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LONDON GREEN SPACES COMMISSION REPORT



Photo: Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

COVID-19

The work of the London Green Spaces Commission was undertaken prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent economic impact.

Throughout the lockdown, continued access to parks was permitted provided users abided by the social distancing rules. Local parks and green spaces became a haven and the preferred location for daily exercise.

This has shown beyond doubt the fundamental contribution parks and green spaces make to the physical health and mental wellbeing of Londoners, especially those without their own outdoor space.

But it has also made clear that these benefits are not available to all. Those Londoners without parks nearby, or those unable to access parks for other reasons, have not benefitted. Consequently, although the Commission's work focused on the future resourcing of parks services, its recommendations are also relevant to how we rethink the provision of green outdoor space for those not able to benefit directly from parks.

To do this we need to recognise that parks are part of a wider network of public realm, which includes spaces such as civic squares, streets and green areas in housing estates. These shared places collectively provide the public space for all Londoners to exercise, socialise, play and experience the natural world around us. They are essential for London's biodiversity and in boosting resilience to climate change. More than ever, parks services will need to be aligned with the wider and more integrated planning and management of these public spaces.

The pandemic has made us all think differently about what is possible. The recovery, and the economic uncertainty that comes with it, will demand new ways of working which call for greater collaboration and ambition. Whilst the Commission understands that likely funding pressures may have an impact on the ability of the Greater London Authority (GLA) and London's boroughs to act, there is a once in a generation opportunity to use the momentum of recovery to reimagine all of our city's spaces for a greener, healthier, and more resilient future. Improving our green spaces, especially access to them, as well as investing in green skills will be key to London's social and economic recovery. Leadership, decision-making, training and governance within and across local authorities and the GLA will need to adapt accordingly. The Commission's proposals for a Centre of Excellence and Future Greenspace Skills Programme can support this.

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This report presents the insights and recommendations of the London Green Spaces Commission.

The report is intentionally concise. Rather than repeat previous studies, it focusses the Commission's work into clear and achievable recommendations.

Whilst there are many challenges facing parks and green spaces in London the recommendations address the Commission's terms of reference 'to help support London boroughs transform how their **parks services are managed and funded so that they can maintain or increase investment in parks and green spaces**, in the context of substantial and ongoing constraints imposed on public sector funding'.

This report was completed in August 2020.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

London is one of the greenest cities in the world; globally recognised for its parks and green spaces.

These invaluable cultural and heritage assets are integral to the city's identity and its pre-eminence as a world city. This has never been better recognised than during the outbreak of coronavirus which has highlighted the way that Londoners value access to green space and how different Londoners' experience and access can be. London's confirmation as the world's first National Park City in 2019 adds to its already well-established green credentials and aims to make the capital ever greener, healthier and wilder. As a Commission we call on London to realise this ambition over the next decade.

By 2030 London's 3,000 plus public parks and green spaces should truly be acknowledged and valued for their critical role in helping fight the climate and ecological emergency as well as reducing the social and health inequalities[1] that threaten the wellbeing of our great city.

This will not happen without fundamental change. London created some of the very first public parks in Britain and has long led the way in developing policies and frameworks to protect and repurpose green spaces for the future. Now there needs to be a step-change in investment in this core infrastructure for an inclusive, healthy and resilient city.



For decades, evidence has been building on the value of parks and green spaces in tackling complex challenges in modern society and their multiplicity of positive impacts: on economic, environmental, social and health outcomes.

1 in every 3 of London's **11-year-old children are overweight or obese**[2]

Just **65%** of adults in the city are **physically active.**

Living in greener places is linked to **longer life expectancy and better mental and physical health**[3].

Covering almost one fifth of the city, green spaces save London **£950m per year in avoided health costs.**

It is estimated that Londoners receive **£27**[4] **in value for every £1 spent on green spaces.**

Projected increases in average monthly temperatures show that London is likely to experience a **5-6°C**[5] **increase in summer and winter averages by 2050.** The natural services parks and green spaces provide help **reduce urban temperatures by up to 2°C during heat waves.**

Significant inequalities persist in our society: Londoners are more likely to be socially isolated or lonely than people in the rest of the UK. **Parks and green spaces are socially inclusive** providing free outdoor public space open to anyone regardless of who they are or where they live.

London's wildlife is in decline, in common with nationwide trends. **Parks and green spaces provide crucial networks and habitats for wildlife.**

London's parks have been estimated to store **5.5 million tonnes of carbon annually,** valued at **£340 million.**[6]

The capital's parks help **reduce Londoners' exposure to harmful pollutants,** providing public space away from the main sources of pollution.

However, this evidence has failed to translate into the sustained investment needed to fully realise the potential of parks and green spaces. In the last ten years £4bn has been cut from core funding for local services in London[7]. Over the same period, spending on public green space has fallen by over 30 per cent to just £159m[8] while London's population has grown by around 900,000 people (11.2 per cent).

Individual initiatives and community efforts can only take us so far. What is needed is system change. This is unlikely to come from central Government; although there is recognition of the multiple benefits green space provides[9], there is no national framework to help secure a financial future for urban parks and green spaces. Responsibility lies with both Defra and MHCLG, with neither providing strong leadership, or taking full ownership.

Although the Mayor of London currently has no direct remit for parks or access to significant funding streams to invest in parks, the GLA has developed a range of environmental, social and regeneration programmes and policies to support boroughs. But these alone cannot make up for the loss of funding suffered by the boroughs or the funding pressures that are likely following the impact of the pandemic.

The Mayor is committed to realising the full potential of parks and green spaces and supporting boroughs, other landowners and the 700+ friends' groups[10], all of whom want to secure a strong and vibrant future for these vital spaces. That is why he established the London Green Spaces Commission (LGSC) to recommend how boroughs can be helped to develop, strengthen and secure their parks services.

As a Commission, we heard of many ways that different organisations can support the future funding and management of parks services, from minor yet highly effective tactical changes to more ambitious goals. However, we made a conscious choice to focus on the two most practical and deliverable actions that we believe will enable a major step-change.

1. Creating a Centre of Excellence for London's Parks & Green Spaces

We want to create a unified and sustainable approach that can unlock value in our parks and green space services across London and ensure they are better aligned with the planning, design and management of the wider public realm.

We want to see an approach capable of:

- raising awareness of the central importance of parks and green spaces to all our lives, in order to galvanise a citywide, cross-sector commitment to sustaining and enhancing them; and, with this, the genuine long-term investment to enable this to happen
- establishing a substantial and significant Green Space Investment Fund to bring new funding to London's green space
- ensuring better value by preventing the need to replicate and reinvent approaches in every borough, including where appropriate, leading the case for any relevant national powers and responsibilities to be devolved to London

The GLA, London Councils, a working group of the London Environment Directors Network, and the charity, Parks for London; all have a city-wide remit, role or responsibility for parks and green space. Friends' groups, businesses and volunteers also play a crucial role. However, resources and expertise are fragmented. Currently no single organisation has the capacity to champion or provide comprehensive city-wide support for London's 33 borough park services to help them become more integral to a local authority's response to the climate and ecological crises.

Whilst the boroughs have deep knowledge of what works on the ground, a new partnership between the Mayor, London Councils and the boroughs is needed. The partnership should be inclusive, inviting and involve other green space and public realm owners and managers to contribute, participate and benefit from a new collective, joined up, approach.

The Commission believes that creating a Centre of Excellence for London's Parks & Green spaces is necessary to deliver change, building greater collaboration to share best practice and resources. The Centre of Excellence would be best achieved by extending the remit of an existing body or organisation. This would provide a dedicated resource to help tackle the many London-wide challenges which are not currently fully addressed.

Recommendation 1: Establish and resource a Centre of Excellence to champion and secure investment for London's public parks and green spaces.

Those organisations responsible for securing a better future for London's parks and green spaces (including the Mayor, London Councils and the London Boroughs) should create a cross-sector Centre of Excellence to drive innovation and promote best practice and to establish a Green Space Investment Fund to sustain this.

Key actors/implementers: The Mayor, London Councils and boroughs working with partners including, London Environmental Directors Network (LEDNet), Parks for London and friends'/community groups.

Challenges to be addressed should include:

- championing the economic, social, health and environmental value of high-quality green and accessible space
- making the case for investment, including establishing new financing mechanisms through an ambitious Green Space Investment Fund
- securing better value for parks services through shared specialist skills, thereby preventing the need to replicate and reinvent
- driving innovation and new thinking to bring wider expertise into the parks sector so that they can play a more prominent role in planning and managing the wider public realm
- promoting approaches that directly address a more inclusive and extensive use of parks and understanding of their value by all sections of London's diverse populations

Through convening partners and creating a united and sustainable approach, the Centre for Excellence will translate the recognised importance of parks and green spaces into real action, investment and cross-London sharing of expertise.

The success of this recommendation will be tested by whether the Centre of Excellence is established and whether it can secure additional investment from public, private and other sources to help reverse the fall in capital and revenue spend on publicly accessible green space by the end of the decade.

2. Developing a Future Green Space Skills Programme

Dealing with the challenges of the climate and ecological emergencies, improving public health and building on the community engagement that has grown through the pandemic will require borough access to a wider variety of skills along with the capacity to deliver the solutions needed. The economic impacts of COVID-19 are likely to bring a change in job availability and type and a renewed interest in skills programmes.

The Commission recommends that a Future Greenspace Skills Programme is established as part of the wider ambition to develop green skills in London, bringing together providers and employers to respond to current and future requirements.

We know that the green space sector is facing a crisis with a loss of staff capacity, skills and expertise. This is worsened by a lack of career progression and professional recognition, difficulty in gaining transferable skills, poor workforce diversity and the fact that it is currently a relatively self-contained sector.

Workforce planning has also tended to focus on land management skills. Yet the skills needed to be 'stewards' of parks and green spaces requires expertise in other areas too. These include commercial management as well as community engagement, combined with a sound knowledge of environmental policy and practice.

Development of this new Future Greenspace Skills Programme needs to include further analysis of the skills, tasks and occupations of the current and future green spaces workforce in London. It should identify where existing skills provision and qualifications must change and adapt. The Programme, should consist of two principal elements:

- a Future Greenspace Skills Plan of continuing professional development and recognition aimed at the existing green space workforce
- major innovation projects and programmes to deliver sector leadership and greater diversification across the sector's workforce



Recommendation 2: Establish a Future Greenspace Skills Programme

The Mayor and London Councils should convene organisations involved with green space management and training provision in London to develop a Future Greenspace Skills Programme and identify innovation projects that will lead to an expansion in the ways in which the greenspace workforce of the present and the future is trained and managed.

The Skills for Londoners Board should integrate the green spaces sector's needs into the Mayor's strategic work on skills and the Green New Deal.

Led by: The Mayor, London Councils, Boroughs

The successful implementation of this recommendation will be tested by whether the Future Greenspace Skills Programme is developed, and the sector needs are integrated into the Mayor's strategic work on skills. The success of the Future Greenspace Skills Programme will be judged by the impact of this new approach on the management of green spaces.



ABOUT THE LONDON GREEN SPACES COMMISSION



The Mayor's London Environment Strategy committed to creating a Commission to support London boroughs transform how their parks services are managed and funded to maintain or increase investment to deliver parks and green spaces fit for the 21st century. This should be seen in the context of substantial and ongoing constraints imposed on public sector funding.

The London Green Spaces Commission was established in April 2019 for one year to deliver this ambition.

The Commission, chaired by Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy, Shirley Rodrigues, met six times between April 2019 and March 2020. After a short extension, as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, the Commission's term will end in September 2020. In addition to vice-chair Councillor Julian Bell, representing London Councils, the Mayor appointed 12 unpaid commissioners following an open application process.

The Commission also supported the Parks for Health project in Camden and Islington which has been match-funded by the Mayor of London. This shows in practice how parks services can be reframed to reflect the health benefits they provide. The project is part of a national Future Parks Accelerator programme supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Trust. It will run until 2021. The findings will then feed into future work to support London's parks services.

Alongside the experience they bring as Commissioners, the Commission has been informed by:

- a review of London's Parks and Green Spaces prepared by Parks for London
- 68 responses to a call for written evidence
- a Talk London online discussion
- extensive oral evidence given over the course of Commission meetings
- Commissioner conversations with councillors, chief executives and borough officers
- two independently facilitated workshops with borough officers from various sectors including public health, regeneration, highways, parks services, sports, culture, leisure and planning
- three short and targeted pieces of research. These included options for the funding and governance of a pan-London body; the sector's skills gap, and potential adult social care budget savings linked to green space
- discussions with the London Environment Directors Network 'Parks Cluster' and input from London Councils

The Commission's terms of reference meant the primary focus was on supporting borough park services rather than on other landowners such as the Royal Parks or City of London. However, insights from these bodies have been fed into the Commission through the evidence gathered and the recommendations will provide benefits for everyone caring for green space in London.

The Commission is grateful to all who gave their time to contribute.



PART 1: LONDON'S PARKS: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

'London's parks and green spaces have always been subject to a boom and bust cycle of funding. This has been exacerbated in recent years by a more fundamental restructuring of public-sector finances which has resulted in substantial and long-lasting reductions in funding for public parks and green spaces.'[11]

Across London, there are over 3,000 parks of varying sizes designated as 'public open space'. The majority are owned and managed by London boroughs or other public bodies such as the Lea Valley Regional Park and The Royal Parks as valuable public assets. Private landowners such as Thames Water, Argent and Grosvenor Britain & Ireland, also own and manage land for public use and benefit. Together these spaces cover almost 18 per cent of London - more than the area covered by railways and roads combined.

Parks have long been protected by policy in the London Plan[12] and borough local plans. More recently, policy frameworks such as the All London Green Grid[13] encourage those who manage and maintain parks to see them as part of a wider integrated network of green infrastructure[14].

The Mayor's commitment to declare the capital as the world's first National Park City[15] was realised in 2019. This confirmation recognised the importance of the capital's parks and green spaces, Londoners' desire and willingness to help make the city greener, healthier and wilder and the Mayor's efforts to protect and invest in the improvement of parks and green spaces.

Furthermore, London was the first megacity to declare a climate emergency and to publish one of the world's most ambitious climate change action plans to reduce emissions. Most boroughs have made declarations in response to the climate and ecological emergencies. Protecting and improving the city's parks and green spaces must be a key part of the capital's response.

Parks and green spaces play a vital role in relation to natural and social capital. They boost Londoners' health and contribute to economic prosperity by making the city liveable. There is an extensive body of evidence on the economic, social, health and environmental value of parks and green spaces.

Recent research for the Commission shows that, in Croydon, investing in public health **interventions that promote exercise in green space demonstrably reduces the borough's spending on adult social care**:

It is estimated that for every

£100

the Borough spends on green spaces, it saves

£12

in social care costs.[16]

If savings arise at the same rate per capita in the rest of London,[17] **they would equate to around**

£10 million

per year.

Early findings from the Parks for Health programme and evidence from the growing number of borough Natural Capital Accounts show the potentially significant economic benefit of offsetting future costs by commissioning parks as public health assets. This approach of **reimagining parks and green spaces as an integral part of local health and wellbeing systems** is likely, with the support of the NHS, to gain traction across all London boroughs.

Whilst initial studies have estimated that London parks currently store

5.5 million

tonnes of carbon annually,[18]

future research should consider the potential for increased long-term cost-savings by further innovation in designing and managing parks for a changing climate.

There have been many reports and reviews of green space funding, and the sector more generally, over the last 20 years. Recent notable additions nationally are the Public Parks report of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee,[19] and Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces report from Fields in Trust.[20] In London, they include the Green Infrastructure Taskforce report[21] and London Assembly Environment Committee's Park Life[22] report.

This Commission report draws on previous publications that show the value of green space (see Appendix 1) and the benefits of taking a green infrastructure approach to city wide planning, design and management. This report's purpose is not to reiterate what has already been said, rather it is to identify the support needed for parks' services. Across London, borough parks' services are being asked to realise value and adopt new approaches. Yet they simultaneously face the likelihood of continuingly constrained, and often diminishing, budgets and other resources.

Whilst central Government recognises the value of green spaces in terms of the many benefits they provide, it has not provided the strong policy framework needed to secure a financial future for parks. This is because departmental responsibility is split between Defra and MHCLG, with neither providing strong leadership or taking full ownership of this important issue. Consequently, there is no longer any government agency or publicly-funded national body that provides a strategic lead on parks, unlike other sectors such as sport (Sport England) or the natural environment (Natural England). As a result, parks and green spaces continue to be under-represented and undervalued for the multiple benefits they provide and routinely fail to get the level of public investment required.

National bodies (like CABE Space) which have historically championed the role of parks and green spaces no longer exist, due to changes in government policy and reductions in the national resources needed to support this sector.

The Government did, however, establish the Parks Action Group (PAG)[23] in 2017 to provide advice to Defra and MHCLG on the issues faced by public parks across England. To date the PAG has gathered evidence and information through four workstreams: Developing a Business Case for Parks; Community Empowerment; Green Infrastructure Standards; and Knowledge and Skills. Whilst the Commission has worked with the PAG, participating in a number of these workstreams and using some of the PAG's evidence to inform its recommendations, no substantive solutions or funding has been proposed by the PAG to date. A report from the PAG is due to be published later in 2020. Although the Commission is London focused, it has proposed recommendations which it believes could also be applied to help secure a future for parks and green spaces more widely and these should be considered by the PAG in its advice to central Government.

More inclusive use of parks in London remains an issue across the capital. For example, there is evidence that lower socio-economic groups and BAME communities derive a disproportionately high level of benefits from parks and green space[24] and yet are less likely to live close to them. There is much to learn from other sectors and wider partners about genuinely inclusive design and engagement. More work is needed to expand the green spaces network, bringing the benefits closer to where people live and work.



Photo: Lee Valley Regional Park Authority.

Despite recent improvements there remains a lack of diversity in both the sector's workforce and those who use green space;

- Nationally, **23 per cent[25] of BAME adults** visit nature less than once a month or never (compared to 14 per cent of white adults)
- Adults in the most deprived areas of England are least likely to spend time outside once a week
- Only **15 per cent[26] of employees in the horticulture and grounds maintenance industry** are **women** and between **10 per cent to 20 per cent** are BAME[27]

Victoria Park in Tower Hamlets, London's first park, was proposed almost **180 years** ago to provide amenity space for Londoners,[28] but perceptions of what a park should be and what it should, or could, provide remain relatively static. If parks' services are to show how green space can help meet both current and future challenges, this must change. We need to significantly expand the purpose of parks, what they should provide, who they are for and ways to proactively engage groups that have historically been absent from them.

Table 1: Some of the challenges faced by park services staff

Financial	Reducing budgets	Budgets not ringfenced	Non statutory service	Lack of innovation
Capability & Facilities	Sector diversity & skills gap	Uncoordinated sector	Historical layout & location	Ageing infrastructure
Stakeholder	Lack of awareness of natural capital value	Competing user expectations	Lack of communication	Inequality of access



PART 2: LONDON'S PARKS: CURRENT FUNDING & GOVERNANCE

Budget constraints and the need to secure year on year savings by boroughs in the face of austerity have reduced investment in parks.

This has resulted in a reliance on grants, which are often skewed towards providing capital rather than revenue funding. This reduction in funding has made strategic planning, inter-departmental and cross-borough working more difficult. Currently more than half of London boroughs do not have a strategic green infrastructure plan to help enable this[29].

Despite these constraints, there is a huge amount of good practice and innovation taking place and tremendous, and increasing, levels of goodwill from the public. The Commission has taken evidence from several boroughs that have devised alternative delivery models[30]. New approaches, in use or in development, range from Community Interest Companies and Trusts, to borough owned private limited companies and commercial partnerships. For example, Ealing Council has established a parks foundation, while Croydon has partnered with charitable social enterprise Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) to manage some of its sports facilities in parks.

The different approaches provided by these models have huge potential benefits for boroughs and Londoners. They may bring in additional income and investment opportunities and are likely to increase and improve community engagement and ownership. They also provide more integrated management frameworks that include or incorporate green spaces outside local authority control. Indeed, and perhaps more controversially, this may even involve transferring local authority parks and green spaces into arms-length bodies or independent trusts, whilst nonetheless retaining public oversight.

However, these new borough models have not yet been independently and objectively tested or evaluated to determine their effectiveness and how they share learning. There is no clear mechanism for enabling peer-to-peer learning between boroughs to ensure that the best models are identified and adopted.

Most of these new models are being trialled in boroughs that have 'in-house' parks services. Despite previous drives towards outsourcing parks services as a single multi-service contract to deliver cost-savings, there is a developing trend across London towards bringing parks services back 'in-house'. That is, to be directly delivered and managed by local authorities. Reports from heads of service suggest that in-house provision, or a more flexible contract, allows a parks' service to be more adaptable, thereby enabling a faster response to changing priorities and policies and providing the opportunity for more bespoke approaches, including using the models mentioned above. There is a roughly equal split between London boroughs directly managing their parks and green spaces and those outsourcing delivery to a third party.

Table 2: How London's parks and green space services are delivered

Parks & green space service	Grounds maintenance function	Client function outsourced	Joint Borough service	Boroughs
In house	Direct labour			15 Boroughs
	Trading company			• Ealing • Hounslow
Outsourced	Contractor(s)			13 Boroughs
		✓ ✓		• Bromley • Wandsworth
			✓	• Richmond & Wandsworth
Trust	Whole service			Redbridge

Source: A Review of London's Parks and Green Spaces, Parks for London, February 2019

Changing the perception of parks so that they are regarded as essential natural capital rather than as purely recreational and horticultural services, requires strong leadership - including a commitment to be bold, imaginative and to innovate - from the very top of local authorities. The benefits of parks and their true value must be championed, politically and managerially, from the top and at all levels in the organisation. This includes key partnerships, as well as at mayoral and government level.

By so doing, the parks service and the green spaces they manage, can be seen to contribute to core local authority priorities and objectives, which in turn means they are more likely to benefit from accessing other sources of local authority funding such as Section 106 agreements (S106), the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and carbon offsetting funds.

The most successful parks have an active community at their heart. However, borough support for engaging communities in the running, managing and maintaining of parks is patchy.

Most boroughs have developed good links with Friends' groups and just over half run active borough Friends' Forums. The existing London Friends of Green Space Network provides strong leadership and the GLA has contributed funding to the Go Parks[31] platform to facilitate better links between Friends' groups and the promotion of London parks. An active Friends' group can support advocacy and the management of green space, bringing benefits such as volunteer time, fundraising and community engagement. Where there is trusted local leadership, sound governance and strong community involvement, the transfer of assets to local communities can be transformative. This can secure their benefits to deliver important local services and make more efficient use of resources. However, these groups have some inherent weaknesses: they can be over-reliant on goodwill and on a few key individuals; they can fall away as circumstances change; and they don't always accurately reflect the demography and diversity of the local area. To be successful, they also require ongoing support and management by park services. They can add real value but are not in themselves a sustainable solution to longer term funding.

PART 3: INSIGHTS AND FINDINGS FROM THE COMMISSION INVESTIGATIONS AND WORKSHOPS

In addition to reviewing existing evidence on parks and green space in London, the Commission has been informed by:

- a review of London's Parks and Green Spaces prepared by Parks for London[32]
- 68 responses to a call for written evidence
- a Talk London online discussion
- extensive oral evidence given over the course of Commission meetings
- Commissioner conversations with councillors, chief executives and borough officers
- two independently facilitated workshops with borough officers from various sectors including public health, regeneration, highways, parks services, sports, culture, leisure and planning
- three short and targeted pieces of research. These include options for the funding and governance of a pan-London body; the sector's skills gap, and potential adult social care budget savings linked to green space
- discussions with the London Environment Directors Network 'Parks Cluster' and input from London Councils

A summary of evidence gathered can be found in Appendix 3.

Key findings from the evidence:

- **All green space should be part of a city-wide green infrastructure network.** There is a need to bring other sectors and borough departments together to realise the benefits of green infrastructure. There is a need to work across internal management "silos" within boroughs and across borough boundaries. The recommendation in the London Plan for **boroughs to prepare green infrastructure strategies** and the accompanying supporting guidance will help enable this.
- A one-size-fits-all approach is not helpful; yet **collaboration and partnership working are essential**. There are opportunities for economies and efficiencies of scale. **A clear and well-resourced lead organisation is required to facilitate this.**
- **Green space in London needs to be championed.** More needs to be done to communicate its value, particularly at senior political levels.
- **Green space is valued by Londoners.** It brings multiple benefits, but these are still not widely appreciated or acknowledged, specifically in terms of additional funding.
- There is a **lack of investment in green spaces** by Government, which leads to reduced investment by boroughs.
- There is learning from other sectors and wider partners about **inclusive design and engagement** that could be applied to parks and green spaces
- **New business and delivery models are operating in some boroughs.** The evidence for their long-term effectiveness is not always yet clear. Better evaluation and knowledge sharing are needed to support the roll out of viable new models of management.
- **Volunteers are vital but need support and clear links into boroughs.** Parks services need support, skills and resources to assist community groups.
- **The sector is not diverse.** There are workforce barriers that need to be overcome. There is a need to make a career in the industry more attractive and aspirational.
- Parks services need **support and upskilling to be responsive to future challenges.**
- There are **structural issues in provision of training** including a lack of on-site training and a scarcity of modular courses which would provide greater variety and flexibility.

PART 4: LONDON'S PARKS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING PARK SERVICES FOR 21ST CENTURY LONDON

Creating a Centre of Excellence for London's Parks and Green Space

There will always be a variation in how individual parks services are resourced and managed due to local priorities; therefore, the management of borough parks and key decisions relating to how they are funded should continue to be made at the borough level. But to address issues such as tackling climate change, promoting social integration and improving public health, a more coherent and joined-up approach is needed; both to re-evaluate the purpose and maximise the function of London's entire parks network and to support and deliver projects that may require cross-borough and multi-partner working.

There are several bodies already operating across Greater London with a remit, role or responsibility relating to parks and green spaces, including the GLA and London Councils. However, there is no single body that is adequately resourced or has sufficient weight to make the case for investment in parks, pursue new sources of funding, facilitate cross-borough working, promote alignment with public realm planning and help shape the sector to respond to future needs.

Research[33] was carried out for the Commission into the structure and governance of a potential pan-London body to identify areas where additional support is needed. It explored several different models for a pan-London initiative. This research, plus evidence from the workshops and informed discussions by Commissioners, concluded that developing the remit of an existing body, preferably one that already has charitable status, was likely to be the most effective and efficient model. This approach will allow the development of an established presence. It opens the option to leverage a range of funding sources and avoids the delay and logistical difficulties of setting up a new, appropriately constituted, organisation from scratch.

Recommendation 1: Establish and resource a Centre of Excellence to champion and secure investment for London's public parks and green spaces.

Those organisations responsible for securing a better future for London's parks and green spaces (including the Mayor, London Councils and the London Boroughs) should create a cross-sector Centre of Excellence to drive innovation and promote best practice and to establish a Green Space Investment Fund to sustain this.

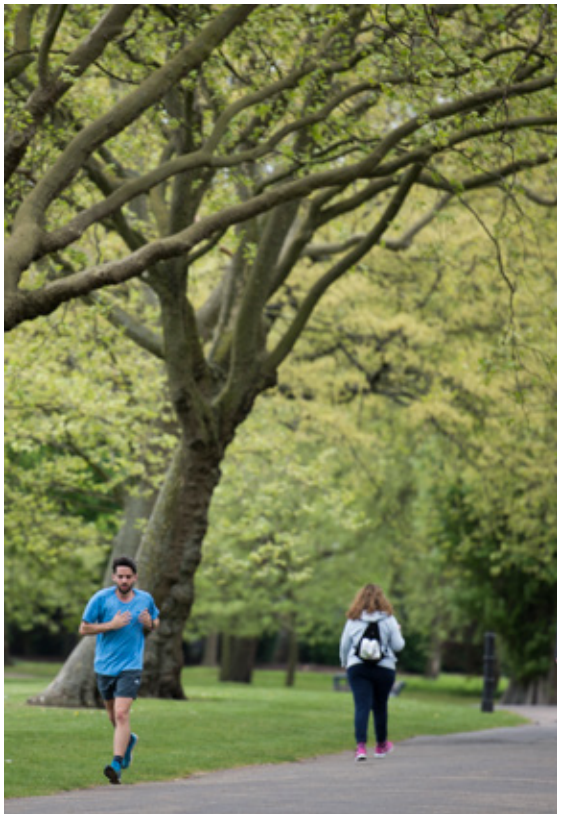
Key actors/implementers: The Mayor, London Councils and boroughs working with partners including, London Environmental Directors Network (LEDNet), Parks for London and friends'/community groups.

As we face climate and ecological emergencies, as well as major social and health inequalities in the capital, the value of London's green space must be championed even more.

Greater coordination of all those who have a stake in the future of our green spaces – indeed of London – is essential. The GLA, London Councils, a working group of the London Environment Directors Network, and the charity, Parks for London, all have a city-wide remit, role or responsibility for parks and green space. Friends' groups, business and volunteers also play a role. However, this resource and expertise is often fragmented within small amenity societies, Friends' groups, associations and trusts. At present, there is no single organisation currently investing enough resources to champion and provide city-wide support for London's 33 borough park services.

The Commission believes that London should create a Centre of Excellence to fulfil this role. The body would:

- champion the importance of green space and facilitate better strategic working with each other as well as with other sectors, including health. This will drive innovation, bring new expertise into the parks sector and help develop new approaches that directly address the more inclusive use of parks
- establish a brokerage service to ensure better value for parks services through shared specialist skills preventing the need to replicate and reinvent in every borough
- secure investment in the parks sector including establishing a new financing facility - a Green Space Investment Fund - for pan-London activities



This significant shift in profile and leadership for green space is fundamental to the Commission's recommendations. However, getting to this point will take time.

Advice to the Commission indicated that a small, lean organisation would be appropriate with about five staff recruited, or seconded for set periods from the GLA, London Councils, boroughs and other relevant organisations. They should have expertise around green infrastructure, strategic projects within local government and the raising and management of funds.

The body taking on this role would need to ensure future governance arrangements provide borough and GLA representation (e.g. as trustees of a charity). Similar governance models already operate in London; both the London Waste and Recycling Board and the Royal Parks have GLA and Borough representation on their boards.

To achieve change quickly and efficiently the Commission believes that the Centre of Excellence should be formed by extending the remit of an existing body. The Commission propose increasing resources for, and giving a stronger mandate to, Parks for London so that it can assume this new role. Parks for London already provides a service to most London boroughs and could readily expand its remit. However, it is recommended that its current Board of Trustees be expanded to include high level representation from a wider range of sectors.

This would include senior players from, for example, the health, economic development, business, community and environment sectors, in order to extend and deepen its base of expertise and experience. The purpose of this would be to strengthen the governance of the enhanced organisation, equipping it with additional resources to help it to re-imagine London's parks and green space services for the future more successfully, and subsequently to implement new strategies for it to fulfil its enhanced new mission.

With funding from the Mayor, London Councils, boroughs and other partners, it would develop work in the areas set out overleaf which have been identified by the Commission as adding the most value.

1.1 Championing green space

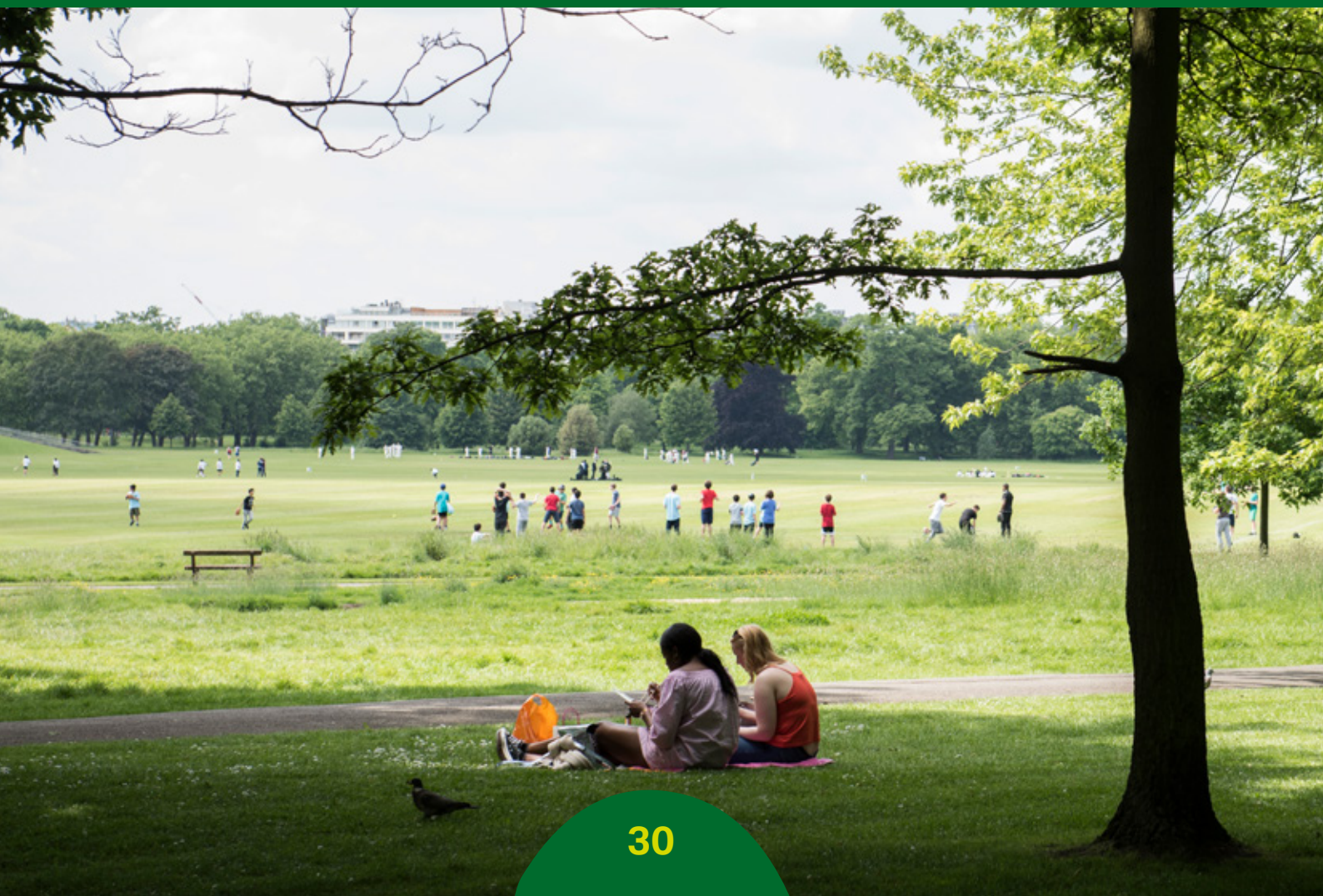
There is an urgent need to champion green space in London and translate goodwill into action. Parks and their management services need to be repositioned and carefully tailored messaging used to raise their profile with local authorities and the public alike. This must be linked to: the climate and ecological emergencies; new public health demands, including mental health and loneliness; and measures to address social exclusion that aim for exemplary levels of increased civic engagement. All these are key elements of the principles underpinning long-term sustainable growth[34].

Reframing the role of parks through approaches such as natural capital and public health projects like the Camden and Islington 'Parks for Health' project have already begun. Making parks' services more visible, relatable and relevant to other local authority departmental decision-makers and budget-holders will create a more compelling case for investment. Part of this reframing will mean working much more closely with the other sectors who use or benefit from green space across the capital.

New frameworks and standards, such as common approaches to green infrastructure strategies, indicators and natural capital accounting, need to be embedded within all boroughs. The London Environment Strategy and the London Plan have included policies to achieve this, but these may also be mandated by central Government in the future to meet the objectives of the 25-Year Environment Plan[35]. Seeing green spaces as assets for health, economic, social and environmental outcomes would help decision-makers consider the way we use, improve and invest in them. This should be integrated across the GLA family as well as within boroughs, to ensure a city-wide narrative and clear strategic direction across public sector delivery.

There is also an opportunity to showcase London's leadership as a global city. Building on the London Environment Strategy, London Plan, All London Green Grid, London's designation as a National Park City and the work of the London's boroughs, there are many exemplars to champion our green spaces to other cities.

> **'By aligning parks as a public health asset rather than just as a public realm asset changes the strategic context for why we have parks and what their primary purpose is. No longer are they nice to have for people to walk their dog, for the kids to play or to sit and have a peaceful cup of coffee; they are intrinsic to sustaining a healthy population. That might then influence where parks services sit within a local authority structure but is not essential. Increasingly we are working collaboratively across traditional departmental boundaries to ensure the focus is on working together to improve the lives of residents. It also changes the thinking about the funding for parks as they become an essential part of the solution to the social care and health challenges and not just a nice to have service.'**
>
> Andrew Bedford, Head of Greenspace & Leisure, Islington Council, 'Parks for Health' initiative



1.2 Establishing a brokerage service

Without more collaboration and partnership working, local authorities will not get the significant savings they could achieve through a shared approach. There are opportunities to work across boroughs in areas such as the sale of specialist services (e.g. commercial contract negotiation), expertise in specialist environmental management (e.g. sustainable drainage management).

There are several current examples of cross-borough collaboration, trading and shared specialist services in other sectors. However, this is not happening as a matter of course across parks services or on a large enough scale to benefit from significant cost or efficiency savings.

- Ealing, Brent and Harrow jointly commissioned and have operated their sport and leisure services in partnership with Everyone Active since 2013
- the South London Waste Partnership, an alliance between five south London boroughs, successfully commissioned their waste collection and street cleansing services
- Islington and Camden share a cemeteries and cremation service operated in-house by LB Islington

Cross-borough collaboration takes significant time and capacity. It also relies on strong working relationships and continuity of leadership.

This can be a problem in a sector facing severe financial pressures. It is made harder by borough level democratic accountability and thus the need to recognise and respect local ownership, accountability and decision making.

The Centre of Excellence would also provide a mechanism through which to engage with and support the managers of those parks and green spaces not managed by the boroughs, for example those managed by independent trusts.

1.3 Establish a Green Space Investment Fund

A new Centre of Excellence would make the case and develop new approaches to securing investment. During its first two years it would scope the fund, explore opportunities from potential funding sources and develop business cases to enable the establishment of a substantial funding pot.

Opportunities it should explore include:

- increasing community/volunteer/corporate participation and philanthropic funding and investment
- supporting boroughs to develop funding and commercial strategies. For example, maximising the opportunities through CIL, S106 and Carbon Offsetting programmes
- increasing appropriate commercial sector support for green spaces
- securing investment from Government for an investment fund (for example, a Future Parks Fund similar to the Government backed Future High Streets Fund)
- alternative funding from taxation, for example, a Tourism Tax
- devolving national funding to London

Environmental issues are moving up the agenda of charitable trusts, foundations and corporate social responsibility programmes as the urgency of tackling climate change increases and public awareness rises[36]. UK charitable foundations provide more than £4bn of funding every year to good causes. In 2019[37] 30 funders signed up to the Funder Commitment on Climate Change[38].

Funders have moved from supporting many small projects in lots of different organisations to a more strategic and longer-term approach[39] with larger multi-year grants. There is also strong evidence and growing interest in the public health and social integration benefits of green space. This suggests that through a charitable organisation, there could be wider scope for approaching philanthropic sources and corporate institutions to contribute to strategic London wide green infrastructure initiatives that go beyond supporting core public services.

In addition to foundation and corporate support, there are other sources of funding that have not yet been fully realised for the green space sector. These have the potential to be part of a blended finance model. Some, such as a Tourist Tax which could be used to help fund all spaces and services currently used 'for free' by tourists, including green spaces, require further devolution of tax raising powers to the Mayor or the boroughs.

Others, like the use of carbon offsets, have not yet been developed into a potentially useful (though time-limited) income source. With many cities calling for a 'Green New Deal'[40] there is an increased focus on leveraging finance for environmental programmes. This area continues to develop rapidly.

A significant and sustainable Green Space Investment Fund could consolidate a variety of these different city-level funding streams and leverage more capital and revenue funding. Funding secured will be additional to core budgets and will unlock activity and action that would be impossible at borough level. For example, the development of green infrastructure strategies and action plans and cross borough projects focused on health, social inclusion or climate change.

Further work is needed to establish levels of support for a Green Space Investment Fund from potential funders and how it might operate. The London Sustainable Development Commission[41] report Financing for a Future London has recommended setting up a Green Finance Taskforce.

In considering future funding opportunities, the Commission also considered proposals to:

- continue to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of making the provision of parks services a statutory service
- ring fence funds for parks services and/or allocate specific percentages of funding to green space.

Making parks a statutory duty does not guarantee any extra funds; a quarter of councils already fear that they will not have enough funding to fulfil their existing statutory duties in the near future[42]. The recent Select Committee on Public parks explored this in detail and chose not to recommend that parks become a statutory service so this would require further lobbying of Government and establishing a compelling case as to whether this would secure additional resources. Whilst this could be investigated further by a Centre of Excellence, it is not going to bring about the speed of change needed in the short term and is therefore not considered a priority.

The Commission recommends that the business case for making parks a statutory service should be addressed by the PAG in its advice to central Government.

As some boroughs are already utilising Community Infrastructure Levy or Section 106 agreements to support parks services, the Commission felt that proposing a one-size-fits-all approach would be unlikely to lead to achieve beneficial change.



Developing a Future Green Space Skills Programme

Green spaces have a vital role to play in the recovery of the city post COVID-19 and its future resilience. They are uniquely well-placed to address a wide range of social, environmental and economic issues. Developing a greenspace skills programme will offer new opportunities to Londoners while helping to build the capacity needed to deliver a greener and healthier future.

There are an estimated 163,000[43] employees in London's green space workforce, but the sector is facing a skills shortage. It has an ageing workforce, lacks ethnic, gender and other forms of diversity, and struggles to fill vacancies. This could well escalate post-Brexit depending on future immigration policies and it is still too early to predict the full scale of the impacts of the pandemic on the sector.

Green spaces will need to work harder as the population grows, and the city increasingly feels the effects of climate change on daily life. To date, workforce training and skills development has been focused on land management. However, the skills required to manage and maintain parks and the benefits they provide are evolving. In future, those working in the sector will need additional skills in areas such as: business management; environmental design; how best to meet new public health demands; and community engagement. Importantly, these comprise transferable skills, making a career in parks and green space management more attractive to a greater number of people, including women, graduates and those from BAME backgrounds.

Recommendation 2: Establish a Future Greenspace Skills Programme.

The Mayor and London Councils should convene organisations involved with green space management and training provision in London to develop a Future Greenspace Skills Programme and identify innovation projects that will lead to an expansion in the ways in which the greenspace workforce of the present and the future is trained and managed.

The Skills for Londoners Board should integrate the green spaces sector's needs into the Mayor's strategic work on skills and the Green New Deal.

Led by: The Mayor, London Councils, Boroughs



Research to support the Commission's recommendations on current skills gaps and responses found that:

1) 70 per cent of stakeholders who responded to the survey and took part in interviews felt confident they knew about the existing traditional sector skills. However, barriers remain in accessing training because of time pressures and cost
2) A broad range of additional skills needs were identified. These included technical green space skills, community engagement/volunteer management, and commercial skills
3) BAME inclusion is gradually improving but does not reflect local demographics in London and women are particularly under-represented. A snapshot from ONS in April 2018 showed that of the 168,000 ornamental horticulture and grounds maintenance employees, only 15 per cent were women and between 10 to 20 per cent BAME[44]
4) There are structural issues in the provision of skills. For example, a lack of modular or short-term courses
5) There has been a shift away from seasonal hiring
6) Barriers to recruitment are visible at all levels. There are a range of reasons for this, including wage level (especially at lower levels), job roles and progression
7) For these reasons, the sector is not perceived as an attractive one to work in

In response to the research findings and further evidence from the borough workshops, the Commission recommends establishing a Future Greenspace Skills Programme. This will comprise two principal elements:

A Future Skills Plan. This plan will focus on developing the skills of the existing green space workforce. This includes providing the future skills needed and developing new models for training delivery in-role and on-site. In addition, it will explore a sector 'quality mark' for training offers.

Major innovation projects on sector leadership and workforce development. These would focus on tackling structural barriers, work cross-sector and make jobs in green space more attractive to a wider range of people.

The Future Greenspace Skills Programme should aim to enable the development of a diverse workforce with transferable skills to help design, create, construct and maintain a green and resilient city. This is a key part of the Mayor's 'Good Growth' agenda and responds to mayoral policies on environment, inequalities and social integration and economic strategy.

To develop this programme, further analysis of the skills, tasks and occupations of the current and future green spaces workforce in London will need to be carried out. This should reflect the changing uses of green spaces and identify where existing skills provision and qualifications need to adapt to meet future demand.

In addition, the Commission calls on the Skills for Londoners Board to integrate the green spaces sector needs into the Mayor's strategic work on skills and the Green New Deal.

The involvement of London Councils through their Green Economy programme, boroughs and providers will enable the success and integration of these recommendations.



Work in the following areas have been identified by the Commission as adding the most value:

2.1. Create a Future Skills Plan

There is sector demand to support the development of future skills and upskilling but currently there is no clear route to enable this. This could be achieved through creating better access to a programme of existing training offers. It would also identify gaps in the current offering and develop modular courses to better meet the sector's needs.

Many courses are available in the green space sector. However, no London-wide sector led approach exists to identify emerging skill requirements (for example marketing, fundraising, volunteer management, sustainable drainage design, drought resistant planting) and gaps in provision. The Commission's discussions with providers such as Capel Manor College have shown support for developing this framework approach. The Mayor's Construction Academy could provide a model for developing a more coordinated approach to delivering the training London's green spaces workforce needs, working across public, private and third sectors, as well as with training providers to:

- identify training barriers and potential improvements, particularly those around sector diversity
- consider a sector 'quality mark' for training offers
- connect with and support existing recruitment drives and skills events and initiatives (for example BALI's Go Landscape, Landscape Institute, the Royal Parks Guild's events)
- work to streamline skills funding to sector need
- ensure apprenticeships, and apprentices, work for the sector

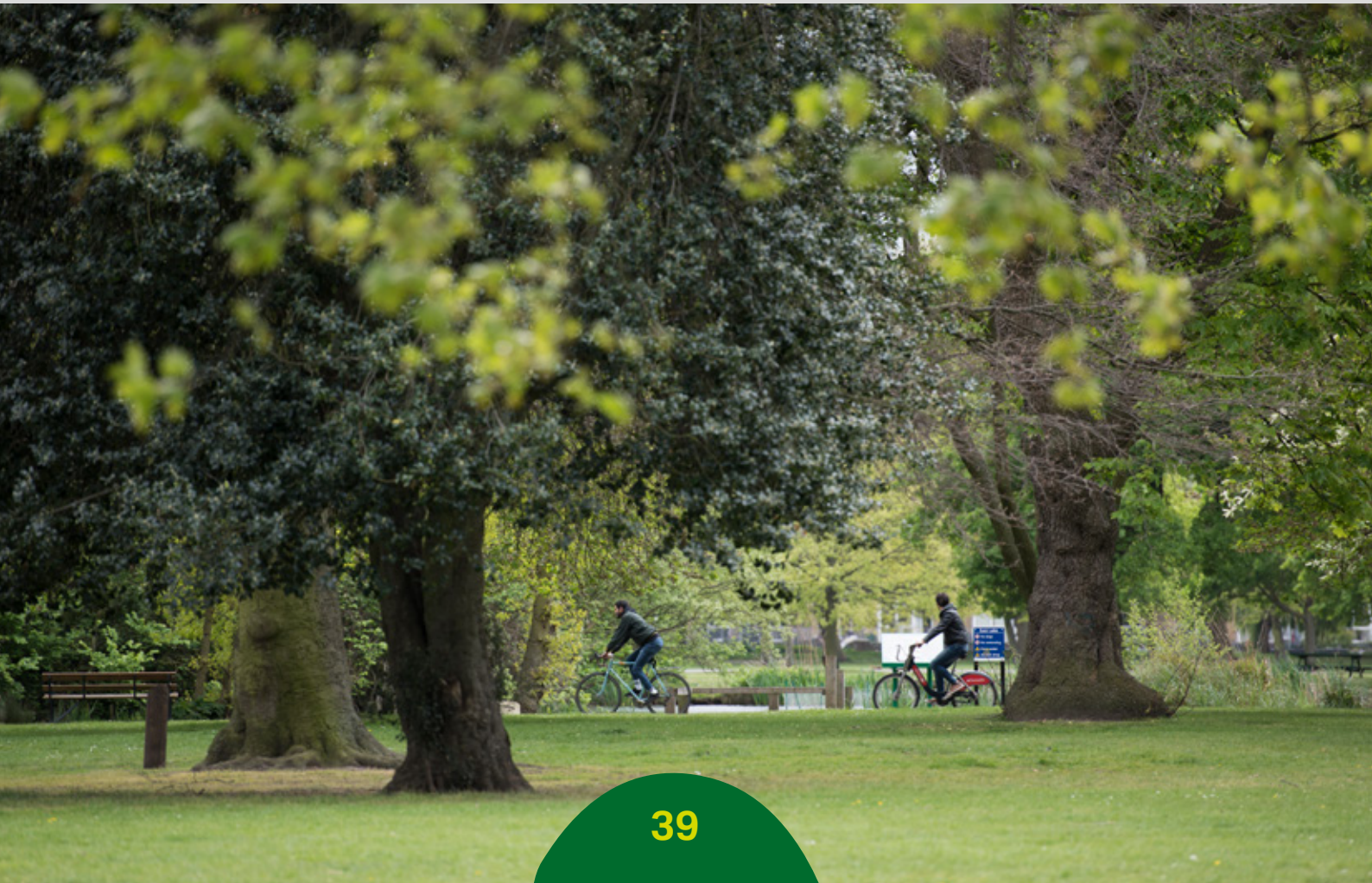


2.2 Sector leadership and innovation

There is a national as well as regional need for sector leadership in green space. Around skills and workforce development, the Future Greenspace Skills Programme could test new approaches and ways to remove barriers to access into the sector. This would respond to feedback from the future skills plan and identify new opportunities that evolve from the current focus on green skills in London.

Catalyst innovation projects could include work on:

- new modular professional courses funded by sector skills budgets
- cross-sector qualifications and training
- skills training and programmes to attract people seeking alternative career paths
- addressing job structure and modernising work patterns
- challenging perceptions of the sector through engagement, including targeting under-represented groups
- exploring the feasibility of a group employment model



PART 5: CONCLUSION

For far too long, investment in parks services has been inadequate and out of step with the benefits they provide.

Whilst there is no silver bullet, we have proposed two key recommendations which we believe will, if implemented, be a catalyst that starts to provide the transformative change needed at a city-wide level.

London's parks and green spaces have a crucial role to play in supporting better public health, including mental health, improving the wellbeing of families and communities, tackling inequalities and helping to address the climate and ecological emergencies in a green recovery post COVID-19. The establishment of a Centre of Excellence and the associated Green Spaces Investment Fund, together with a Future Green Space Skills Programme, provide a pathway for fundamental change that can lead to a decade of action for London's parks and green spaces.

We hope the Mayor, London Councils, the boroughs and other organisations committed to the future of London's parks and green spaces will work together urgently and constructively to implement the proposed recommendations.

Finally, the Commissioners would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have provided support to the work of the Commission over the last 12 months. The thoughts and insights from a wide variety of stakeholders have been essential in helping us develop these recommendations.



Appendices

1. Recognising the value
2. Terms of Reference
3. Summary of evidence received

APPENDIX 1

RECOGNISING THE VALUE

Green space in London provides a wide range of functions and benefits. This value is increasingly well established in the sector, although it often remains less well understood more widely. Realising this value financially is challenging since savings are often realised elsewhere. In considering the future of green space, we must think about increasing and enhancing its performance (what it gives us as a society) and its offer (how it attracts users and funders). These marginal improvements (in economic terms) help build the case for increased investment – rather than needing to restate the case for an asset that already exists. A brief overview of some of the key figures around the value of green space is provided OVERLEAF.



Social

Community integration

The importance of shared spaces, particularly parks, to social integration is widely acknowledged. Most recently in the Mayor's Strategy for Social Integration, the Mayor's Culture Strategy, Government's Integrated Communities Strategy, Loneliness Strategy and Communities Framework.

Health

Parks and green spaces have a central role to play in the health and wellbeing of urban communities and there is now a strong body of research and evidence to support this. Access to good quality parks and green space is associated with a range of positive health outcomes including better self-rated health; lower body mass index scores and overweight and obesity levels; improved mental health and wellbeing and increased life expectancy in older people. Increasing the use of good quality green space for all social groups is likely to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities.

Over 75 per cent of those surveyed nationally think that green spaces bring communities closer together[45]

Community ownership of assets, such as parks, supports strong integrated communities by catalysing social action. Saving a much-loved asset and taking part in shaping services can act as a focal point for the community and offers opportunities for people to mix and combat a 'them and us' mentality.'[46]

Londoners avoid £950m per year in health costs due to public parks. This figure is made up of reduced disease risk due to higher levels of physical activity and improved mental health due to access to parks[47].

The proportion of adults who are physically active in London is 65 per cent, which is a lower than in 2015/16[48].
In 2017/18, one in five of London's 4/5-year old children were considered to be overweight or obese[49]. At age 10/11 – the figure is 38 per cent.

Fewer children in London (62 per cent) regularly visit a park or green space than in any other part of England (78 per cent in the North East). This is especially so for BAME children and those from lower income households[50]

Over 90 per cent of respondents to the Parks for London annual survey of Head of Parks Services felt that the health sector should be actively engaged in 2020.

Recreation and local economy

Parks are good for the local economy, making places more attractive to businesses and workers, increasing local property values and providing valuable jobs and opportunities for volunteering. Well managed green spaces can contribute to the economy in many ways and this can enhance the desirability of an area as a place to live, work, play and invest

It is estimated that for the average household in London, the value of proximity to parks is over £900 per year in house value and amenity benefits. This is in addition to the other types of benefits households enjoy, which, as one would expect, shows that parks are not only delivering value through recreation and improved health outcomes but also because of its impact on general quality of life.[51]

Environmental

The effects of climate change – including urban heat islands, high carbon emissions, air pollution and declining biodiversity – create risks to the environment, health and the economy. The impacts are concentrated on the most vulnerable, contributing to health inequalities. In recognition of this, the Mayor and over two thirds of London councils have declared a climate and ecological emergency.

Green spaces contribute in several ways to a city's resilience. Parks provide flows of natural benefits including water management, heat reduction, carbon capture and pollution control, which in turn reduces the financial burden on councils and on government. When assessed over their productive lifetime, green infrastructure investments, including parks, are a very low-risk and low-cost policy response to climate-related challenges compared to major physical infrastructure projects. Values for environmental benefits are currently low but, as urgency over action on climate change increases, it is likely this will increase.

London's green spaces reduce urban **temperatures by 2°C during heat waves providing a preventative value estimated to be £594m[52].**

For the whole of Greater London, the value of carbon stored in soil is estimated to be £10m per year and the value of carbon contained in trees is estimated at £8m per year[53]

Parks make up 56.64 per cent of the overall Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) network[54].

'Emerging research is suggesting that it is the combination of both learning about and being connected to nature that develops environmentally friendly behaviours. Therefore, in order to ensure that the upcoming generation is both passionate and knowledgeable enough about the natural world and local green spaces to want to protect them, providing opportunities to connect with nature early on as part of their education experience is essential. London's parks play a pivotal role in this process.' Joy Blizzard, written evidence.

APPENDIX 2

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The LGSC is a time-limited advisory body of experts appointed by the Mayor of London.

i. Aim

The aim of the LGSC is to support London boroughs to transform how they manage and fund their parks services so that they can maintain or increase investment in parks and public green spaces, in the context of substantial and ongoing constraints imposed on public sector funding.

Definition of parks and green spaces
For the purposes of the LGSC, parks and public green spaces will be defined as: areas such as local, district and metropolitan parks, and natural areas, that are freely accessible to Londoners, that are owned and managed by local authorities.

ii. Objectives

To achieve this aim, the LGSC will:

1. Articulate and communicate the common problems faced by London borough parks services and highlight the potential impact of continued underinvestment in London's parks and public green spaces. This will build on the findings of the review of London's parks and green spaces undertaken by Parks for London.

2. Use new knowledge and information about the economic value of London's parks and public green spaces to demonstrate the need for continued investment by boroughs and other key stakeholders, in order to maximise the opportunity to deliver social and environmental benefits. This will build on the findings of the Natural Capital Account for London's Public Green Spaces[55].

3. Build a broad partnership of key decision-makers who recognise the value of London's parks and public green spaces and can influence future investment decisions and leverage additional sources of finance.

4. Explore new, more sustainable business models for parks services in London boroughs so that they can maintain and increase investment in these assets to secure the public benefits they provide. These business models should consider new forms of finance and/or new or complementary governance structures.

iii. Outputs

The LGSC will deliver two primary outputs within its term of operation (initially 12 months):

1. An initial report that summarises:
   - the current state of play with regards to the funding and governance of London borough parks services
   - the new information, tools and models available that can help reaffirm the importance of London's parks and public green spaces
   - the learning from pilot projects that sign-post the most sustainable business models for parks and public green spaces in the future

2. A final published framework outlining recommendations and proposals for the transformation of how parks and green spaces services in London boroughs are funded and governed.

   In addition, the LGSC will work with parks service transformation pilots in collaboration with London boroughs. The LGSC will provide advice and support to test their emerging recommendations through an action-learning and co-creation process.

iv. Governance

- The LGSC will be time-limited to a term not exceeding 12 months from its first meeting
- The LGSC is an advisory not a decision-making body. The Commission will make recommendations and proposals to the Mayor, London boroughs and wider stakeholders, but does not have decision-making powers
- The LGSC will provide recommendations on work it considers needs to be undertaken to inform the delivery of the Commission's objectives
- The LGSC reports to the Mayor of London, through the Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy (the Chair of the Commission)

v. Operation

As an advisory body, the LGSC will be able to address the problem of resourcing a discretionary service in the context of reduced overall budget and resources, without the constraints of the need to focus on operational matters and local political considerations.

The LGSC:

- will be serviced by a secretariat staffed by officers from the Greater London Authority
- will meet at least six times over the course of its term
- may establish smaller working groups to address specific issues or elements of the work programme
- may commission external contractors to conduct research or provide consultancy services to achieve the objectives of the LGSC
- will work in close partnership with key stakeholders including but not limited to London Councils, London boroughs, the National Trust, the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Parks Action Group
- may be supported by advice from theme specific experts who can be called to give evidence and/or participate in specific meetings or events, to ensure that the Commission has access to the full range of information and expertise

The LSGC should be informed by previous and existing relevant work, including:

- *the Natural capital account for public green spaces in London*[56]
- a review of the status of parks services in London (commissioned)
- the recommendations of the Communities and Local Government Committee's *Public parks* inquiry[57], and the London Assembly's *Park life*[58] report
- the work programme of the Parks Action Group[59]
- the experience of other projects funded by the Future Parks Accelerator programme

APPENDIX 3

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE RECEIVED

Review of London's Parks and Green Spaces[60] prepared by Parks for London	London's wider governance through the GLA and London Councils has the potential to incentivise greater collaboration at a sub-regional scale. Change might be achieved by developing strategic policy alongside service transformation across siloed departments, but boroughs need support to develop and implement such changes. The promotion of exemplar projects, best practice and learning from unsuccessful approaches would help. A one-size-fits-all approach is not helpful but better collaboration is needed. Historic approaches to green space planning and management can be a constraint to realising the full benefits. Borough governance and service delivery varies greatly, and decisions are often driven by short-term thinking. A wider range of stakeholders are getting involved with green spaces, leading to more diversified management, however stakeholder and community-based organisations need to be nurtured. There is a lack of a robust evidence base making it hard to demonstrate value for money and need for ongoing investment. There is a need to raise the profile of green spaces, including how they support other council strategies and services. **This includes identifying relevant data and tools, to support arguments for the multiple benefits and value of green space.** Green spaces need to be managed as city wide green infrastructure and adopting relevant policies could also raise the profile of green spaces and how they fit into and support broader environmental, economic, social and health strategies, plans and goals.

Written evidence

Written evidence had a strong emphasis on partnership working, breaking down silos and seeing spaces and policies in a wider context. The need for green space to be managed as part of a city-wide network came out strongly with active travel and habitat connectivity highlighted. Many respondents also mentioned the importance of cross borough working and borough green space strategies. Community engagement and the importance of friends' groups came out strongly and there were calls for volunteer coordinators with clear links to borough and centralised advice provision.

The need for investment in green space was identified in many responses. **Lobbying Government to make parks statutory, for more funding and an incentivised tax system to support park philanthropy where identified.** Some suggested changes to the way funding was dealt with at borough level, for example park investment being part of local infrastructure delivery plans, ring fencing park budgets and allocating a dedicated amount of Community Infrastructure Levy to green space. A need for a long-term sustainable approach was also identified, less open to short term thinking. **Several respondents mentioned green space policies at borough and city level and the need to strengthen and enforce these.**

Investigation of potential for alternative funding streams linked to benefits, for example from health, environment, social and economic progress were highlighted. Several responses mentioned **supporting alternative models including social enterprise and private sector involvement through a catalyst programme.**

The need for **high quality training of existing staff and new apprentices and a wider strategy on skills training was identified.**

A group of responses called for better marketing of London's green spaces and its benefits. A strategic organisation that could co-ordinate existing players to 'raise the game' and provide better political leverage was mentioned. Other areas around communication were picked up across responses including the need to tell Londoners how much park maintenance cost and how large events provided much needed funding.

Some respondents identified the need to distinguish between governance, management and operations. Points around the importance of strategic commissioning for service delivery and flexibility in contracts to allow response to future pressures.

Talk London online discussion

Londoners identified a wide range of partnerships and new approaches being taken to manage parks and fed back on their effectiveness in practice.

Many highlighted the lack of available funding and some particularly drew attention to the small amount contributed by nearby development to their parks. The pressure of housing on green space was mentioned.

Many respondents mentioned issues with litter, conflicts over the use of green space and large events.

There was a communication theme in many responses. This focused around finding the right borough contact, identifying where decision making powers lay and responsive management of the space, for example reduced mowing to encourage biodiversity.

The value placed on green space and the huge amount of voluntary work taking place came through strongly. Respondents valued their green space, in particular the biodiversity and education benefits.

Several community projects responded with details of how their park user groups had raised funding, improved their green space and used it to engage others and bring residents together. Good practice from boroughs was highlighted by some including effective community engagement, although experiences were mixed. Respondents were mostly from friends' groups or community forums with several charities, for example Friends of Barnes Common contributing.

Oral evidence given over the course of Commission meetings

Evidence was received from boroughs of Ealing, Barnet, Hounslow, Camden and Islington and from the developers of Greenkeeper (a tool to support management of green space which is being used in the Parks for Health pilot)

The Commission heard about new models for management and funding including the Ealing Parks Foundation and Hounslow's borough owned trading company. There was discussion around natural capital accounting and commercial partnership around sports provision. Community engagement and examples of active citizen programmes were identified. Entrepreneurial ways of gaining funding and understanding use were highlighted. Strategic approaches to borough green spaces and investment programmes varied and means for better coordination was discussed.

Commissioners heard about the Parks for Health programme and green social prescribing. There were discussions about the pros and cons of park management being contracted out and around skills shortages in the sector.

Conversations with councillors, chief executives and borough officers	Conversations indicated a need for a bolder and more forward-thinking London level approach to change the debate and narrative around parks funding. The case for improving green spaces needs strengthening at a political level, drawing on data and evidence. **The GLA should get major parks funders together to address future investment needs across London.** Emphasis was put on the need to share innovation better and do more cross directorate working so each partner can see why doing things differently can benefit them.
Facilitated borough workshops	Workshops highlighted the need for effective communication of the value of parks and green space with tailored messaging for different audiences. **Promoting the role of green space in tackling the climate and ecological emergencies and public health needs was felt to be an opportunity to raise the profile of parks services and drive investment.** Many attendees felt that there was a **need for a London-wide organisation or alliance to represent and champion parks and the value of green infrastructure.** This organisation would also work across sectors and bring a strategic approach, for example helping to link approaches to sustainability with policy on health. **In addition, a need for a pan-London skills body with universal 'skills standards' was identified.** There were conversations around investment with the suggestion of a London parks action lobbying group approaching Government for funding. There were specific suggestions on an increase in the proportion of business

rates that reach boroughs, greater funding for apprenticeships and the flexibility of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

Sharing good practice and engaging actively with others with an interest in and/or leadership in green space was discussed with organisations such as Kew Gardens, Royal Parks and London Sport being identified.

Specific areas for sharing good practice were identified as anti-social behaviour responses and technology in parks. There was a desire to assess new models and create one set of standards for benchmarking.

The need to retain and champion the existing workforce was highlighted with suggestions around park champions or advocates.

Research

Funding and governance of a pan-London body

Sources of Funding: Identified charitable donations and endowments, revolving funds and taxes and levies as the four most relevant options to pursue. However, other options should be considered as conversations continue. Anticipated that the body is likely to be funded in a blended manner from several different sources, and so recommend keeping options open.

Structure and Governance: Identified several organisations providing advice and coordination within the sector, and fewer providers of funding. Due to the number of initiatives in the field, the report recommended alignment with an existing organisation, either through i) embedding the Initiative within a current organisation, or ii) operating within the GLA. If a suitable partner is not available, the report recommended the Initiative establish itself as an independent charity.

Research

Sector & workforce development

Report recommendations were informed by primary data from a survey, one to one interviews and desktop research. It identified that a broad range of additional skills are needed to support parks services in reimaging London's green space. It found that there are structural issues in provision, including lack of on-site training and a scarcity of modular courses. Recruitment was found to be hard with the lack of progression and the attractiveness of the sector playing significant roles. The report also identified a lack of diversity in the sector. It recommended establishing a 'Mayor's Green Space Initiative' with three primary functions:

A future skills programme of continuing professional development for the existing green space workforce focused on upskilling and establishing future skills and new models for skills delivery in-role and on-site.

Sector leadership on workforce development supported by 'sandbox'[61] projects to directly tackle structural barriers, create cross-sectoral approaches and attractiveness of the sector.

A social employment agency based on a group employment model to bring new entrants into the green space jobs market, focused on frontline delivery skills and recruitment pathways to tackle diversification of the workforce.

Research

Adult social care budget savings linked to green space

The purpose of this work was to build on the existing methods to value the health benefits of exercise in green space by extending them to cover the benefits of avoiding costs of social care.

The cost of adult social care is borne by the borough so any savings resulting from investment in green space are realised in budgets.

For Croydon it has been estimated that for every £100 the Borough spends, it saves £12 in social care. This is a saving in relation to three health conditions closely related to lack of physical exercise: stroke, dementia and heart disease.

Together with wider physical and mental health benefits being demonstrated through the Parks for Health pilot and an increasing evidence base, this research helps **build the case for investment in green space as part of a borough health strategy.**

Endnotes

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8 Figure from Parks for London spend on open spaces by local authorities

9 Government's 25-year environment plan commits to help people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces

10 http://www.lfgn.org.uk/what-we-say-2/

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12 https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/london-plan/new-london-plan

13 https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/parks-green-spaces-and-biodiversity/all-london-green-grid

14 The network of green spaces, rivers and wetlands (as well as features such as street trees and green roofs) that is planned, designed and managed to deliver a range of benefits, including: healthy living; mitigating flooding; improving air and water quality; cooling the urban environment; encouraging walking and cycling; and enhancing biodiversity and ecological resilience

15 http://www.nationalparkcity.london/

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17 Based on population of LB Croydon of 364,000, and of 8.9m for the GLA boundary: https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset

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29 Unpublished report, Parks for London, data collected for annual Good Parks for London reports https://parksforlondon.org.uk/good-parks-for-london/

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33 London Green Spaces Commission: Options for Establishing a Pan-London Green Infrastructure Hub, Social Finance, December 2019

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36 “Climate change & social change”, Ten Years Time https://tenyearstime.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Climate-Change-Social-Change-How-Funders-Can-Act-On-Both.pdf

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38 https://fundercommitmentclimatechange.org/

39 “More than grants: How funders can support Grantee Effectiveness”https://www.thinknpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/More-than-grants.-How-funders-can-support-grantee-effectiveness.pdf

40 The Mayor of London and Conservative Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street, have both called on the UK Government to introduce a Green New Deal that devolves power to enable regions to create a fair and just transition to a net-zero economy.

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53 17 510.36 ha of public park in London is also recognised as a Site of Importance of Nature Conservation. 1162 public parks in London are also recognised in whole or in part as a Site of Importance of Nature Conservation. Parks make up 56.64% of the overall SINC network. Source: Public Open Space dataset, Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC, 2020

54 55, 56 https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/11015viv_natural_capital_account_for_london_v7_full_vis.pdf

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61 'Sandbox' approaches are used typically in regulated environments to test new approaches or innovations without needing to fundamentally change wider rules. It allows new, emerging ideas that need proper, live testing to happen without prejudice.