

# **Apse Parks Seminar 2017.**

**Can we afford to Park the  
problems?**

# Proposals for the future management and development of Newcastle's parks.



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**Newcastle's parks and green spaces –  
the worst of times, the best of times.**

# Context.

- Ongoing significant budget reductions since 2010/11 – a reduction of 91%.
- All of the council's budgets are under great pressure, with a further £70m to find 2017/18-2019/20.
- Even before the cuts dug deeply, it was clear that we needed a new delivery model if we were to protect parks and green spaces for future generations.
- Elected Members were also looking for new delivery models which would support its Cooperative Council ambitions.

# Newcastle parks and green spaces in 2027.

- Vibrant, busy and popular, safe and well maintained, and with lots of activities orchestrated by managers and partners.
- Recognised venues / spaces for health and therapeutic activities, for people of all ages and abilities and backgrounds.
- Strategically important wildlife sites and green spaces across the city delivering ecological value and supporting diversity, in line with the Council's statutory duties under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006).

# Newcastle parks and green spaces in 2027.

- Managed by an independent body with cooperative and mutual values, providing excellent opportunities for volunteers and stakeholders.
- Parks' users; friends of groups, and residents all integral to the delivery of the service.
- An enhanced parks service, with a culture of continuous improvement.
- Parks for all, and at the centre of the city's life – as was the original intention (our first municipal park – Leazes Park – opened in 1873).



# Core Principles.

1. **Council priority:** parks are not a statutory service, but their successful future is a high priority for the Council.
2. **Public ownership:** parks should remain in Council ownership.
3. **Safe and clean:** parks should be clean, and visitors should feel and be safe.
4. **Free access for all:** parks should be free to access and use but charging for some facilities/activities continues and grows.
5. **Existing groups:** integral – part and parcel of any new solutions.

# Core Principles.

- 6. Your Parks:** no decisions without engaging, listening, problem-solving (together), and feeding back.
- 7. One City:** equality of resources and enjoyment across all of the City's parks – no single park / individual solutions.
- 8. No Privatisation:** parks not transferred to a commercial entity but rather an entity with charity and community objectives, which preserves the parks and uses available income sources (including commercial), to run the parks.



# Our transformation journey so far, 2015 – 2016.

- 2014 budget ideas - a 'national trust for Newcastle' – a crackpot idea? Perhaps, but members keen to find out.
- Research into models, partner/expert advice, partner opportunities.
- Making sense of what we have – estate; restrictions and opportunities; budgets and other resources.
- Project team and options appraisal, and identifying scope (in all senses).
- Open conversations, nothing secret, but no wide ranging consultation and engagement as yet.
- A quick realisation that 'something must be done'.

# Story so far.....

- Reviewing the estate, legal documents and titles, restrictions etc and how the parks are operated now.
- Carrying out structural surveys.
- Received input from staff, councillors, parks groups.
- Work with National Trust, Social Finance, Sheffield and Liverpool Councils.
- Considered various options with specialist support.
- Developing a preferred solution.....

# Partnerships.

**Politicians, communities,  
stakeholders and delivery partners.**

- We don't know for sure yet that this model will work financially and legally for our parks.
- While we are taking financial and legal advice, we also want to find out what partners, stakeholders, staff, Friends' Groups, the Parks' Forum, councillors, parks' users, specific groups of residents, health experts, utilities, business, schools, colleges and universities, and residents generally think about this proposed model.

# Why are we engaging?

- What we are suggesting could be a significant change to the way in which the Council has provided public parks in the past.
- The public and partners need to know what work is going on, what may happen, and have the opportunity to tell us how they think parks might be run in the future.
- We want everyone's views on the future of parks to help shape a proposed delivery model.

# Engagement to date.

- Regular dialogue and briefing with the Parks Forum.
- Some discussions with specialist groups like the Wildlife Trust.
- Briefings for Councillors and MPs.
- Regular discussions with Parks' colleagues.
- Group discussions facilitated by Newcastle University Open Lab – the Parks Game.

# We particularly want views on the following issues:

- The opportunities for parks in supporting public health, and parks' relationship with nearby hospitals.
- The role of parks in delivering a sustainable city - delivering ecological value and supporting diversity.
- Volunteers: roles; recruitment; training; health and safety.
- Involvement in the governance of the Charity
- The development of destination parks, and the role of neighbourhood parks.

- Events: community and cultural events; flagship events and their implications.
- Income generation:
  - charging for events and facilities;
  - the best use of the buildings in parks;
  - restaurants, catering, and licensing issues;
  - parking.
- Parks and urban farming/allotments.
- The use of social media and crowdfunding.



# How are we consulting and engaging?

- Online engagement tool.
- Social and printed media.
- Public information events.
- Pop up engagement in parks.
- Face to face stakeholder engagement.
- Results fed in for action – consideration, resolution, shaping proposals etc...

# Parks Forum and Friends' Groups.

- A great sounding board.
- We have to build on and not disregard their existing work and potential.
- They need to be part of the new model.
- But they are not representing the general public.

# The National Trust.

- Started out as an informal link through the HLF/Nesta project.
- NT brought together Sheffield, Liverpool and Newcastle as examples of Councils trying to mitigate funding reductions, but also trying to find positive future delivery models – not just cutting.
- Sheffield and Liverpool unable to proceed just now, so by default, Newcastle has become the national pathfinder.

- At present, the National Trust is acting as an advisor to the Council, helping us to look at the future from a third sector perspective.
- They are also sharing their expertise across a range of development areas.
- As we proceed, the National Trust will become an advisor to the new Parks Charitable Trust.

# Parks and health – partnerships and benefits.

- Supporting pathways to work for people with learning and physical difficulties through parks maintenance and management.
- Providing part of the city's network of health check provision and 'health trainer support', (working closely with "Ways to Wellness" and other parts of the health improvement network).
- Being skilled in supporting rehabilitation pathways for a variety of conditions including mental health recovery, cardiac rehabilitation, peripheral vascular disease, hypertension, pre-diabetes and diabetes; support and coordinate a network of volunteers, involved in these functions.
- But not just hospitals without a roof.

# Politicians.

- Close working with the political leadership.
- Regular briefings with back benchers and opposition group.
- Involvement in some of the workshop activity.
- Briefings also for local MPs.
- Messaging is crucial (those core principles again).
- High profile and external communications are critical.

# **A new model for Newcastle's Parks and Greenspaces?**

**NCC Parks and Green Space**



**11 Principal Parks**  
*e.g. Jesmond Dene*



**19 Recreation Grounds**  
*e.g. Blakelaw Park*



**15 Neighbourhood Parks**  
*e.g. Iris Brickfield*



**9 Countryside Parks**  
*e.g. Tyne Riverside*



**64 Allotments**  
*e.g. Hazlerigg Allotments*

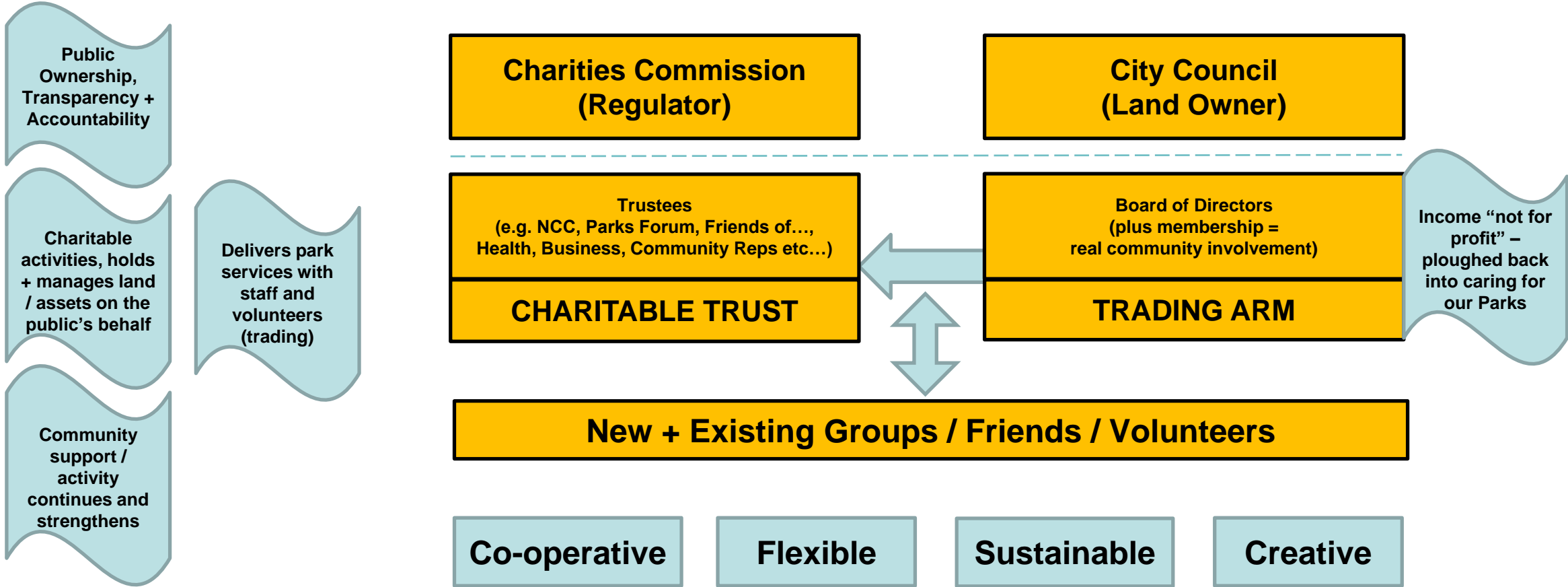
**118 sites** across the city, comprising over **480 hectares** - equivalent to over **600 football pitches**



# Preferred Option – a Charitable Trust.

- Independent from the Council therefore removed from the constraints imposed on local authorities.
- **Legally protects** parks for public use.
- Requires active involvement of the community, partners, stakeholders and staff (**civic/mutual values**).
- Potential for trading and enterprising (**social enterprise**).
- Secures the best human, environmental and social impacts.
- Maximises opportunities for income generation to sustain the enterprise (not purely for commercial gain).
- Unlocks new opportunities to access alternative funding sources.

# Potential Structure (for comment / to be tested)



# Our next steps.

- Consultation programme – February – April.
- Finalising the business plan.
- Refining the model (and the scope)- in the context of the consultation.
- Hopefully we'll have a model that will work.
- Cabinet approval to proceed – June?
- Implementation – the legals, the new Board, the transition programme, the launch – September 17-April18?

# Key lessons – the challenges

- It takes a long time to transform.
- It takes a long time to get your house in order.
- You need the right transformation model in mind – but how do you know what's possible?
- Agreeing the scope of your transformation – and justifying it?
- You must invest in internal and external stakeholder management – and as soon as possible.
- You'll need culture change – staff, members, interest groups, volunteers, and residents.
- You're bound to unearth the unexpected.
- Transforming and pioneering are expensive processes – be prepared.

