

London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network

The London network for the 600+ Friends and User Groups for all green open spaces www.lfgn.net

Protecting and promoting green spaces * Improving and enhancing the quality of green spaces

Expanding the amount of green space generally * Improving staffing and management

Seeking adequate resources for green spaces (capital and revenue)

Ensuring the involvement of Friends/Users groups as partners in the management of their parks and green spaces

Draft Report to London Assembly Environment Committee, 30.11.2016

URGENT ACTION NEEDED TO PROTECT LONDON'S PUBLIC GREEN SPACES

Role of the Mayor and the GLA*

The Mayor has statutory strategies on biodiversity and on climate change adaptation, as well as the London Plan. The Mayor's election manifesto included these pledges:

1. **Protect nature and play space**
2. **Protect the green belt, green spaces and play spaces**, prioritising development on brownfield sites
3. **Strengthen protections for open spaces within the London Plan**, including playing fields, Metropolitan Open Land, and our Sites of Importance for Local Nature Conservation and nature reserves
4. **Protect wildlife and biodiversity** by creating green corridors through the city
5. **Make London the first 'National Park City'**
6. **Set a long term target to make more than 50 per cent of our city green** and ensure that all children have access to nature.

In a recent Mayoral response to the reduction in local authority funding for green spaces, the Mayor stated: *"I will continue to highlight the adverse impact of this and lobby government to ensure local authorities are adequately resourced to deliver a full range of necessary and important local services. I'll also be developing an environmental improvement programme and tree-planting campaign to provide local communities with support to conserve and enhance local green spaces"*

The previous Mayor's Green Infrastructure Task Force final report concluded that **green infrastructure must be considered as essential as the city's transport, energy, water, waste and digital infrastructure.**

* Extract from the London Assembly Green Spaces Investigation Outline, 11.11.2016

The London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network [More detailed statement below]

We are the voice of the dynamic and inspirational grassroots movement of over 600 local Friends of Parks groups - the volunteers who act on behalf of the communities who use and care about our vital public green spaces throughout London. We exist to support and represent their activities, issues and concerns, and to amplify their passionate and knowledgeable voices. We meet bi-monthly at City Hall to share news and views.

Our much-loved parks and green spaces - around 3,000 throughout London - are recognised by all to be essential public resources providing an unparalleled range of vital services and facilities for all sections of our communities, and for nature.

But their future is under threat due to Government cuts to local public services. This serious underfunding crisis needs to be addressed and reversed immediately.

Our public green spaces need statutory recognition and effective protection by all tiers of Government backed by adequate public funding (eg from infrastructure budgets), good management and community involvement. This is not only to address the current disastrous underfunding crisis but also to fulfil the full potential and benefits of our green spaces for nature and for London's communities.

THE LONDON GREEN SPACES FRIENDS GROUPS NETWORK RESPONSE TO THE 'FUTURE OF PARKS' DCLG SELECT COMMITTEE NATIONAL INQUIRY [September 2016]

Introduction The LGSFGN was set up in October 2009 at a conference in Tottenham attended by 80 Friends groups' representatives from 17 boroughs. Currently there are over 600 local Friends and Users Groups for the 3,000 designated open green spaces in London, and so far 17 borough-wide Friends Forums to help co-ordinate efforts. Our aims are:

- * Protecting and promoting green spaces * Improving and enhancing the quality of green spaces
- * Expanding the amount of green space generally * Improving staffing and management
- * Seeking adequate resources for green spaces (capital and revenue)
- * Ensuring the involvement of Friends/Users groups as partners in the management of their parks and green spaces

Most of London's Friends Groups were set up by local park users over the last 15 years to try to reverse the neglect their local green spaces had fallen into as the result of savage public spending cuts in the 1970s and 1980s. After much success, but still much to do to complete the job, it was felt in 2009 that the looming new round of public spending cuts could herald a return to 'those bad old days'. To counter this we would need to coordinate and strengthen our efforts, speak out together and take up strategic issues facing green spaces. Also we had so many stories and successes to share! This picture was reflected across the UK with the development of other regional networks and in 2010 the launch of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces.

We are gradually encouraging the development of active Friends Forums in all 32 London boroughs. Nationally, there are over 6,000 local Friends Groups and the many local networks are linked together through the National Federation of Parks & Green Spaces – of which we are an active member. It now feels that our grass-roots (literally!) movement is fast-growing and fast-evolving into something very significant. We are aiming for a Friends Group for every urban green space, a Friends Groups Forum for every borough and area, and a statutory duty on all Councils and landowners to protect and manage all their spaces to Green Flag Award standards.

Friends Groups Local Friends Groups are independent community organisations set up by park users and local residents to promote, protect and improve a local green space - in essence to 'take ownership' of the space on behalf of local communities and park users. Friends Groups are responsible for a wide range of highly positive achievements, including: organising local events of all kinds, planting bulbs and helping increase biodiversity, disseminating information and news, producing publicity and history pamphlets, working closely with parks staff and managers, getting key user groups to work together, developing visions for improving local spaces, accessing resources and funding, and so on.

Our public green spaces Every green space should have the management and maintenance it deserves to enable the local community to enjoy its many benefits. This includes adequate on-site staffing, buildings and facilities in good condition and in daily use, and well-maintained natural and horticultural areas, playgrounds, paths and park furniture. And most importantly, the local community and in particular any Friends or User groups need to be able to be fully involved in the management of that green space. With an increasing population and rising obesity levels amongst London's children, public parks are needed more than ever and should be expanding rather than shrinking, improving rather than deteriorating. Where else can community cohesion occur so abundantly - with London's many minority ethnic groups, ages and interest groups intermingling, enjoying the exhilaration and freedom of open, public and green space?

Policies and programmes abound aiming to recognise, protect and enhance London's open green spaces: the London Plan's all-London Green Grid; London's Green Infrastructure Report; Spatial Planning Guidance - Preparing Tree and Woodland Strategies; Fields In Trust covenants; the Green Flag Awards, London in Bloom awards; Metropolitan Open Land and other designations, and last but not least the growing movement towards London being declared a National Park City (supported by the Mayor).

Yet despite all this, member groups and borough Forums are reporting on major threats to open green spaces – parks, sports fields, nature reserves, woodlands and cemeteries etc. They are witnessing cuts in parks' staff, increasing inappropriate commercial usage and even loss of sites or parts of sites to development.

Government public spending cuts have seen savage reductions to London boroughs' parks maintenance budgets over the last 6 years - with more cuts threatened. We don't want London's green spaces to return to the scandalous neglect and dereliction that afflicted most of the country's urban green spaces 20-30 years ago. Most Friends Groups were set up in the last 15 years precisely for that reason. Their often stupendous efforts have gradually borne fruit, but for most the recovery is not yet complete – and Government cuts have thrown the gears into reverse. There are also growing problems caused by privatisation and fragmentation of local services. Most spaces don't even have a Friends Group yet so are likely to be in a particularly poor state, or well on the way there.

For these reasons we supported the growing calls by MPs, Horticulture Week, The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces and The Parks Alliance for a Parliamentary Select Committee National Inquiry into these matters. *[Update 14.11.2016 – the Inquiry is currently underway and the LGSFGN Chair gave oral evidence at the first open session on behalf of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, with reference also to the LGSFGN].*

The level of protection and funding is clearly inadequate, and a crisis is growing in front of our eyes. The situation will continue to deteriorate unless swift comprehensive and effective action is taken at Government level.

Hence we support the submission of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces and their call for parks to be designated as a statutory service (as recommended by the previous Select Committee on parks in 2003) and to be adequately funded mainly from public funding sources ie taxation.

Dave Morris - Chair, LGSFGN

The London Assembly says:[Extracts from LA statement, 11.11.2016]:

The London Assembly Environment Committee is conducting an investigation into the management of green space across London. We are seeking your views and information on green space. Written submissions should be sent to: EnvironmentCommittee@london.gov.uk by 9 December 2016. The purpose of the investigation is to protect the quality of green spaces and enhance their community use... and how they can be enhanced to maximise the benefits they offer... by informing the Mayoral Environment Strategy and other relevant policies.

...However due to the cut in local authority budgets the presence and quality of these spaces, along with their associated benefits, are now at risk. The Mayor has made a number of manifesto commitments to protect London's green spaces and will be setting out key policies in a new Environment Strategy next year.

Green Infrastructure is when green spaces are planned and managed to provide environmental, physical, mental, social and economic benefits. Environmental benefits of green space include flood water alleviation, green travel routes, water purification, cooling temperatures, pollution management and enhancing biodiversity and ecological resilience. Public health benefits include having a positive impact on both physical and mental health. Green spaces also provide outdoor spaces for exercise... Many use green spaces as a meeting place to socialize and playgrounds make a prominent feature of many green spaces in London. Over 80 per cent of local authorities felt that their green spaces promoted community cohesion. Research estimated that Clapham Common alone provides £10 to £45 million of benefits from around six million visitors per year... A recent study conducted by Sheffield City Council found that for every pound spent on green spaces, average £34 of services are supplied.

Evidence indicates that cuts in funding have led to a reduction in maintenance services and further reliance on the community sector, whilst reducing skilled and knowledgeable council staff to support voluntary groups. A 2016 UK-wide survey found that 78 per cent of friends groups now help with maintenance activities, up from 73% the previous year.

How can we protect and enhance London's green spaces? Over the past 20 years, parks and green spaces have grown increasingly popular with the communities that they serve. ...However without clear direction on how the funding deficit will be met and consistent support for those expected to meet these gaps, quality green spaces are at risk. Green spaces can also be protected by enhancing their value. One of the ways to do this it would be to make green spaces 'multifunctional', enabling the land to perform a range of functions, such as the provision for healthy recreation whilst performing services to alleviate flood risk through the use of sustainable drainage systems. Making green spaces multifunctional also opens additional revenue streams.

The London Plan describes "A city ... which makes the most of and extends its wealth of open and green spaces, natural environment and waterways, realising its potential for improving Londoners' health, welfare and development". The London Plan also promotes the concept of green infrastructure...

The previous Mayor launched the Green Infrastructure Task Force following the publication of the London Infrastructure Plan 2050. Its final report concluded that green infrastructure must be considered as essential as the city's transport, energy, water, waste and digital infrastructure, and made several recommendations for delivering a more coherent

green infrastructure across Greater London. The previous Mayor also provided £2 million of funding to help establish 100 pocket parks to improve streets, squares, parks, and canal and riverside spaces across London.

GLA evidence to DCLG Select Committee Inquiry, Officer submission [September 2016. Extracts]

The Greater London Authority has a particular interest in the future of public parks in London because the Mayor is obliged to set strategic policy for London's natural environment and green spaces through his London Plan and his environment strategies. By providing citywide leadership the Mayor also has a role in assisting boroughs to develop new approaches to securing the resources needed to manage and maintain public parks, and to determine the role of parks in a city which continues to grow and develop. The Mayor is also committed to making London a 'National Park City' – a policy framework and public campaign to maintain and enhance London's status as a city of parks and green spaces. The quality and extent of public parks is also highly relevant to the Mayor's Health Inequalities Strategy and his Economic Development Strategy. Access to green space is one of the key determinants of health; and London's status as one of the greenest big cities contributes to attracting inward investment and a highly-skilled workforce.

The scale of the problem and the challenge faced by local authorities is set out clearly in the [State of UK Public Parks 2016](#) a recent report from the Heritage Lottery Fund. We do not intend to repeat these arguments here. Suffice to say that the Mayor recognises that public parks need core levels of public funds in order to maintain the basic services and benefits these assets provide. ... The advice and recommendations provided in this submission ... are drawn from [Natural Capital: investing in a green infrastructure for a future London](#), the report of the independent Green Infrastructure Task Force. The points below are a summary of the key messages [note: extracts]:

- Parks and green spaces should be regarded as components of an integrated 'green infrastructure' that is recognised as being as vital to the economic development of our cities as the existing infrastructure of roads, rails, pipes and cables.
- Cities need to rethink the way we plan, design, manage and fund existing green spaces. The role of green spaces, especially in the urban environment, need to be reframed (for example, by combining recreation with flood risk management or protection of heritage with green walking and cycling routes) and regularly upgraded or modified, as happens with other forms of infrastructure.
- Considering green infrastructure as a network also means that we should fill the gaps in our green infrastructure by incorporating it into buildings and public realm.
- Government needs to ensure better join-up of policy and programmes across departments in order to ensure the benefits of green infrastructure are realised and supported by all relevant Departments, including DCLG, Defra, Department of Health and Department for BEIS.

Recommendation: Those responsible for making key decisions about a city's infrastructure should acknowledge that the green parts [of] cities will need to provide a wider range of benefits. They should also recognise that this green infrastructure needs to be planned, managed and funded like other essential infrastructure.

...the management and maintenance of London's traditional green infrastructure has been subject to boom and bust cycles of public funding, i.e. periodic capital investment followed by often inadequate long-term maintenance funding. This has been exacerbated by the fact that green infrastructure provision is not a statutory requirement for local authorities and therefore there are no dedicated or ring-fenced funds allocated to green infrastructure provision. This is an area that could be addressed as part of the debate on fiscal and financial devolution. For example the London Finance Commission suggested, in its report [Raising the Capital](#), allowing London government to introduce levies on environmentally detrimental or unhealthy activity to assist in delivering wider public good objectives.

Changing the way we value the benefits of green infrastructure will help address these problems. Some of the approaches advocated by the Natural Capital Committee and others may be helpful and need to be embedded into practice. But it is also clear that new sources of funding and finance are needed. These include models that compensate for environmental loss or degradation, or leverage more private sector finance to offset the costs of upgrading more traditional infrastructure....

Recommendation: As of the ongoing identify the scope for additional levies or compensatory mechanisms on environmentally detrimental activity that could assist in funding green infrastructure projects. These should include, for example, ‘stormwater credits’ and ‘biodiversity offsetting’.