



THE PARKS MANAGEMENT FORUM

REPRESENTING PARKS PROFESSIONALS

Dear Prime Minister, Ministers and Members of Parliament

Why Parks Matter? The Statement from The Parks Management Forum

The Parks Management Forum represents individuals and organisations working in the public parks and open spaces sector, whether in the public, private or third sector. Our terms of reference are attached in Appendix 1.

Today we write to you to ask for your support and to bring a greater appreciation of the value of parks and open spaces and the vital role they play for our communities, and in particular how they can play a key role in the recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic.

In March 2020, the lives of our communities were affected like no other time in recent history with the global impact of Covid-19. People were encouraged to use their local parks as they became the only area of respite from the tough restrictions imposed by the lockdown. Now as the gradual relaxing of restrictions are taking place, the use of parks and open spaces continues to be encouraged as places to meet people safely, take exercise and maintain our health and well-being.

The evidence indicating the value of parks and green spaces is overwhelming. The Parks Management Forum is now urging all MPs, Local Authorities and Government Departments to support the following recommendations:

- Ring-fence appropriate funding to protect, enhance and sustain parks and green infrastructure services for future generations;
- Acknowledge the success of local authorities and all other relevant organisations in managing public parks and open spaces during the COVID19 lockdown and the widespread public affection for them;
- Recognise the important role parks and open spaces had during the pandemic and will have in the ongoing recovery process, with likely greater usage, and in the health and well-being, socio-economic and environmental agendas and allocate emergency funding to support this role;
- Support nature recovery plans as part of the Environment Bill; and
- Encourage all local authorities to adopt a Green Infrastructure or Green Spaces Strategy, underpinning the value of parks and open spaces for public health, regeneration and well-being, social equity, biodiversity and climate change resilience.

Creating a Sustainable Green future (the evidence)

New mobility data shows that Britons are flocking to parks to socialise and exercise. There has been a 136% increase in the amount of people gathering in parks when compared to a baseline figure prior to lockdown, according to Google's mobility data. The Government's daily briefing on 30 May 2020 also referred to this trend. There are 27,000 parks and open spaces nationwide and they can all play a part in the recovery after the height of the pandemic. This increase is almost certainly likely to bring continued greater usage.

The Government Public Parks Inquiry in 2017 emphasised that the future of public parks was at a tipping point. The State of UK Public Parks reports (2014 and 2016) gave the clearest picture of the sector for some time. They reported that maintenance budgets were still being reduced, capital was less available for improvements and park facilities were becoming more expensive to manage.

Today, the parks and open space sector could face an even greater challenge with further austerity as a distinct possibility and a deep recession looming. Now with a recognised, and in many instances, rediscovered important key role in society, there are incredible opportunities to embrace the important role our parks and open spaces have during the recovery phase. The Fields in Trust publication '*Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces - Measuring their economic and wellbeing value to individuals*' is a great baseline on how parks and open spaces can contribute not only to health and well-being, reducing health inequality but also to the financial recovery.

This research was conducted in line with HM Treasury best practice for valuing non-market goods, using two valuation methodologies: Contingent Valuation (stated preference to elicit an individual's Willingness to Pay) and Wellbeing Valuation (subjective wellbeing assigning equivalent monetary values to life satisfaction survey responses); and additional analysis to quantify partial health cost savings to the Exchequer.

The key findings:

- Parks and green spaces are estimated to save the NHS around **£111 million per year** based solely on a reduction in GP visits (we do not account additional savings to the NHS associated with reductions in prescribing or referrals);
- An individual would need to be compensated by £974 a year to replace the life satisfaction they would have gained from using their local park or green space (more than once per month); and
- Aggregated across the UK an estimated **£34.2 billion worth of wellbeing benefits per year** are delivered by frequent use of parks and green spaces.

As a group, we are engaging with practitioners and the whole sector to ensure that parks and open spaces meet the 21st century challenges around health, climate change and nature recovery. In particular, we are keen to collaborate with the wide range of organisations working for similar aims and help government meet their own policy challenges at scale. As John Ruskin was quoted, '*The measure of any great civilization is in its cities, and the measure of a city's greatness is to be found in the quality of its public spaces, its parks and squares*'.

We are passionate about the importance of our parks and green spaces. COVID-19 has highlighted what we already knew - how valued parks and local green spaces are by our communities. It is time to start reinvesting in this green infrastructure to secure it for future generations and your support is paramount in helping us to do this.

We hope that you will support our recommendations and work with us to reposition the importance of parks and open spaces as valued community assets and that deserves a better recognition and protection moving forward.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely
Paul Rabbitts MLA FRSA
Chair- The Parks Management Forum

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Appendix 1

Who are the Parks Management Forum?

OUR VISION

“Representing professionals working in public parks and open spaces”

The Parks Management Forum aims to represent those individuals and organisations working in the public parks and open spaces sector, whether in the public, private or third sector.

The Parks Management Board remains independent and will aim to work through a steering group of parks professionals acting in the interests of public parks in England, and to promote their wider value to all. The Board will act as the commissioning body for the sector in relation to skills, knowledge, continuing professional development, community engagement, advocacy and wider representation. Its complete independence will allow it to champion the value of public parks and open spaces and steer the best intervention and development amongst the various organisations that work within the parks sector.

The Board - its aims and defined roles

- Champion the central role well managed parks and open spaces play in our neighbourhoods for all sections of our communities and raise its value locally, regionally and nationally;
- Recognise and endorse the roles of parks and open spaces for health and well-being, heritage, social economic, climate change and biodiversity;
- Endorse best management practices and play a role in facilitating roll out amongst practitioners;
- Embed the effective role parks and open spaces have as green infrastructure endorsing sustainable development and protection;
- Advocate for long-term resources for ongoing maintenance, management and development and play a role in finding solutions with government and relevant partner organisations – “one voice”
- Encourage and enable partnerships including empowerment of local people and park users.

The Board will be able to achieve the above by:

- Collaborating with relevant organisations to facilitate training opportunities, skill development, knowledge and continuing professional development;
- Providing advice and having a development, scrutiny and influencing role on relevant policy and implementation;
- Enhancing networking opportunities for those within the sector;
- Facilitating a single representative voice by liaising with all relevant organisations and representing parks practitioners with government departments including MHCLG, DEFRA and DCMS and their equivalents in the devolved administrations, Sport England, Public Health England, and NLHF;

- Creating and managing a knowledge hub by disseminating information, share case studies and best practice by providing the link between a number of organisations, practitioners and regional forums

The most important function of the Parks Management Forum is to create a joined-up approach in our sector, especially with all the work that is already happening and the Parks Management Board will make a constructive effort to enhance partnership work and avoid duplication amongst various agencies, organisations and existing regional forums. It is very important that the Board can give the opportunity for all practitioners to generate ideas and participation to all debates and workstreams. Our aim is to enhance and increase the significant range of environmental, social and economic benefits to the community that parks and open spaces provide.

The Board secretariat will be initially facilitated by APSE

Communication

The Board will meet at least six times a year and will define the development of work streams where a selection of individual and practitioners can meet more frequently with relevant organisations to progress work streams that can develop the sector further.

Examples of work streams can be skills development, community participation, parks activation, commercialisation, post covid-19 etc. These can link to a particular regional forum who are already undertaking or some organisations who are already leading on. Joined up working to be encouraged.

The main channel of initial communication will be through representation of the Board members, the LinkedIn page (The Parks Management Forum), Twitter (@parks_forum) and email. Communication in relation to political lobbying and official statements will be agreed by the Board through a quorate.

Communication in relation to discussions, work streams, debates will also take place through twitter, email and other social media means.

The website is www.parksmanagementforum.co.uk

The Parks
Management
Forum Board

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Other Professional bodies

All practitioners
Regional parks forums

The Parks Management Board consists of:-

- Paul Rabbitts, Watford Borough Council – Chairperson
- Ian Baggott, Community First Partnership – Vice-chairperson
- Stefania Horne, LB Hounslow – Vice-chairperson
- Philippa Reece, Adur and Worthing Council – Vice-chairperson
- Eddie Curry, Nottingham City Council – Vice-chairperson
- Chis Worman MBE, Rugby Borough Council – Vice-chairperson
- Dr Mary Worrall, Wirral MBC – Vice-chairperson
- Mike Bent, Bury MBC – Vice-chairperson
- Jerry Dronsfield – North Tyneside MBC – Vice-chairperson

Working Group

- James Cairncross, The Parks Trust (Milton Keynes)
- Sue France, Green Estate Sheffield CIC
- Barbara Hooper, Urban Green, Newcastle upon Tyne
- Chris Welsh, LB Ealing
- Jon Maidment, City of Cardiff
- Michael Rowland, BCP Council
- Annie Surtees, Salford MBC
- Darren Share MBE, Birmingham City Council
- David Lambert, The Parks Agency
- Kylie Ward, Manchester City Council
- Stuart Turner, Sheffield City Council
- Laurence Gale – TurfPro
- Andy Lee – Rotherham MBC
- James Jones-McFarland, Adur Council
- Bernard Sheridan, Consultant