PKS0330)
129 Friends of Vauxhall Park (PKS0203)
130 Friends of Victoria Park Leicester (PKS0223)
131 Friends of Victoria Park, Stretford (PKS0056)
132 Friends of Walkden Gardens, Sale (PKS0096)
133 friends of walton hall park (PKS0366)
134 Friends of Waterloo Seafront Gardens (PKS0117)
135 Friends of West End Park (PKS0066)
136 Gilbrook and Kilgarth schools (PKS0411)
137 Gloucestershire Local Access Forum (PKS0068)
138 Graeme Moore (PKS0422)
139 Greater London Authority (PKS0336)
140 Green Connect (PKS0363)
141 Green Space Wales (PKS0127)
142 greenspace scotland / Park Managers Forum (Scotland) (PKS0177)
143 Greenwich Parks Forum (PKS0393)
144 Grenville Nation (PKS0002)
145 Groundwork (PKS0256)
146 Haggerston Park User Group (PKS0032)

147 Hampshire County Council (PKS0334)

148 Hampshire Gardens Trust (PKS0067)

149 Haringey Council (PKS0404)

150 Haringey Friends of Parks Forum (PKS0391)

151 Harlow Council (PKS0263)

152 Harrow Parks Forum (PKS0180)

153 Harrow Recreation Ground Steering Group (PKS0105)

154 Heather Martin (PKS0249)

155 Heather Williams (PKS0083)

156 Helen Steel (PKS0409)

157 Heritage Lottery Fund (PKS0275)

158 Herts Association of Cultural Officers Greenspace Managers Group (also known as ParksHerts) (PKS0181)

159 Hestercombe Gardens Trust (PKS0285)

160 Highbury Community Association (PKS0218)

161 Highfield Park Trust (PKS0059)

162 Historic England (PKS0195)

163 Hoole Residents, Hoole Community Forum (PKS0346)

164 Iain MacKay (PKS0339)

165 Ivybridge Town Council (PKS0112)

166 IWUN (PKS0322)

167 Keep Britain Tidy (PKS0147)

168 Kent County Council (PKS0289)

169 Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum (PKS0272)

170 Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (PKS0405)

171 Lambeth Parks and Open Spaces Forum (PKS0377)

172 Landscape Institute (PKS0300)

173 Lawn Tennis Association (PKS0259)

174 LDA Design Consulting Ltd (PKS0349)

175 Learning through Landscapes (PKS0069)

176 Leeds City Council (PKS0379)

177 Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Forum (PKS0286)

178 Leicestershire Local Access Forum (PKS0015)

179 Little Forest Folk Ltd (PKS0228)

180 Live Nation Entertainment, Inc (PKS0261)

181 Living Streets (PKS0291)

182 London Borough of Brent (PKS0266)

183 London Borough of Camden (PKS0335)

184 London Borough of Waltham Forest (PKS0406)
185 London Geodiversity Partnership (PKS0162)
186 London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network (PKS0164)
187 London Parks and Gardens Trust (PKS0344)
188 London Parks Benchmarking Group (PKS0212)
189 London Play (PKS0340)
190 London Sport (PKS0270)
191 London Tree Officers Association (PKS0060)
192 Luton Friends of Parks & Green Spaces (PKS0295)
193 Lynda Cole (PKS0037)
194 Lynn Good (PKS0091)
195 M I H Becket (PKS0041)
196 Maidstone Borough Council (PKS0293)
197 Malmesbury Concert Band (PKS0035)
198 Mary O'Connor (PKS0395)
199 Maureen Clark-Darby (PKS0128)
200 Michelle Rispin (PKS0388)
201 Middlesbrough Parks and Green Spaces forum (PKS0267)
202 Mike Windsor Associates (PKS0365)
203 Mind (PKS0323)
204 Miss Charlotte Pither (PKS0154)
205 Miss Poppy Morgan (PKS0364)
206 Mr A R Bowden (PKS0022)
207 Mr Alex Baxter-Brown (PKS0412)
208 Mr Anthony Coyle (PKS0036)
209 Mr Bernard Sheridan (PKS0142)
210 Mr Charles King-Farlow (PKS0348)
211 Mr Christian Krekel (PKS0354)
212 Mr Christopher Worman MBE (PKS0058)
213 Mr Clive Durdle (PKS0011)
214 Mr Colin Horton (PKS0214)
215 Mr David Geall (PKS0012)
216 Mr David Roberts (PKS0115)
217 Mr George Broughton (PKS0016)
218 Mr Graeme Moore (PKS0047)
219 Mr Gregory Gale (PKS0160)
220 Mr Harvey Hamilton-Thorpe (PKS0209)
221 Mr Ian Mursell (PKS0007)

222 Mr Ian Stewart (PKS0050)
223 Mr Jeremy Stone (PKS0054)
224 Mr Keith Brackstone (PKS0070)
225 Mr Ken Johnson (PKS0089)
226 Mr Mark Driver (PKS0064)
227 Mr Mark Winslow (PKS0332)
228 Mr Martin Small (PKS0114)
229 Mr Maxwell Lang (PKS0122)
230 Mr Michael Rowan (PKS0301)
231 Mr Nicholas Dyson (PKS0242)
232 Mr Nigel Neil (PKS0221)
233 Mr Paul Bramhill (PKS0338)
234 Mr Paul Reading (PKS0254)
235 Mr Peter McKay (PKS0184)
236 Mr Peter Neal (PKS0324)
237 Mr Phil Pairpoint (PKS0028)
238 Mr Reginald Norgan (PKS0207)
239 Mr Rob Burns (PKS0077)
240 Mr Ruari Muir (PKS0098)
241 Mr Simon Newton (PKS0372)
242 Mr Terry Sweeney (PKS0403)
243 Mr Wasyl Strutynskyj (PKS0197)
244 Mr William Hodgkinson (PKS0090)
245 Mr William McKinney (PKS0165)
246 Mrs Anita Grice-Goldsmith (PKS0014)
247 Mrs Ann Gates (PKS0039)
248 Mrs Belinda Walker (PKS0009)
249 Mrs Christina Wakefield (PKS0204)
250 Mrs Clare O'Meara (PKS0232)
251 Mrs Donna Goodsell (PKS0234)
252 Mrs Edwina Osborne (PKS0374)
253 Mrs Gillian Costello (PKS0129)
254 Mrs Jane Edwards (PKS0078)
255 Mrs Julia Trocme-Latter (PKS0085)
256 Mrs Kate Martin (PKS0140)
257 Mrs Margaret Boggs (PKS0106)
258 Mrs Mary Gange (PKS0020)
259 Mrs Mechelle Jacques (PKS0023)

260 Mrs Meredith Whitten (PKS0314)
261 Mrs Michelle Furtado (PKS0134)
262 Mrs Rhoda Burns (PKS0027)
263 Mrs S Witney (PKS0045)
264 Mrs Stephanie Roberts (PKS0107)
265 Mrs Sue Korman (PKS0001)
266 Mrs Susan Lees (PKS0369)
267 Mrs Susan Lofthouse (PKS0003)
268 Mrs Susanna Norris (PKS0247)
269 Ms Dawn Carey Jones (PKS0094)
270 Ms Julia Matcham (PKS0005)
271 Ms Katharine Kirkbride (PKS0274)
272 Ms Rosemary Perkins (PKS0043)
273 Ms Sangita Squires (PKS0239)
274 Ms Sarah Couch (PKS0174)
275 Ms Susan Palmer (PKS0183)
276 Ms Tracey Brown (PKS0303)
277 Ms Vida Kwotuah (PKS0230)
278 NALC (PKS0194)
279 National Trust (PKS0408)
280 Nene Park Trust (PKS0215)
281 Nesta (PKS0246)
282 Newcastle City Council (PKS0319)
283 Newcastle Parks Forum (PKS0038)
284 Newcastle University (PKS0173)
285 NFPGS (PKS0400)
286 Nigel Sharp (PKS0414)
287 Open Spaces Society (PKS0161)
288 OPENspace research centre, University of Edinburgh (PKS0109)
289 Our Ground (PKS0326)
290 parkrun Limited (PKS0298)
291 Parks for London (PKS0229)
292 Parks for London (PKS0331)
293 Parks for the People, Lancaster Green Spaces (PKS0306)
294 Paths for All (PKS0190)
295 Pavilions for Music CIC (PKS0061)
296 Peter Neal (PKS0419)
297 Philip Stones (PKS0356)

298 Play Torbay (PKS0178)
299 Play Wales (PKS0185)
300 PlayBoard NI (PKS0279)
301 Plymouth Open Spaces Network (PKS0157)
302 Professor Daniel Osborn (PKS0361)
303 Professor Dr Paul Ekins (PKS0355)
304 Professor Emerita Annabelle Mark (PKS0082)
305 Professor Robert Lee (PKS0250)
306 Protect Clarence Park (PKS0347)
307 Public Health England (PKS0264)
308 Pupils 2 Parliament (PKS0283)
309 R Ward (PKS0394)
310 Reading Civic Society (PKS0376)
311 ResPublica (PKS0149)
312 Richard Styles (PKS0325)
313 Rimrose Valley Friends (PKS0144)
314 Ronald Stewart (PKS0226)
315 Rosalind Merrick (PKS0238)
316 Royal Town Planning Institute (PKS0367)
317 Rugby Borough Council (PKS0241)
318 S:Park (PKS0029)
319 Sally Cranfield (PKS0008)
320 Sam Thomas (PKS0378)
321 Sarah Hughes (PKS0006)
322 Save Haggerston Park (PKS0148)
323 Save Lea Marshes (PKS0169)
324 Save Newcastle Wildlife (PKS0421)
325 Save the Beckenham 18 (PKS0302)
326 Sefton Council (PKS0146)
327 Shared Assets (PKS0359)
328 Sheffield City Council (PKS0310)
329 Sheffield Civic Trust (PKS0244)
330 Sheffield Green Spaces Forum (PKS0382)
331 South Ashford Community Forum (PKS0233)
332 South Gloucestershire Council (PKS0258)
333 Southwark Council (PKS0193)
334 Sport and Recreation Alliance (PKS0186)
335 Sport England (PKS0333)

336 Sportsroots (PKS0316)
337 Staffordshire County Council (PKS0104)
338 Stephen Hobbs (PKS0282)
339 Stephen Smith (PKS0353)
340 Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (PKS0252)
341 Strategic Green and Open Spaces Review Board Liverpool (PKS0271)
342 Streatham Common Cooperative (PKS0119)
343 StreetGames (PKS0321)
344 Sue Clarke (PKS0328)
345 Surrey Parks and Countryside Forum (PKS0268)
346 Surrey Playing Fields (PKS0251)
347 Susan Hedley (PKS0357)
348 The British Horse Society (PKS0305)
349 The Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association (PKS0309)
350 The Clapham Society (PKS0237)
351 The Clissold Park User Group (PKS0281)
352 The Conservation Volunteers (PKS0318)
353 The Football Association (PKS0397)
354 The Friends of Crow Nest Park (PKS0317)
355 The Friends of Finsbury Park (PKS0273)
356 The Friends of Meads Parks and Gardfens (PKS0220)
357 The Friends of Muswell Hill Playing Fields and Coldfall Woods (PKS0137)
358 The Friends of Priory Park Warwick (PKS0222)
359 The Friends of Victoria Park (Stafford) (PKS0097)
360 The Froglife Trust (PKS0033)
361 The Gardens Trust (PKS0192)
362 The Heath & Hampstead Society (PKS0276)
363 The Kennel Club (PKS0102)
364 The Land Trust (PKS0136)
365 The Parks Agency Limited (PKS0103)
366 The Parks Alliance (PKS0084)
367 The Ramblers (PKS0151)
368 The Upper Street Association: Gardens SubCommittee (PKS0210)
369 Town & Country Planning Association (TCPA) (PKS0368)
370 Trafford Labour Group (PKS0024)
371 Trees and Design Action Group (PKS0030)
372 Truro City Council (PKS0327)
373 Tyne & Wear Joint Local Access Forum (PKS0100)

374 ukactive (PKS0320)
375 University of Leeds (PKS0156)
376 University of Westminster (PKS0257)
377 Urban FWAC Network (PKS0278)
378 Urban Pollinators Ltd (PKS0046)
379 Vicky Cole (PKS0179)
380 Victoria Park Action Group (PKS0383)
381 Vision-Redbridge Culture and Leisure (PKS0111)
382 walking 4 health (PKS0044)
383 Warley Woods Community Trust (PKS0189)
384 Warwickshire County Council Parks Manager (PKS0081)
385 Waterplay Solutions Ltd (PKS0116)
386 We Own It (PKS0350)
387 West Midlands Parks Forum (PKS0290)
388 West of England Nature Partnership (PKS0371)
389 Woodland Trust (PKS0287)
390 World Urban Parks (PKS0402

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2016–17

First Report	100 per cent retention of business rates: issues for consideration	HC 241
Second Report	Pre-appointment hearing with the Government's preferred candidate for the post of Chair of the Homes and Communities Agency	HC 41
Third Report	Homelessness	HC 40
Fourth Report	Government interventions: the use of Commissioners in Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets	HC 42 (CM 9345)
Fifth Report	The draft Homelessness Reduction Bill	HC 635
Sixth Report	Pre-appointment hearing with the Government's preferred candidate for the post of Local Government Ombudsman	HC 737
First Special Report	Housing associations and the Right to Buy: Homes and Communities Agency response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2015–16	HC 902

Session 2015–16

First Report	Devolution: the next five years and beyond	HC 369 (CM 9291)
Second Report	Housing associations and the Right to Buy	HC 370
Third Report	Department for Communities and Local Government's consultation on national planning policy	HC 703
First Special Report	Child sexual exploitation in Rotherham: Ofsted and further government issues: Ofsted Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2014–15	HC 435
Second Special Report	Private rented sector: the evidence from banning letting agents' fees in Scotland: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2014–15	HC 434