

APSE Parks Seminar 2022: A Report Back

To: All Chief Executives, Senior Policy Officers, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Brief Overview

On 30 March 2022, APSE held its annual Parks Seminar at Lancashire County Cricket Ground in Old Trafford, Manchester. This briefing provides a short summary of the Seminar's speakers and the topics of discussion.

[Each presentation from the event can be downloaded for free from the APSE website here.](#)

1. Maintaining our vital green infrastructure

Over the past two years the impact of COVID has brought about lifestyle changes to many people, whether this be working more from home or coping with social distancing requirements in the outside world. What has become clear is that COVID has had significant negative impacts on people's health and wellbeing, and one of the most common ways of coping with this negativity has been to escape into parks and greenspaces.

APSE polling consistently shows the public consider parks and greenspaces a priority. That is why APSE's annual Parks Seminar, one of the largest of its kind in the sector, plays such an important role; helping those who work in the field share best practice and therefore deliver the absolute best for their local communities.

2. The financial health of the parks and greenspace sector

APSE Chief Executive Paul O'Brien was first to the podium to bring together the findings of two of APSE's reports: The State of the Market on Parks 2022 and The State of UK Parks Report 2021.

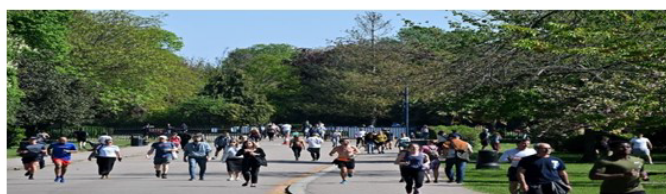
On the issue of funding, for the majority of respondents to APSE's State of the Market survey, there has been a significant increase from 68% to 86% regarding respondents who either 'agree', or 'agree strongly' that 'the squeeze on public sector resources is affecting parks and green spaces disproportionately to other service areas'. This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that although all services have been affected by the impacts of the pandemic, parks have been under specific pressure due to the increased use by the public and all the additional strain this has put on parks budgets such as infrastructure maintenance.

Equally, there has been a large increase in the numbers of respondents who either 'agree' or 'agree strongly' that reductions in funding have resulted in a withdrawal of maintenance from some land and an increase in unmaintained land (71% in 2021 rising to 92% in 2022).

apse membership resources

The COVID-effect!

- 86% feel parks have had their budgets cut more severely than other services (68% in 2021).
- 92% said budget cuts had led to reduced levels of maintenance and increases in unmaintained land (71% in 2021).
- 100% said lack of investments in parks and green spaces will impact adversely health and social well-being (97% in 2021).
- 94% stated parks should be free to access (96% in 2021).



www.apse.org.uk

Coupled together these two results show that there seems to be a growing concern about continuing budget reductions and the negative impact these are having on the quality of parks maintenance. This, as previously noted, has become more apparent as increased wear and tear on parks infrastructures have placed additional financial pressure on already stretched parks maintenance budgets.

For the very first time, 100% of respondents either 'agree' or 'agree strongly' that the 'lack of investment in parks and green spaces will have health and social impacts'. This is a 3% increase on last year's results, and no doubt has been driven by the fact thousands of people used their parks as refuges during the pandemic when all other sources of leisure and exercise were closed, thus showing the importance of parks and greenspaces in providing health-related experiences.

Paul O'Brien then moved on the highly salient issue of climate change and biodiversity. The main environmental priority for parks and green space services is now biodiversity at 89.8% as opposed to 83% in 2021. The second highest priority is now climate change at 77.5% as opposed to 65% in 2021. This is perhaps no surprise considering the increasing amount of climate emergency declarations and biodiversity action plans now being seen as corporate priorities and parks and greenspaces being recognised as critical in achieving the aims of these plans by helping ameliorating the effects of climate change and providing habitats for flora and fauna.

APSE's Chief Executive rounded off his presentation by expressing gratitude to those frontline service workers in attendance. Despite the wider recognition of the benefits of parks and greenspaces to local communities – evidenced by APSE polling – Paul O'Brien noted how the sector is still awaiting evidence of sustainable and realistic financial support. This despite the huge increases in visitor numbers.

3. RHS Bridgewater Garden: A glorious garden set in an historic landscape

Salford's stunning new 156-acre RHS Garden was the topic of our next speaker, Marcus Chilton-Jones, Curator at RHS Garden Bridgewater, The Royal Horticultural Society. The former site of Worsley New Hall, in Salford, is a heritage landscape that is being transformed into an

iconic RHS Garden. The project started in the summer of 2017, and is the biggest hands-on gardening project the charity has undertaken in its 211-year history.



The Holy Trinity of Bridgewater

1. Place
2. Plants
3. People

Royal Horticultural Society
Sharing the best in Gardening

RHS Bridgewater - a world class future.

From the very outset, Bridgewater always wanted to make a big impact on local communities and local employment, and has led to the development of a: -

- Series of community gardens
- Wellbeing Garden
- Community Grow Garden
- Learning Garden

This has allowed local people to come together, collaborate and learn in an inspirational setting; allowing people of all different kinds of ages, backgrounds and communities to reconnect with horticulture and with nature. On the topic of access for young people, special mention was given to the Woodland Play Garden. Set in the heart of Middle Wood, Woodland Play is an inspiring adventure play space that champions all aspects of 'wild play' in a series of zoned woodland glades. Covering seven acres. The space has been designed to promote adventure, creativity and a desire to explore nature; from a low ropes course among the sycamores, a hide-and-seek trail around the rhododendrons and massive beech trees, to spider-web nets, basket swings and clambering frames.

4. 'Parks in the sky' reimagining Manchester's Castlefield viaduct

The final speaker for Session One, Duncan Laird, Head of Urban Places at the National Trust (NT), shed light on the Trust's ambitious new project of creating a cultural, heritage and greenspace amenity in the heart of the Manchester City Centre. Built in 1892, the Grade II Listed Castlefield Viaduct has been left unused under the management of the Historic Railways Estate (HRE) for the last 50 years. Working with HRE and local partners, including the Castlefield Forum, NT has a vision to reopen the viaduct to the public as an elevated urban park and new cultural and heritage destination for the local community and visitors from further afield. The project is part of delivery of the NT's urban places strategy where it aims to improve access to nature, history and beauty for people in towns and cities.



From July 2022, the public will be able to visit Castlefield Viaduct for free as part of a 12-month pilot opening. Trees, flowers and shrubs will be planted across half of the deck, creating a green space for visitors and the local community to explore and unwind in. The new planting will be made up of many species including cotton grass, Manchester's County Flower. The variety of plants being added will help attract more birds and pollinators to the viaduct. A section of the viaduct will be left untouched to provide a sense of how nature has reclaimed the space since the site was closed in the late 1960s.

As well as free daily guided visits, National Trust will also be running special events throughout the year, including takeovers by partner organisations and the local community.

5. Half time analysis: Manchester's Park Strategy 2017-2027

Opening Session Two, Kylie Ward, explain the Council's 10-year strategic vision, which is now at it half way point. The 2016 consultation - which so heavily informed the ten-year Strategy – received an impressive 1,978 individual responses. The vision of the Strategy is:

"Together, we want our parks and green spaces to be the soul, lungs and heart of Manchester by providing the conditions for our people, our environment and our city to flourish."

Key to realising this vision for Manchester City Council has been putting parks at the heart of neighbourhoods and ensuring they remain engines of activity for local communities. This has involved the Council refreshing and developing 35 park plans, creating an Age Friendly standard, and developing a Strategic Framework for Wythenshawe Park. The Council can also boast 100+ weekly activities taking place across the estate and 10 self-led activity trails.

Delegates heard about the 'Manchester Quality Standard', a Standard which aims to 'deliver safe, high-quality parks and green spaces for all residents across the city'. The standard has brought several benefits to local residents and the local environment, including the removal of 147,000 bags of litter from parks (not including the bags picked by volunteers), a digital recording system for inspections and the reduced use of glyphosate.

A Manchester Quality Standard

- In excess on 147k bags of litter removed from parks, not including the bags picked by our amazing volunteers
- Delivered a new River Valleys grounds maintenance contract
- Embedded a service charge for the upkeep of St Michaels Flags
- Move to a digital recording system for inspections
- Reduced use of glyphosate



6. Lambeth's non-chemical romance

Expanding on the thorny issue of glyphosate, Ian Ross, Head of Parks and Leisure Services at Lambeth Council, was up next to outline his team's nature-friendly approach to tackling weeds; with a focus on the Council's promise not to use herbicides for routine grounds maintenance except for in instances where there is no alternative.

The journey had begun over five years prior, when as part of the Council's insourcing of parks maintenance, the then head of service had sought to restrict the use of chemicals as part of the development of the new service specification. Things really gathered pace for Lambeth in 2018 when they signed up to the Pesticide-free London pledge – led by Councillor Claire Holland, then Cabinet Member and now Council Leader. The Council's Parks Service were able to confirm that it had stopped all use of chemicals, except for treating noxious weeds such as Japanese Knotweed.

Residents have been highly supportive of the switch to non-chemical solutions, and from a parks management perspective, it certainly hasn't impacted on the popularity or resident satisfaction with them, with the Council's most recent resident survey seeing parks voted as the best thing about living in Lambeth. The switch also now forms a key part of the Borough's

Climate Action Plan with the Council being ambitious in its desire to tackle climate change and improve biodiversity and ultimately the environment for its residents.

An opportunity for change?

- Definitely!
 - Our experience is the public on the whole support us not using herbicides and accept things have/will change
 - The statutory obligation under Environment Act 2021 and Lambeth declaring an Ecological and Climate Emergency has given us the mandate to change our management regimes




Lambeth

7. Assisting with parks and greenspace research

Keep Britain Tidy and Sheffield University have developed the Parks and Green Spaces Research Portal; a resource which will create a link between universities/research organisations and parks management to allow the sharing of research findings and possibly also funding opportunities for parks and green spaces. Delegates heard from: Dr. Nicola Dempsey, Senior Lecturer in Landscape, Planning and Management, University of Sheffield; Dr. Anna Barker, Associate Professor in Criminal Justice and Criminology, University of Leeds; and Paul Todd, Green Flag award scheme manager, Keep Britain Tidy, about this exciting new initiative.

8. Preserving parks in perpetuity – The Liverpool experience

Helena Cunningham, Liverpool City Council, and Tamsin Fudge, Head of Projects and Stewardship, Fields in Trust, were next to the podium to discuss how the charity's partnership

working with the Council is helping to protect as much of its green space as possible. Liverpool is the first local authority to commit to protecting 100% of its parks and green spaces forever.

Fields in Trust has been working with local authorities and landowners for almost 100 years to legally protect parks and green spaces forever. The charity protects land through a Deed of Dedication in England and Wales, and through a Minute of Agreement in Scotland. During the drafting of the legal documents, Fields in Trust ask councils to take into account future plans for the land, parts that may need to be omitted, plans for extending car parks or adding buildings. This is to minimise the need for potential alterations in the future, and because councils must adapt as the needs and communities around them change.

Once a space is protected, Fields in Trust provide an ongoing stewardship service for leases, easements, wayleaves, adaptations to the space and buildings, and land transfers. Many of the changes a local authority might want to make, won't need the charity's approval, such as updating the public amenities. But some changes require approval, such as new buildings or extensions to car parks. This approval process ensures that the original recreational purpose of the land is upheld.

The Liverpool Context

We estimate that the overall size of our parks and green spaces asset is more than 1,450 hectares (3,600+ acres).

Of this over 1,000 hectares are defined and managed as public parks and the remainder (under 450 hectares/1000 acres) are incidental green spaces or highways assets such as grass verges, public squares, green buffers etc.

The idea for the partnership was generated by the community, championed by the Liverpool Parks Friends Forum

Cabinet approved the partnership on 23 March 2021 with an aim to protect over 100 sites by 2023.

Process requires dedicated project manager and legal support to assemble the required title deeds, protected covenants etc.



Newsham Park

9. Pollinator parks and their role in improving the wider ecosystem

The need to protect our pollinators and the ecosystems in which they thrive is a key responsibility for parks managers. With our final speaker of the day - Seamus Connolly, Group Manager in Parks Development and Bereavement Services at Glasgow City Council - delegates heard how the Council is working to create special pollinator parks through the planting of wildflower. Central to this strategy is the need to develop wider 'green connectors' to help link up wider ecosystems for the benefits of increasing levels of biodiversity. The Council's Green Urban Connectors Project, 2021 -2026, aims to improve:

- Grasslands to become flower-rich meadows.
- Tree cover to develop woodland habitats.
- Hedgerow and woodland edge as habitats and active travel corridors for wildlife.
- Wetland habitats where required.

Pollinator Parks

Ambitious new environmental plans will transform Queen's Park into 'pollinator park'

By Catriona Stewart | @LadyCatHT
Columnist/reporter

Queen's Park Picture: Colin Mearns

5 comments

QUEEN'S Park is to be designated a 'pollinator park' in a bid to further tackle climate change and boost Glasgow's green credentials.

It will be the second pollinator park in the city - after Hogganfield Park - to benefit from extra resources to make the green space perfect for diverse insects, birds and small mammals.

Council bosses are looking at "extensive" bulb planting for the park, the creation of wildflower meadows, extra tree planting and even increases food growing.

Councillor Anna Richardson, City Convener for Sustainability and Carbon Reduction, said: "Glasgow's declaration on a climate and ecological emergency makes it essential we do everything we can to support the city's

30,000 Sqm wildflower meadows

Three year bulb planting programme

1.2 hectares of tree planting

PEOPLE MAKE GLASGOW GREENER

This pollinator park is being managed to promote biodiversity and tackle environmental issues which contribute to climate and ecological emergency.

www.glasgow.gov.uk/wildflower

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Glasgow CITY COUNCIL

10. Securing the long-term future of public parks

The public has reconnected with nature as never before over the last few years, whether this has been as a result of the tribulations of the COVID-19 pandemic, or the wider concerns of climate change. Much of this reconnection has been through the increased use of local parks and greenspaces. If these wonderful places continue to be allowed to decline - despite the

acknowledgement that there are many other worthy priorities - people who lose such spaces will remember who allowed this to happen.

APSE will continue to be an advocate for the UK's public parks and open spaces by promoting their value at every opportunity along with like-minded. As the foremost specialist in local authority frontline services, APSE continues to support local authority parks teams via our extensive network of over 250 local authorities.

Through our training suite, advisory groups, research programmes and benchmarking service, membership of APSE can bring significant benefits to those who work in local government – from officers to directors to elected members to chief executives – by helping them comprehensively get to grips with the latest policy and technological developments.

Not a member? [Sign up today!](#)

Matthew Ellis

Communications Officer

How APSE's rich suite of services can help your Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Service...



Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Advisory Group – Free for APSE members

The Group explores issues for parks, open spaces and playgrounds, grounds maintenance, amenity land services, horticulture and arboriculture as well as allotments and cemeteries and crematoria. Topics covered include; operational methods, innovation, funding, legislative and policy changes, apprenticeships and training, and working with businesses and the community. Speakers from major suppliers keep the group up-to-date with new products and services. [You can sign up for the Group here.](#)



Step in as an ASPE Interim Manager and join our network of excellence

APSE Solutions are currently assisting a number of councils with a high demand in interim requirements. We are therefore looking to expand on available associates who can confidently step into a team, and hit the ground running. We are currently seeing a growing demand in parks management. We understand that as people leave their roles, we lose so much valuable experience and local government knowledge, APSE Solutions strive to share that knowledge and expertise amongst those authorities that need the support the most. If you have a background in operational and/or senior management within parks services, you may have the skills required to step in as an ASPE Interim Manager and deliver the Solutions to excellent public service.

If you would be interested with working with APSE as an associate for interim assignments, email Nathan Horrocks at nhorrocks@apse.org.uk or call 0161 772 1810.

Data is power: Measure the performance of your parks teams

APSE Performance Networks is the largest voluntary public sector benchmarking service in the UK. With more than 200 UK local authorities in membership, Performance Networks benchmarks across 17 frontline services, including parks and open spaces.

As a membership of APSE Performance Networks, local authority parks teams are provided with the following data: Cost of service; Productivity Staff absence; Customer satisfaction; Human resources and people management; Quality assurance and community consultation; Cleanliness standards achieved; and Cost.

Not a member? [Sign up today!](#)

Advanced Parks Management: Sustainable Finance (CPD)

The parks industry has been changing at a pace, with significant new requirements being placed on those at all levels in the profession. Demands are increasing and resources dwindling. Professionals are showing resilience, determination and innovation and this is being captured in a new course being offered by APSE Training.

This particular course is the first in what is expected to become a suite of advanced modules for senior parks professionals. Focussing on sustainable funding, it provides an insight into the key issues and best practice techniques for creating a more sustainable basis for future funding. The course includes:

- Commercialisation - business planning
- Risk management - the commercial environment
- Alternative funding sources

- Income generation - traditional sources v blue sky thinking

This interactive course will share best practice and experiences and follows on from the popular, well-received 'Introduction to Parks Management'. [Book your place here.](#)



Helping your council municipalise local energy generation

APSE Energy is designed to bring councils together to share information, ideas, resources, best practice, and to support local energy projects. Our dedicated team of specialists assist APSE Energy members through:

- Regular briefings about the most up-to-date issues related to the energy agenda and their impact on local government;
- Detailed publications on relevant topics such as energy efficiency and renewables technologies, legislation and the climate emergency;
- Events, workshops and webinars to bring people, experience and ideas together to enable sharing of knowledge;
- Circulating specific operational queries to find answers from our membership;
- Providing consultancy support for individual projects where internal capacity means help and expertise is required.

Not a member? [Sign up today!](#)