

Helping Local Authorities to maximise value from parks

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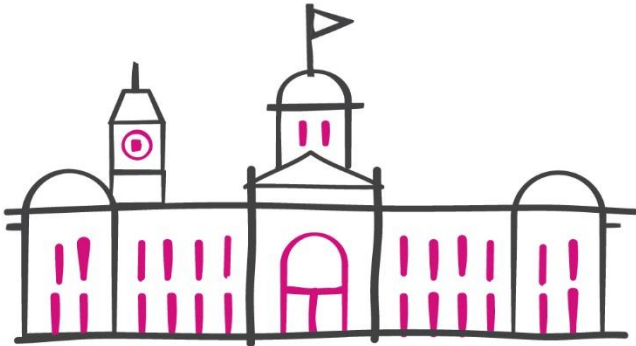
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 **RESET** **RESHAPE** **RESTART**

How can Local Authorities use economics evidence and adaptive leadership to inform investment in parks?



Adaptive Leadership

Work Package 1

- Analyse (dis)investment across Birmingham parks over 10 years
- Analyse (dis)investment across other competing services

Work Package 2

- Systematic Review
- Interviews with LAs
 - Birmingham
 - Coventry
 - Walsall
 - Plymouth

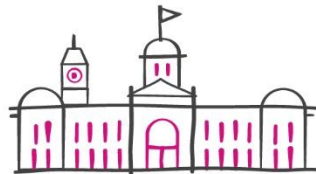
Work Package 3

- Workshops and survey
- Conceptual model
- Inputs, outputs, funding sources, parks vs leisure centres





WP 1 – How has BCC spending on Birmingham parks changed over 10 years?



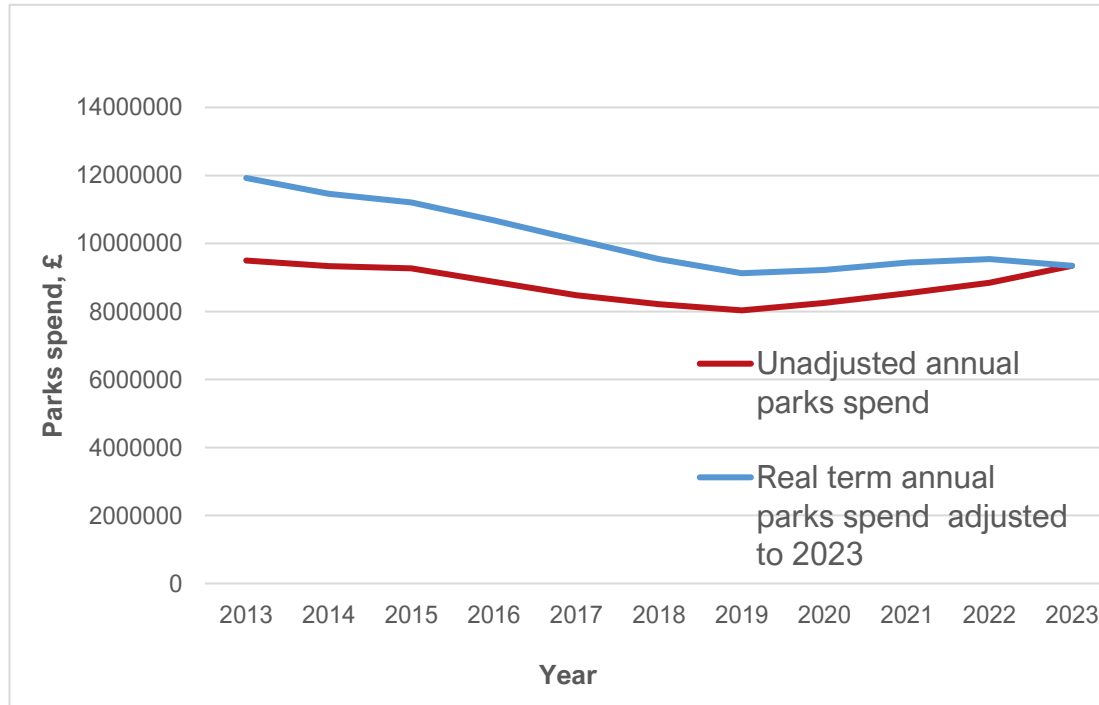


Some things to mention

- Exploratory analysis
 - A lot of data
- Focus is only on allocated budget Grounds Maintenance from BCC
 - No income accounted for (yet)
- Number of parks being analysed each year varies from 390-399
- Focus on patterns of ***budgeted*** spend over time
 - Referred to as spend in graphs
- Spend adjusted for inflation i.e. real term (RT) spend
 - Inflation
 - Consumer Price Index for Households (CPIH)
 - Office of National Statistics
- Spend also adjusted for population within 1km of park entrances



Average yearly growth of spend in BCC parks



- Unadjusted spend looks relatively constant
- When spend is adjusted to 2023 costs or real term (RT) costs, see bigger reduction in real term costs (22% decrease)





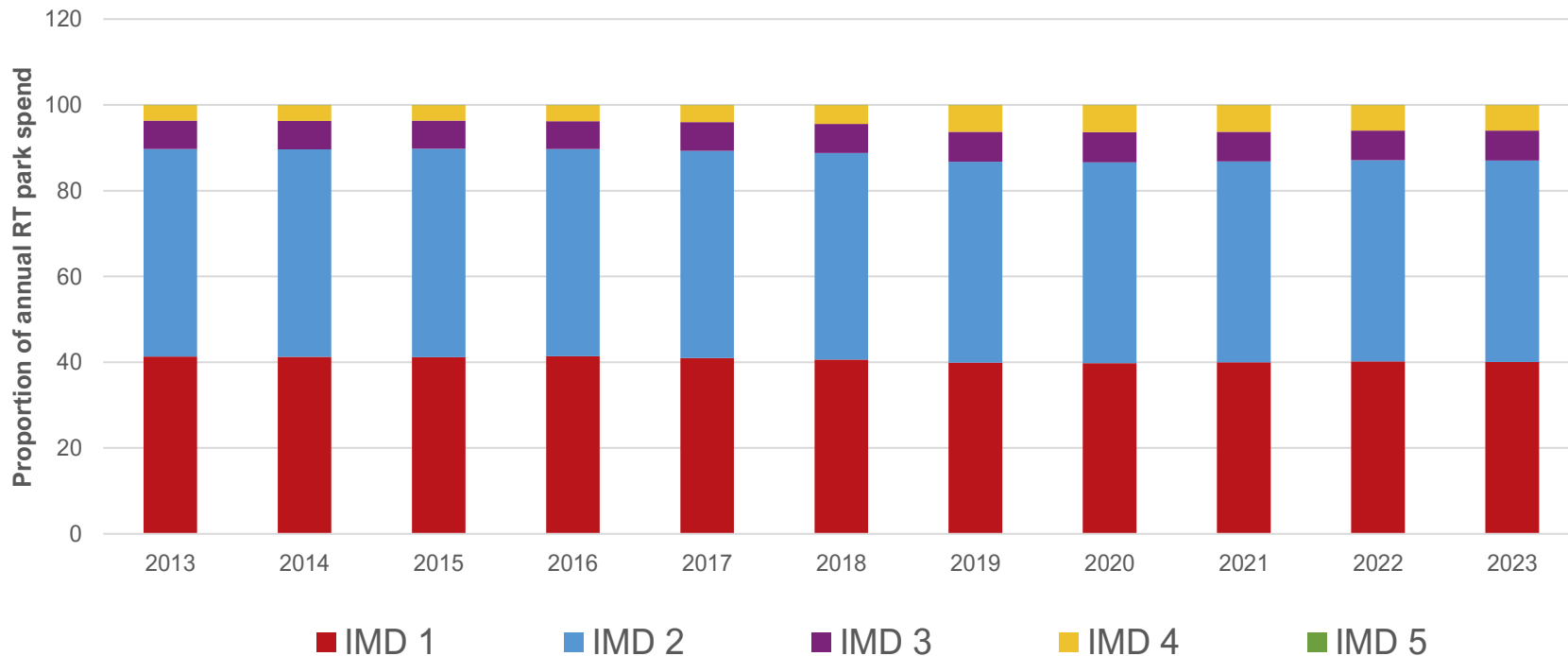
Key characteristics of parks

- Deprivation
 - measured by Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)
 - Quintiles
 - IMD 1 = most deprived; IMD 5 = least deprived
- Whether park is Green Flag
- Whether park has any play area that requires maintenance





IMD and RT park spend

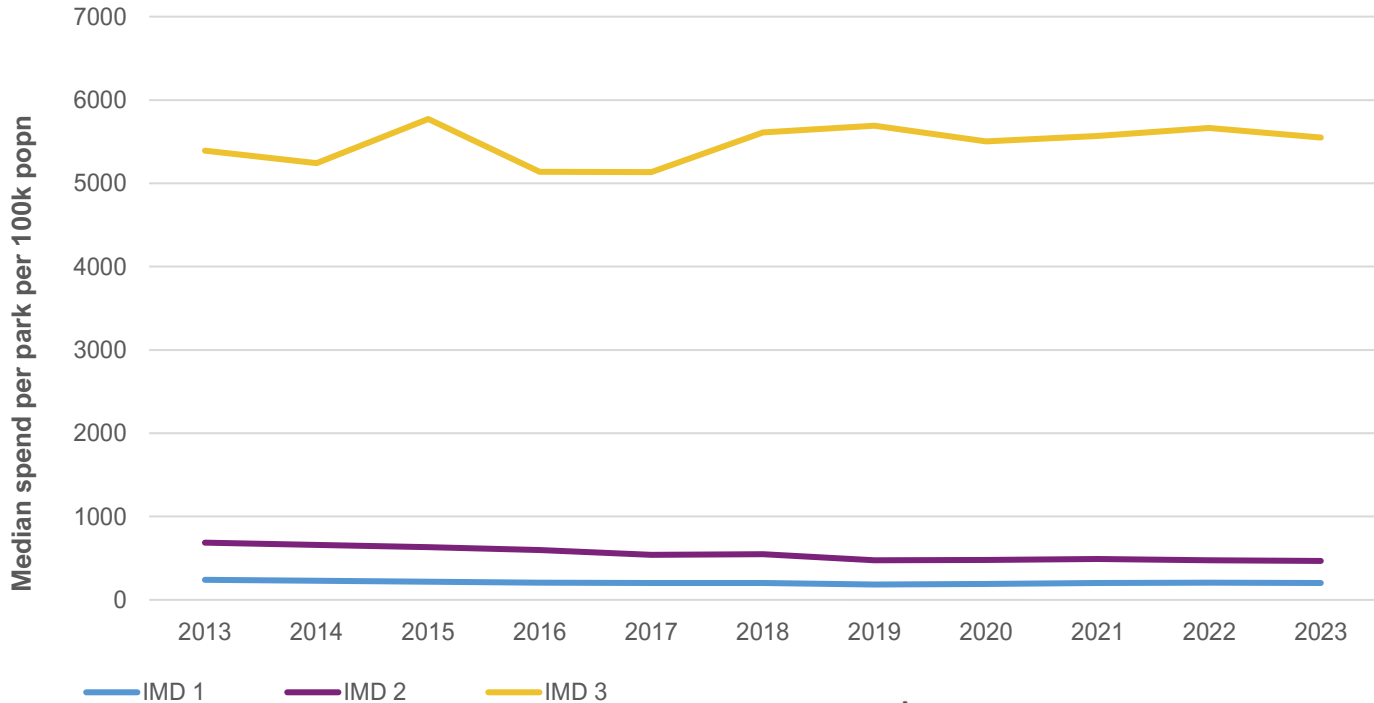


IMD 1 = most deprived

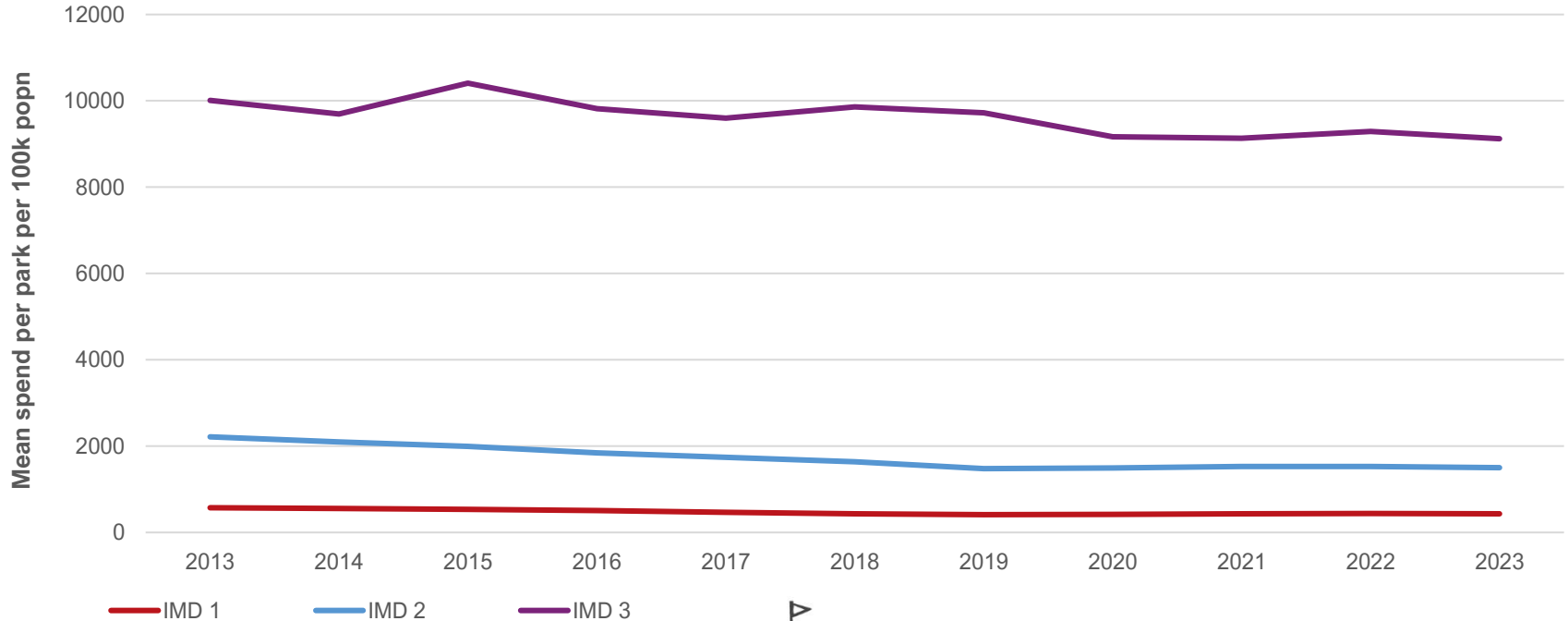




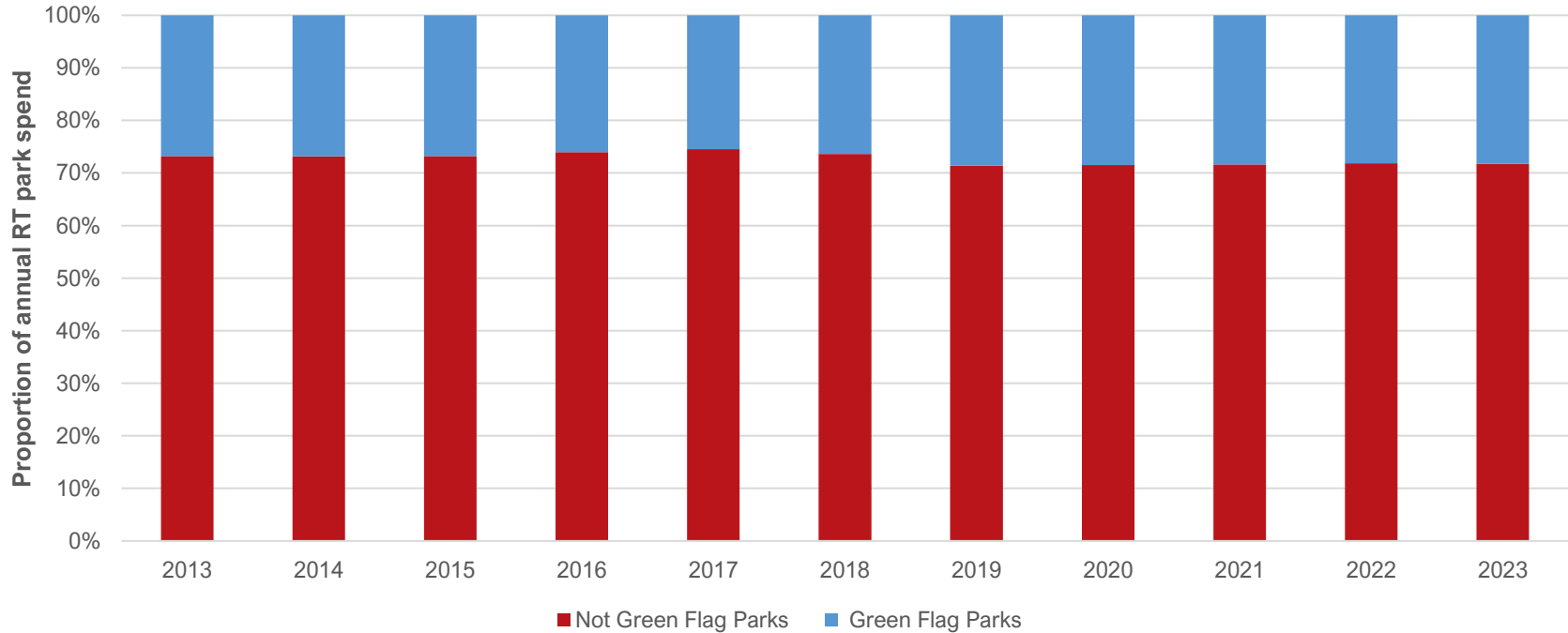
IMD and RT median park spend



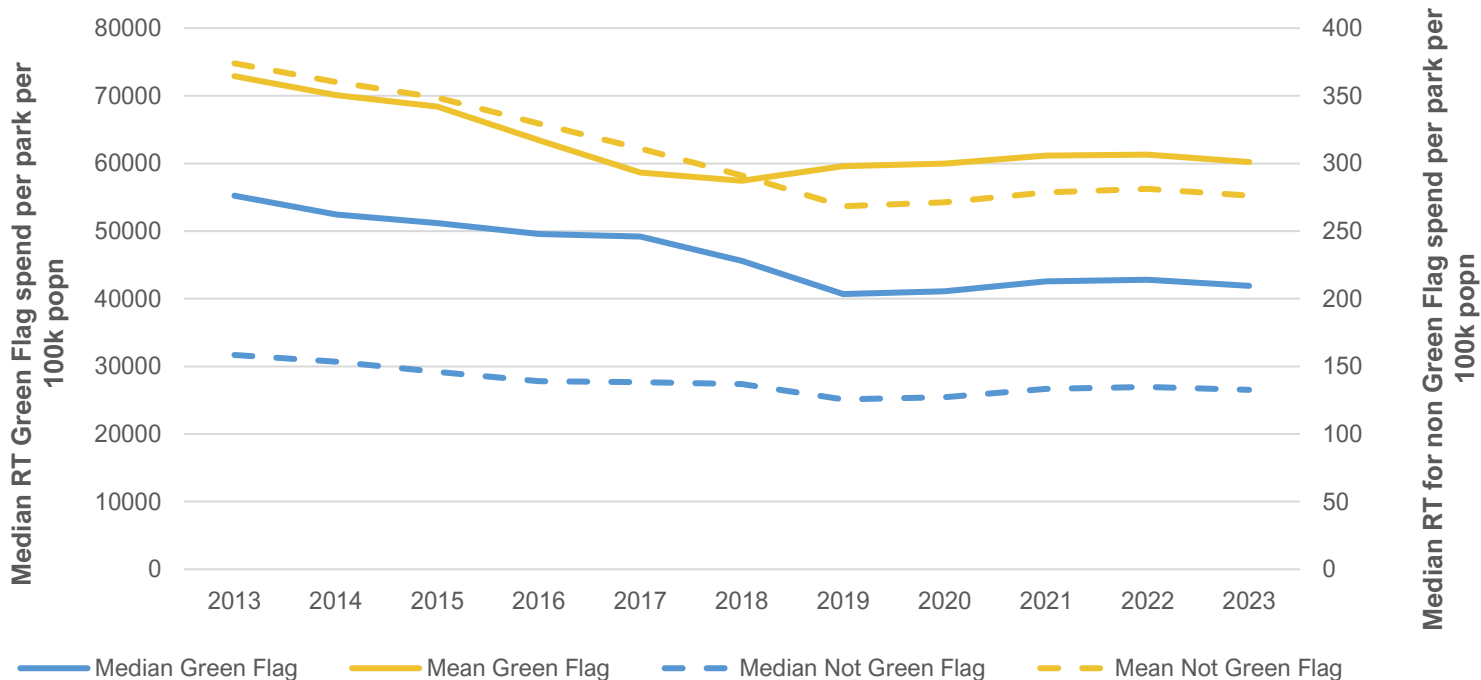
IMD and RT median park spend



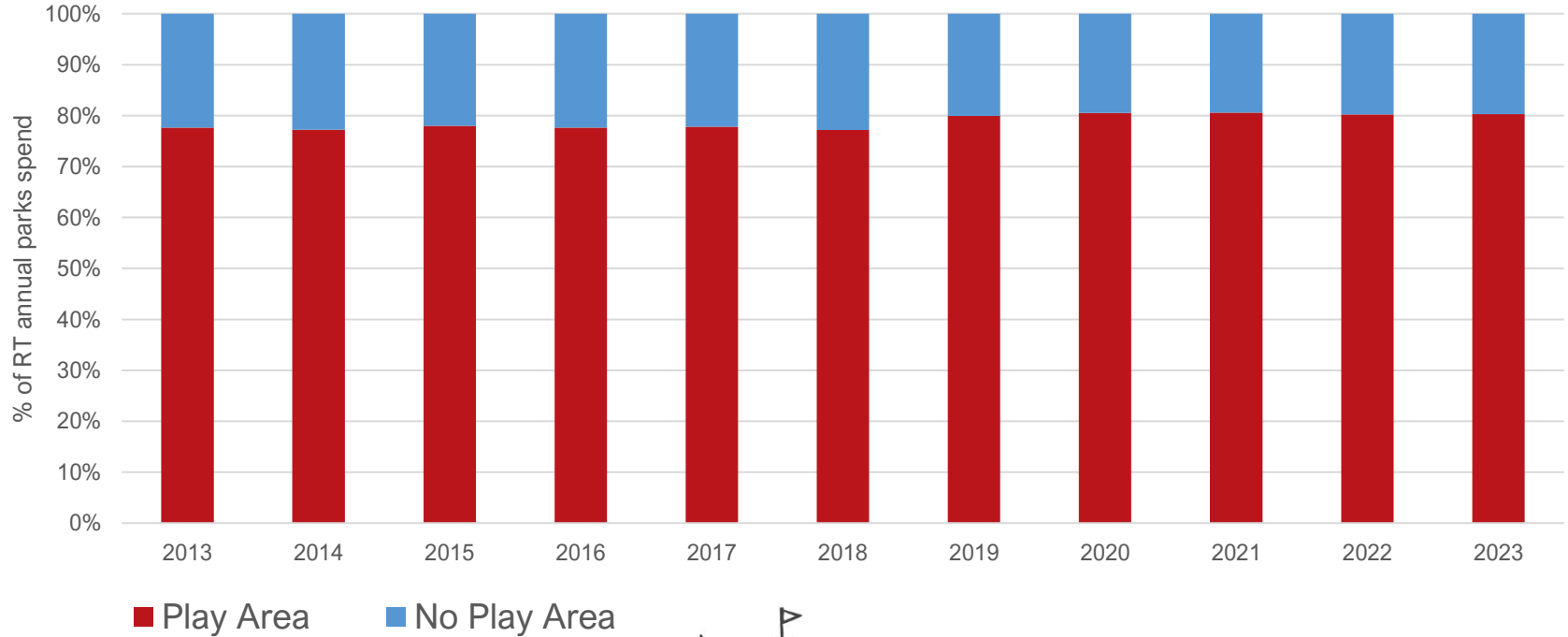
Green Flag and RT park spend



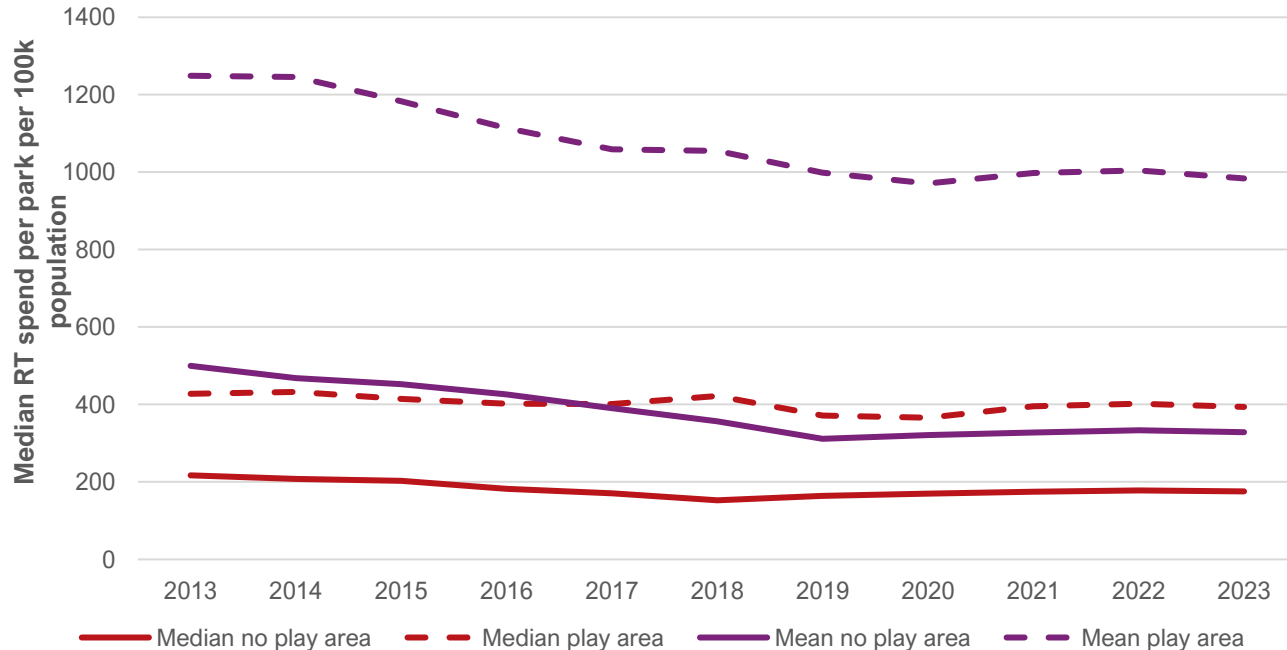
RT annual median spend per park comparing Green Flag parks with non Green Flag parks



Play area parks and RT spend



RT annual median spend per park comparing parks with play area and parks without play areas

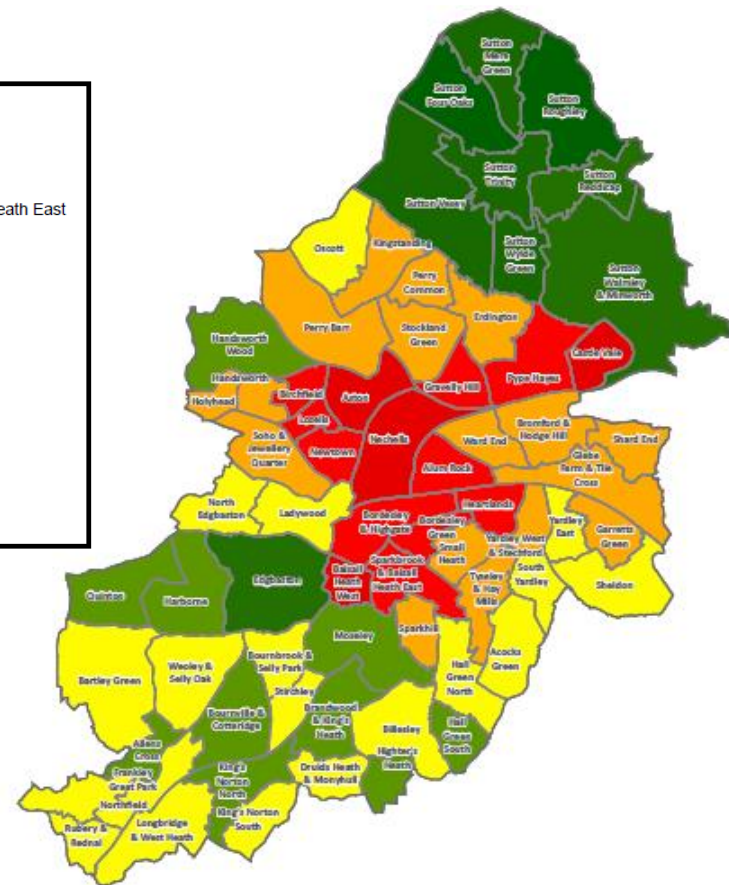


Environmental Justice for Birmingham



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0.12 - Sutton Roughley	0.28 - Brandwood & King's Heath	0.32 - Frankley Great Park	0.37 - Garretts Green
0.12 - Sutton Four Oaks	0.28 - King's Norton North	0.32 - Acocks Green	0.38 - Shard End
0.15 - Sutton Vesey	0.29 - Northfield	0.32 - North Edgbaston	0.38 - Handsworth
0.16 - Sutton Wyldie Green	0.30 - Rubery & Rednal	0.33 - Ladywood	0.38 - Ward End
0.16 - Sutton Mere Green	0.30 - Bournbrook & Selly Park	0.34 - Erdington	0.39 - Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath East
0.18 - Sutton Trinity	0.30 - Hall Green North	0.34 - Holyhead	0.39 - Alum Rock
0.21 - Edgbaston	0.30 - King's Norton South	0.34 - Yardley West & Stechford	0.39 - Birchfield
0.22 - Sutton Walmley & Minworth	0.30 - Yardley East	0.34 - Small Heath	0.39 - Heartlands
0.22 - Sutton Reddicap	0.30 - Weoley & Selly Oak	0.35- Tyseley & Hay Mills	0.39 - Bordesley Green
0.24 - Hall Green South	0.30 Longbridge & West Heath	0.35- Sparkhill	0.39 - Pype Hayes
0.26 - Harborne	0.30 - Oscott	0.36 - Perry Barr	0.40 - Bordesley & Highgate
0.26 - Bournville & Cotteridge	0.31 - Bartley Green	0.36 - Soho & Jewellery Quarter	0.40 - Lozells
0.26 - Moseley	0.31 - Sheldon	0.36 - Perry Common	0.41 - Gravelly Hill
0.26 - Handsworth Wood	0.31 - Billesley	0.36 - Bromford & Hodge Hill	0.41 - Newtown
0.27 - Quinton	0.31 - Stirchley	0.37 - Stockland Green	0.42 - Aston
0.28 - Highter's Heath	0.32 - South Yardley	0.37 - Kingstanding	0.42 - Nechells
0.28 - Allens Cross	0.32 - Druids Heath & Monyhull	0.37 - Glebe Farm & Tile Cross	0.43 - Castle Vale
			0.43 - Balsall Heath West



[Nov-Dec23.pdf \(tcpa.org.uk\)](http://tcpa.org.uk)





Key findings

- Real terms spend is crucial for any analysis of parks data
- Mean and median spend for parks is going down each year across most park characteristics
- Those parks with more budgeted spend/ population are Green Flag
- IMD is an important consideration
- Play parks offer opportunities
- Still need to develop a model to really understand how a range of park factors are linked with spend in parks

- ***Do contact me if you'd like to be involved in this research***



Acknowledgements



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- Kieron Vernon
- David Joy
- Stuart Unwin



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APSE Parks Seminar, Manchester

Birmingham City Council - Parks & Green Spaces Service Update

13TH th March 2025

Eddie Curry, Interim Head of Parks
Humera Sultan, Public Health Consultant



Introduction

Welcome to Birmingham

- **Birmingham is huge!**
- **Birmingham is the largest local authority in Europe and UK's second City**
- **The City has a younger population a more diverse background and higher than average levels of deprivation compared to the rest of England.**

Current Council Status

Birmingham City Council was placed under special measures on **9th October 2023**.

This followed the issuance of two Section 114 notices in September 2023 due to financial difficulties, including equal pay claims and an in-year financial gap within the council's budget.

Birmingham City Council is facing a significant budget deficit. For the financial year 2024/25, the council has a forecast budget gap of **£164.8 million**, which is expected to rise to **£177.1 million** in 2025/26. To manage this deficit, the council has set a target to find **£200 million** in savings over the next two financial years. This includes delivering **£165 million** of savings in the 2024/25 financial year and an additional **£35 million** in the 2025/26 financial year.



Greenspace Context

The City Council has an extensive portfolio of service, managed as part of the Parks Management Service, including:

- 641 Parks and Green Space
- 6 Country Parks
- 1 National Nature Reserve
- Landscape Practice Group
- Arboriculture and tree inspections of 750,000 streets
- 11 Category 1 reservoirs and 39 other water bodies
- Birmingham Wildlife Conservation Park
- The Ranger Service,
- Management of nurseries, and support services.
- 109 Allotments Sites with 7,105 individual plots



RESET



RESHAPE



RESTART

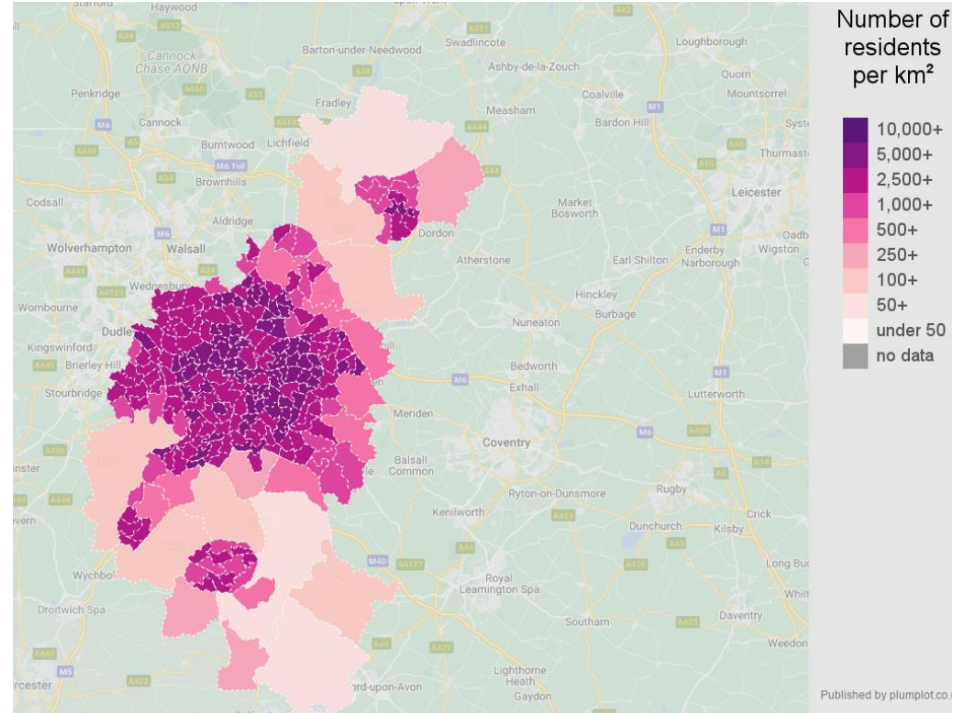
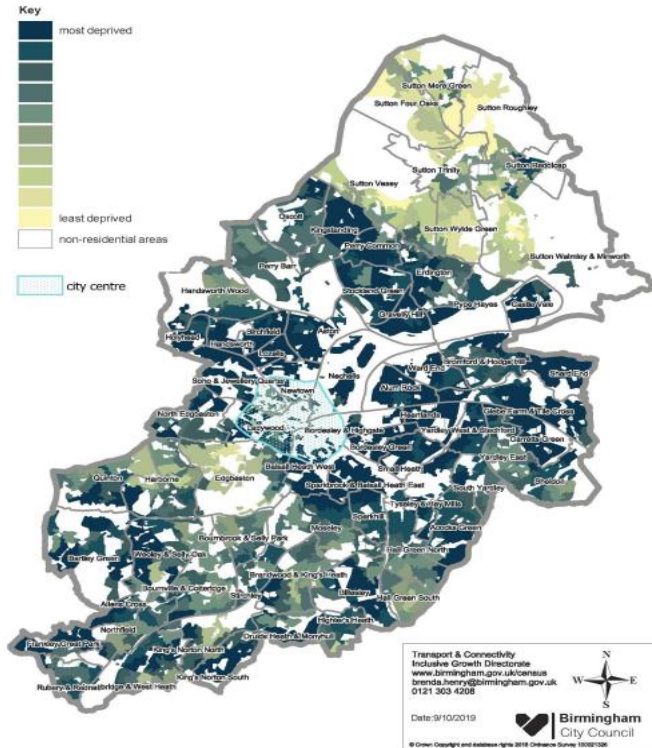
Location

- 27,000 Hectares landmass
- Population 1.1m



Deprivation and population density

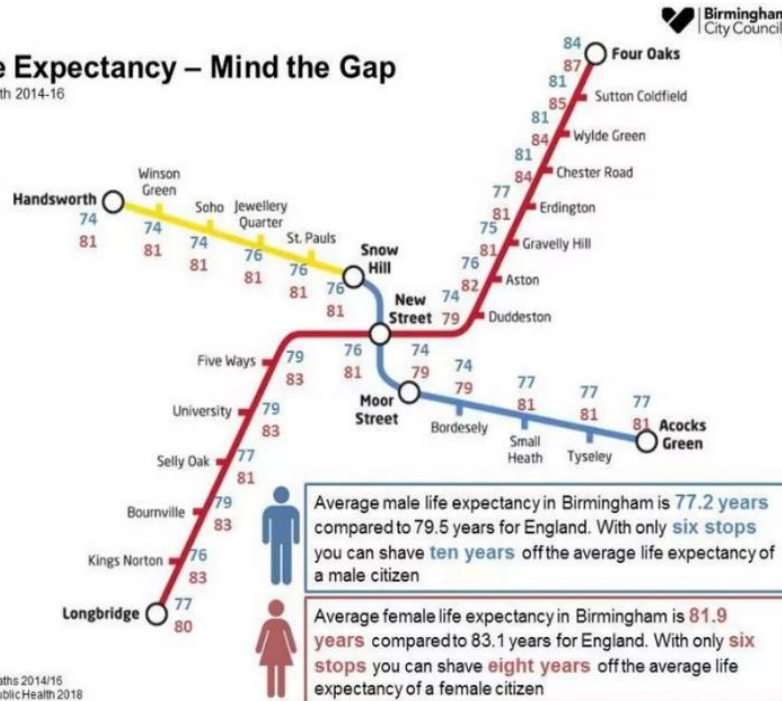
2019 English Index of Multiple Deprivation - Birmingham



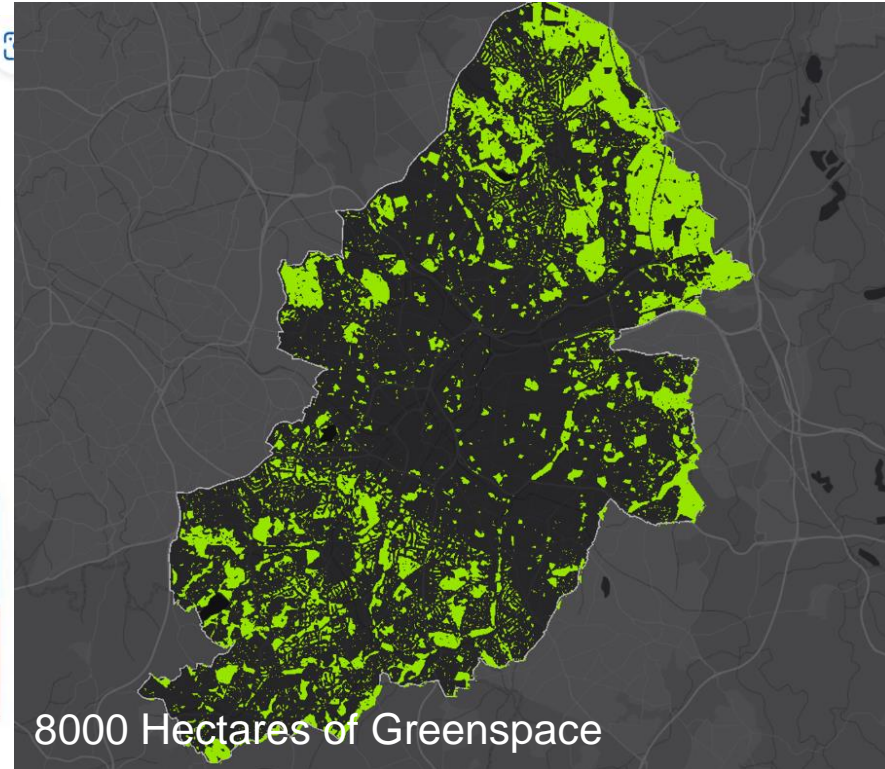
Life Expectancy and Green Space Provision

Life Expectancy – Mind the Gap

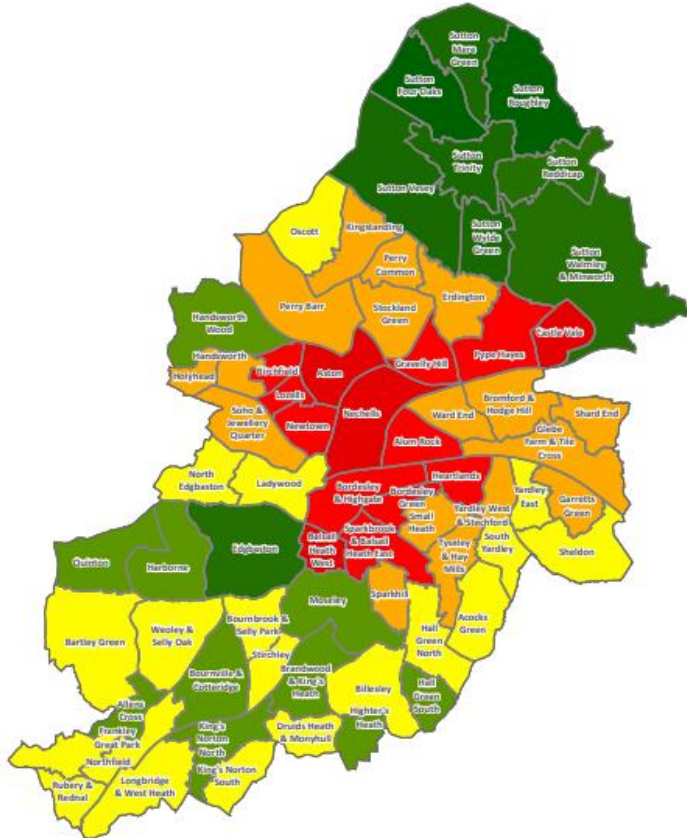
at birth 2014-16



Source: ONS Deaths 2014/16
© Birmingham Public Health 2018



Birmingham Environmental Justice Map



Combined Index by Ward - Mean Value

0.12 - Sutton Roughley	0.28 - Brandwood & King's Heath	0.32 - Frankley Great Park	0.37 - Garretts Green
0.12 - Sutton Four Oaks	0.28 - King's Norton North	0.32 - Acocks Green	0.38 - Shard End
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Parks Satisfaction Survey 2022

General overview:

- Good response rate at 942 (*response in 2020 was 1304*)
- Good satisfaction rate with their visit: 86.34% (*response in 2020 was 82.36%*)
- Attendance i.e. frequency of visits to the Park: 21.93% daily, 47.35% once a week, 22.35% once a month and 6.14% at least once a year
- *[From 2020 survey - Attendance pre covid ie frequency of visits to the Park: 28.14% daily, 46.78% once a week, 19.86 % once a month and 3.76% at least once a year*
- *And during covid the attendance was 40.03% daily, 38.19% once a week, 14.72 % once a month and 4.68% at least once a year. An increase of daily users by 11.89%*
- Currently 81.89% rated parks as contributing 1or 2 (out of 5) to mental health i.e. 1 = great deal. Whilst during covid 84.22% rated parks as contributing 1or 2 to mental health. *[In 2020 survey : Pre covid 74.16% rated parks as contributing 1or 2 (out of 5) to mental health i.e. 1= great deal]*
- Currently 80.08% rated parks as contributing 1or 2 (out of 5)to physical health i.e.1 = great deal . Whilst during covid 81.99% rated parks as contributing 1or 2 to physical health. *[In 2020 survey : Pre covid 72.93% rated parks as contributing 1or 2 (out of 5) to physical health]*
- Visitors who felt very safe or safe (i.e. 1 or 2 out of 5 for safety) in BCC Parks was 46.09% *[In 2020 survey it was 50.23%]*

Savings Plans

The Parks Service has a number of existing in year savings plans to deliver, which are outlined in the table below:

Ref	Description	24/25 Target £'m	25/26 Target £'m	Current RAG	Delivery Commentary
35	Remove Ranger Patrol and delete vacant posts within the Ranger Service	0.807	0.807	Blue	Savings have been achieved through a combination of public Health Grant being received to support the service and the removal of a several vacant posts
225	Additional Income at the Birmingham Wildlife and Conservation Centre	0.070	0.105	Blue	Entry fees have been increased and in place from April 2024. October Year to Date admissions income is £63k higher than at same period last year. Overall income for the year has already attained 99% of the annual target with seasonal holidays still to come.
236	Remove client/contractor working arrangements in Grounds Maintenance and review the POPI system.	0.106	0.106	Blue	Saving achieved through the deletion of vacant posts

Savings Plans

The Parks Service has a number of existing in-year savings plans to deliver, which are outlined in the table below:

Ref	Description	25/26 Target £'m	26/27 Target £'m	Current RAG	Delivery Commentary
31	Car Parking at Parks	0.381	0.381	Amber	Informal Parking consultation completed. TRO dwgs have been produced and submitted for TRO approval, Parking TRO to be specified up before TRO can be produced. Project progressing but may be delayed subject to confirming technical engineer support for the TRO. Formal Consultation to start in February
225	Additional Income - Birmingham Wildlife and Conservation Centre	0.35	0.35	Green	Income has significantly improved and nearing the target income . Forecast to deliver by end of qtr 4
303	Closure of Coleshill Nursery	0.125	0.125	Blue	Property progressing with the sale of the site. Service tenancy being served notice

Savings Plans

The Parks Service has a number of existing in-year savings plans to deliver, which are outlined in the table below:

Ref	Description	25/26 Target £'m	26/27 Target £'m	Current RAG	Delivery Commentary
319	Review Concessions in Parks	0.125	0.125	Green	Tenders for mobile cafes completed. Tender for concessions opportunities to go out to tender April contract to start June / July . Income target already progressing well.
349	Close Remaining Nurseries	0.026	0.026	Amber	CMB report in production. Discussions with property in progress re outsourcing KHN and retaining some retail space.
350	Close Sheldon Country Park Old Rectory Farm	0.023	0.023	Amber	Discussions taking place to introduce new income generating services at SCP . The farm will not be closing.

Capital

The projects below are awaiting confirmation

Ref	Description	25/26 Target £'m	26/27 Target £'m	Current RAG	Delivery Commentary
	Outdoor Play Facilities	0.240	0.240	Green	Works to be commissioned and delivered over a 3-year programme to replace items of play equipment with new more robust play equipment.
	Provision of a singular Grounds Maintenance and Tree Management Solution (To replace POPI)	0.150	0.150	Green	Confirm system procured , Training now in progress. Programme to roll out Confirm starts in April with Tree's and is ongoing over the following 6 months for other services.

Service Review

	Position	Current status	Mitigation	Revised Status
Parks Condition	Long legacy of underinvestment. Major programme of capital investment needed for Park infrastructure and play areas all need investment	Poor	£12m S106 Funds available. Major opportunity to develop strategic partnerships with External Funding. New restructure to build Capacity to development funding bids and deliver improvements.	Improvement likely following the restructure
People Staff	Some Great Staff with Skills and Knowledge Some hangups re Client / contractor responsibilities / culture to overcome Longstanding uncertainty restructure and operating modal affecting staff moral	Service Improvement Required	New service operating model now confirmed. Restructure now nearing approval ready to implement in April. New roles to be recruited May / June. Cultural change programme needed to reset the new working practices and fill any skill gaps	Strong chance of Service improvement
Policy and Strategy	Legacy of the FPA and City of Nature programme Strong strategic framework formally adopted CON 2022 and in active delivery Strategic partnerships with NT, NLF in place and currently under review	Work in progress	Work required to review the CoN action plans and confirm if still deliverable in the current financial constraints Ongoing partnership work continues with NT & NLF Priority actions to be formulated into the Parks services work programme	Progress on going
Public Engagement	Strong community engagement & partnerships in place and active inc BOSF, Birmingham Tree People Parks Friends Groups Etc City of Nature Alliance Currently limited capacity and resources to support and coordinate volunteer activities	Service support required	Continued and Ongoing support to be confirmed via the restructure of the park service. Community / volunteer engagement post to be created to boost capacity to support activation programmes Ongoing financial support to be confirmed to continue and sustain the BOSF groups insurance and seed corn funding arrangements	Improvement likely following restructure and budget confirmation

- **Capital Investment** needed to stabilise and improve the parks and greenspaces- Lots of external funding opportunities to drive improvements.
- **Staff** suffer from a lack of clear leadership and support and have retained a strong client contractor focus. Restructure will focus on building leadership capacity and changing the operating modal away from client duties towards a more strategic development and community engagement focused service.
- **Policy and strategy** strong legacy of FPA and NT partnership. CoN strategy well placed but just needs a review and partnerships reconfirming.
- **Public / community engagement** strong community activity just needs a stronger focus and more support to help coordinate and quantify the value of in-kind contributions.
- The service is eager to confirm the structure and drive forward – **General good signs and potential for service improvement.**

Service Review

1. Earlier in 2024, a decision was made to separate out operational Grounds Maintenance services from more specialist parks services. This is part of the Council's refreshed approach to Street Management, and as presented to a meeting of the Neighbourhoods Oversight and Scrutiny Committee on 16th October 2024.
2. Parks Service Redesign Deep Dive Commissioners Review conducted 27th January 2025.
3. New operating model approved for the Parks and Green Space Service has been developed and will focus on delivering:
 - **Activation and delivery of the City of Nature Strategy**
 - **Community and Volunteer Engagement**
 - **Commercial activities and external grant funding to drive parks & greenspace investment programme**
 - **Destination Site Management**
4. The Parks Management Service now leads on strategy development and the management of parks and greenspaces, whilst the Street Management service will lead on operational delivery of street cleansing and grounds maintenance functions.
5. Parks and Green Space Service restructure is progressing through job evaluation and towards formal approval. Planned Go Live date is April 2025.

1. Activation and delivery of the City of Nature Strategy

- At the core of this new operating model, is the intention for the Parks Management Service to strategically lead the city's green spaces. As such, the service has embarked upon a review to consider options for reshaping the service, exploring innovative delivery models, including greater collaboration with partners and stakeholders and opportunities to leverage external funding.
- The City of Nature Plan was a product of the strategic Future Parks Accelerator Project, funded through the National Trust and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- The vision statement set out in the CoN plan is the starting point, which states that:

“Over the next 25 years we want to see Birmingham recognised as a City of Nature, where its parks and greenspaces are both sustainably managed and funded. This plan aims to change the way Birmingham treats its natural environment and how it thinks about the future of its parks and greenspaces”.

2. Community Engagement / Volunteers

- Volunteers are a key resource in managing and activating green spaces and promoting the benefits to their communities and beyond. The city already benefits from many “Friends of Parks” groups, who provide a substantial number of volunteer hours per year (97,598 hrs) providing the equivalent of £1,063,818 investment in time and capital.
- The remodelling of the parks service will include approaches to further empower these volunteer groups so that those wishing to expand on their stewardship can do so. This will include stronger support around planning, funding applications, local championing and community capacity building. A model to potentially scale up is the existing seed corn funding grant to Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF) for bid writing; for example, in 2023/24 the £20,000 seed corn grant yielded over £247,000 grant aid.
- The restructure will provide capacity to support and further develop both partnership working and a structured programme of community events and volunteering opportunities .

3. Commercial Activities and External Grant Funding

Work is ongoing to review the financial model for parks and green space and reviewing lessons, and best practice, from other Councils. This has begun to identify some new or innovative options for consideration and a few of these are referenced below:-

- **Work with major partners** - such as the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country, The National Trust and the Environment Agency includes looking at joint funding bid opportunities, which may include new operational models. This will build on examples such as the Pocket Parks Project, River Cole restoration projects, which delivers on water quality, biodiversity and climate change resilience through decreased flood risk and joint community engagement projects such as Nature Neighbourhoods.
- **At a smaller scale** - the City of Nature Alliance (a coming together of local charities, organisations and other local providers who work with BCC to deliver the City of Nature Plan) has delivered a range of interventions and engagement activities in the key 'red' wards identified in the environmental justice mapping.

Commercial activities and external grant funding (cont)

- The Parks service is considering **further commercialisation options** not yet developed in Birmingham, such as a High Ropes course at Cannon Hill Park, building upon existing work to generate new income streams.
- The **use of our Destination Parks as ‘venues’** also lends itself to further extending events, which both drive footfall and deliver commercial returns. The proposed restructuring of the Parks service is likely to place a greater emphasis upon such commercial skillsets.
- The **use of our Grants** will remain a source of opportunity both for capital projects but also potentially revenue costs. The National Heritage Lottery and the National Lottery Communities Fund teams and the National Trust have all expressed interest in discussing how each could continue to support BCC with the work being delivered through the City of Nature Plan. Other avenues of grant funding are being explored such as Landfill Tax the Climate Action Fund and the continued use of S106 and CIL funding. This is also likely to be a growing area of importance for the repurposed service.

4. Destination Parks

A categorisation structure for urban parks helps to organise assets based on their size, purpose, and function. The categorisation is based on size and user numbers and ranges from large country parks which draw in visitors from beyond the city to small pocket parks that serve a very local community.

Birmingham's Destination Parks

Six parks are identified as Destination Parks, which are best served by dedicated operational models. These Parks will develop site-based management plans and will focus on infrastructure improvements community events and volunteering and commercial income generating activities:

Sutton
Park NNR



Canon Hill
Park



Sheldon
Country Park



Woodgate Valley
Country Park



Lickey Hills
Park



Handsworth
Park



Parks & Green Spaces – service improvement project update

Current Activities – This Reporting Cycle	Planned Activities – Next Reporting Cycle	Key Risks / Issues / Dependencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee was presented in January 2025. OSC requested a more detailed programme of work to be presented in April 2025. • Continuing implementation of MOU with Public Health for the Ranger Service • Projects put forward to WMCA for local investment in natural capital (green finance) programme • Continuing work on stakeholder mapping through the Urban Green Partnership work with NT in East Birmingham as a model for city-wide mapping to inform a communications plan • Progressing implementation of 2025/6 Nursery Operating Model. • Progressing implementation work for parking charges. • Progressing with tender process to secure new commercial opportunities within Parks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate grant funding opportunities to align with project identified in pipeline. • Review City of Nature measures to update and align with revised corporate plan (KPIs) • Develop a commercial strategy to build on existing offer • Review residential estate in Parks to assess future use/disposal • Develop a destination park approach for future dedicated visitor experience management • Reaching out to partners such as Environment Agency, Severn Trent Water, the Wildlife Trust to explore joint projects • Project pipeline identification with NT Urban Green Partnership in East Birmingham as model for seeking funding to be reconvened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk - Uncertainty over future savings decisions impacting staff and assets • There is a risk that some of the existing teams do not currently have the required skills regarding bid-writing / fund-raising • Scale and pace of the transformation will require support from wider council departments • Issue - Capacity in change programme team and wider parks team to dedicate time to change programme • Continual development of the project programme plan will identify other risks and dependencies

Summary & Next Steps

- The first phase of restructuring the Grounds Maintenance operations out of the Parks Service and into Street Management is complete.
- Parks and Green Space Service restructure is progressing through job evaluation and towards formal approval. Planned Go Live date is April 2025.
- New operating model for the Parks and Green Space Service has been developed and will focus on delivering:
 - All of the City of Nature Strategy
 - Community and Volunteer Engagement
 - Commercial activities and external grant funding
 - Destination Site Management
- Budget savings and workstreams are in progress and will accelerate once the restructure is implemented.

Thank you

Any Questions

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