

Parks: Is there too much information and not enough action?



The desire for more and more information

- Backdrop of reducing parks budgets – ‘age of austerity’ and non-statutory service.
- Growing awareness of multiple value of parks to a wide variety of organisations and to wider environment
- Large investments over past 10 years – HLF
- Large body of academic research on benefits of parks and wider greenspace
- Government instigated public inquiry into value of parks and impacts of ongoing budget cuts.



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Areas of research

- New Funding
- New Management Models (Partnerships, Trusts, Community management).
- New park styles
- Increased used of volunteers
- Income generation
- New maintenance regimes (Naturalised planting/maintenance schemes)
- Biodiversity
- Health, flood alleviation, climate change, social inclusion etc.etc.etc.





'we strongly believe that without being able to demonstrate the contribution made by parks to broader agendas, local authority parks departments will find it difficult to secure sufficient priority for their parks, or to access alternative funding sources'.

House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee:
Public Parks, Seventh Report of Session 2016–17

General view of some academics is:

- Too many unrelated research projects all scrambling for funding – no co-ordination.
- Focus on far-off impacts – danger findings will come too late as cuts continue.
- Need for studies on dealing with immediate threats.
- Need for greater co-ordination between academics (consensus rather than differing views and opinions)
- Concern that people are not willing to accept parks may be lost, so whilst research is going on real issue is avoided.
- **Is more research simply a smoke-screen?**

A new shape for parks?

- **City Magnet Parks** – large public parks with large events and facilities for all to use
- **Club Parks** – managed by public and private ‘club’ which may be restricted re access, involving membership costs and maintained by volunteers.
- **Theme Parks** – Open to all but include a large number of purchased activities, income from which is re-invested into the park.
- **Laissez-faire Parks** – little formal design, with minimum regulation where local community can use it as they want to. Some concerns that this could lead to territorial claims on the facility.
- **Variegated Parks** – Split into zones to meet specific demands either on a permanent basis or at certain times of the year. This can lead to the park being fragmented with some areas accessible to all whilst others would be restricted to certain users e.g. football teams, tennis players etc.
- **Co-mingled Parks** – Facilities are designed for shared use which promotes community cohesion, and can be managed again by volunteers.
- **Sale or hire of parks** - parks which can be hired out or sold at times of financial constraint and income re-invested in remaining parks. Restrictions can be placed on sale which makes ensures will have to be kept as a park. These parks are likely to be those with limited income generating potential or low visitor numbers.



Positive research:

Do we know what we have got?

- OS Open Greenspace

Location of public parks, playing fields, sports facilities, play areas and allotments, along with access points for entering and exiting urban and rural greenspaces.

‘It is hoped the dataset will prove instrumental in helping the public sector create and manage health and wellbeing strategies, active travel plans and various environmental initiatives that include air quality, biodiversity, housing regeneration and flood resilience.

Its primary purpose is to enable members of the public to find and access green spaces near them for exercise and recreation’.

Do we know its value?

Currently no mechanism to apportion costs and benefits of parks and greenspaces e.g.

- NHS
- Police
- Home owners

Mismatch between distribution of costs and those who benefit from parks - **Sheffield City Council Study**

Services	Beneficiaries					Total Value	Share of value	In financial accounts
	Sheffield City Council	Public services	Residents	Businesses	Global			
Recreation	3					3	-	3
Parking	2					2	-	2
Leases (commercial, café)	10					10	1%	10
Fibre (timber)	2					2	-	2
Mental health		29	74	42		145	11%	-
Physical health		216	338			554	42%	-
Grants	3					3	-	3
Residential property uplift			237			237	18%	
Clean air		40	49			89	7%	
Carbon storage in trees and soil					120	120	9%	
Temperature				84		84	6%	
Wildlife		6				6	-	
Crime	14		52			66	5%	
Flood risk mgt	2					2	-	
Gross asset value	35	291	412-750	126-464	120	1,321	100%	20
Liabilities								
Operational expenditure	(23)					(23)	62%	(23)
CAPEX (core + optional backlog)	(14)					(14)	38%	(14)
Total liability	(36)					(36)	100%	(36)
Total net asset value	(1)	291	412-750	126-464	120	1,285		(16)
Share of net value	0%	23%	32%-58%	10%-36%	9%	100%		

£145m

£554m

£35m

£36m

£1.29b

Note: Benefits for households from residential property uplift are adjusted to avoid double counting of health benefits.

Commercial Activity - a welcome benefit?

- The need to generate additional funding is a key issue.
- Research show public will accept charges for certain experiences.
- Unhappy with too much commercialism – closes off parts of parks , particularly large events.
- Income generated in parks should stay in parks!
- Some parks better at raising income than others – sharing of profits between all parks to avoid some slipping into disrepair.
- Real need for park users to see the benefits commercial activity, particularly disruptive activity bring.
- Good communications critical.





Putting a value on parks and greenspaces

Academics looking to mirror National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) based on:

- Evaluating the ways in which the **quality and quantity** of urban green space impacts on the health and wellbeing of residents
- Exploring the **cultures and values** that influence how people of different ages and backgrounds interact with the natural environment
- Finding out more about **which aspects** of the natural environment are beneficial for health and wellbeing
- Evaluating whether a **smartphone app** connecting people with nature can improve health and wellbeing
- Developing a method to measure the **cost-effectiveness of natural environments** to help determine the ways in which they could play a significant part in the UK's future healthcare arrangements
- Working out how urban green space can be used to **deliver health and social care**
- **Natural capital accounting systems will become crucial to prove the value of parks and greenspaces to the wider community to counteract the increasing demand of other local services and land needs, and perhaps most importantly would be lost if cuts are imposed.**

Clear messages

- Sharing of best practice and successes is critical.
- Training and support as roles of parks professionals change.
- Greater exposure to innovation and stronger leadership skills to drive ideas forward.
- Corporate support e.g. Health and Well-Being Boards, stakeholders and community involvement.
- Consider carefully the belief that income generation can be the answer to self-funding.
- Clearly define role of volunteers – additionality not replacement.
- Develop clear plans for future shape of parks – role and function
- Better co-ordination of research to achieve workable solutions – avoid long-term ‘navel gazing’.
- Parks are public assets and should be run for the benefits of the public, including public funding.
- Ability to show cost, quality and productivity of parks and their wide-ranging benefits.
- Continue to lobby the Government in order to ensure parks and greenspaces do not slip of the national agenda.

Increasing the voice of APSE members

- Parks and Greenspaces Minister, Marcus Jones, announced creation of new Parks Action Group to:

'help England's public parks and green spaces meet the needs of communities now and in the future'

- Government providing £500,000 funding to kick start work of the group.
- Responding to House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee on future of parks.
- Aim is for expert panel is to consider recommendations and look at new ways to help parks and green space thrive
- APSE Chief Executive **Paul O'Brien** has been appointed as one of the members of the Parks Action Group.
- Discussions will be fed back to APSE members and their views and responses fed back to the working group.

