

# The Current Crisis and the Gardens Trust Response

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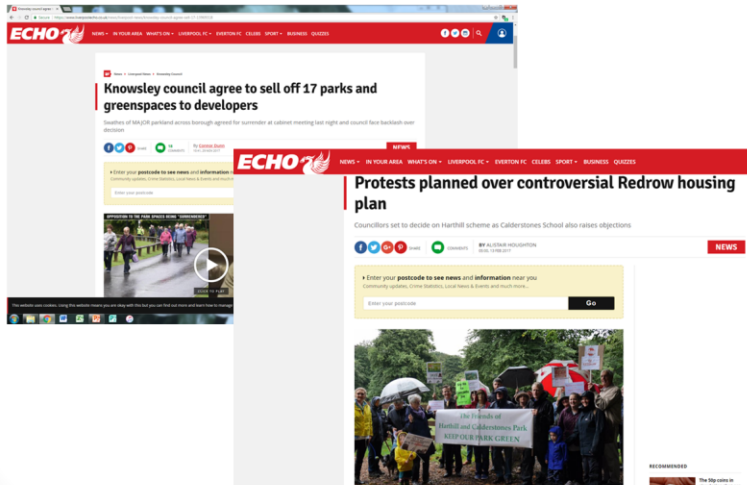
## Contemporary context

- 'Mainstream expenditure by local authorities on upkeep required to sustain improvement over the longer term has increased, although not at the rate of increases spent on other public services'.  
(National Audit Office, 2006, 6)
- Since Comprehensive Spending Review of 2010 there have been cuts of 40% and more to parks budgets.
- Recent Select Committee acknowledged the problem but ignored calls for statutory duty on part of LAs and provided no solution to funding crisis.
- Local authorities are seeking ways to manage cuts including: outsourcing, selling off land for development, asset transfer (very few so far), increasing commercial activity (concerts etc)., seeking alternative financial models (e.g. endowment).

Since 2010, the Government has abdicated its role in providing leadership. There has been a complete absence of strategic responsibility at Government level since the closure of CABESpace in 2011. The Design Council, which was charged with taking over CABE's responsibilities, ignored the remit of CABESpace. The closure of CABESpace was followed in 2013 by the loss of Green Space, the charity which represented parks interests, largely due to a lack of Government support.

In recognition of mounting concern, the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee announced in July 2016 that it would hold an inquiry into the future of public parks. At the time of writing, the Committee had received 384 submissions from every sector of society, as well as a 273,000-signature petition, demonstrating the high value placed on public parks across the country and the breadth of concern over the current crisis.

# Sale and loss



When there is the chance that a development proposal may be approved, there is little motivation within local authorities to invest time or money in that site. If such proposals are unsuccessful, councils often find that the condition of the site has deteriorated in the meantime and the cost of repair increased proportionately. In some instances, this process is repeated numerous times with the cycle of proposals planning consultations, and campaigns, pushing the park into a deeper state of dereliction every time

## Loss of grants



Between 1996, when the Heritage Lottery Fund announced a new £50m Urban Parks Programme and 2010, when the new coalition Government embarked on its austerity programme and imposed unprecedented cuts on local government budgets, there was a renaissance in the public parks and gardens of the UK. So far over £850m has been invested by the National Lottery alone.

Although local authority budgets are being cut, the HLF and Big Lottery Fund have thus far continued to fund the conservation, restoration and regeneration of public parks. In fact, as local authorities have come under increasing pressure and as other sources of capital funding, such as the European Regional Development Fund, have become more elusive, the National Lottery has become the de facto 'last funder standing'.

# So what on earth can we do????



**the economic value** of good parks in terms of economic activity in surrounding areas, value for money, attractiveness to inward investment, and property values;

**the social value** in terms of social cohesion, crime reduction, quality of life, education and health; and

**the environmental value** in terms of biodiversity, carbon capture, pollution and urban drainage.

# 'New' models?

Newcastle...

"This is the first time that a charitable trust has been set up to manage parks and allotments on such a large scale, and I am delighted... Swingeing Government cuts of more than 90 per cent to our parks budgets left us with no option but to look at alternative ways of running our open spaces – spaces that are vital to keeping this city a safe, clean and green environment where people can relax and enjoy their leisure time ...

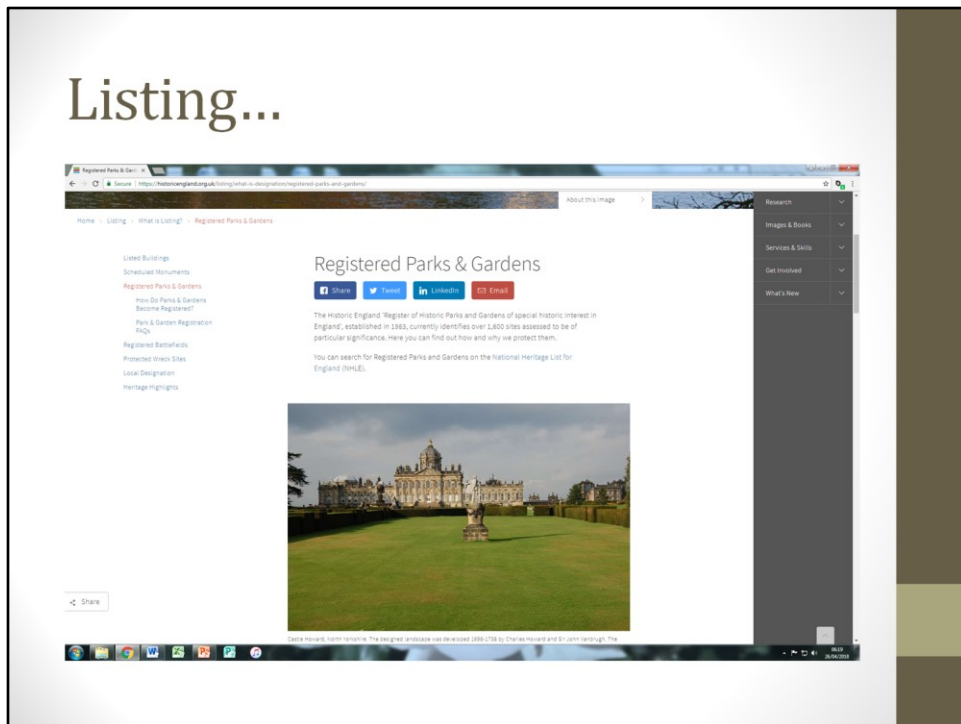
We have worked for many months with the National Trust, Social Finance and Heritage Lottery Fund to bring this plan to life and we are proud of what we have achieved so far...Let me assure people that all money raised in the parks will be spent in the parks and their future remains in public ownership for everyone to enjoy. This new and innovative approach will open up our parks and bring back the days when parks were venues for social and community events...Now we must get on and lay the foundations for a 10-year plan that will nurture and develop the Charitable Trust that will guide our parks and allotments for future generations."

Newcastle Council's Cabinet Member for Culture and Communities, Cllr Kim McGuinness

"The National Trust is very supportive of Newcastle City Council's decision to set up a new independent charity to care for their parks. We believe that setting up a Parks Trust is a great way to secure the public social and health benefits that parks offer for the long term.

Harry Bowell, Director of the North for the National Trust

10-15 million endowment. Needs to be about 10x that.



The protection of parks in the planning system remains weak. Every year, the Gardens Trust receives some 1600 planning applications that affect registered parks and gardens and this figure is expected to rise. Those consultations only relate to registered parks and gardens and the vast majority of public parks are unregistered. Recognition of the national significance of the few must be matched by recognition of the local significance of the many.

A good number of non-registered parks are included on local lists, to which many county gardens trusts have contributed, and these in turn are often the subject of some measure of protection in the local plan. However, there remains a harmful void between the value local people place on their parks and the value placed on them by government, both national and local.

## What to do when the answers are unpopular...

- Organisations (national and local) have official policies. It is frequently difficult if not impossible to have honest and open discussions about funding and esp. funding failure. Seek out the reality via individuals. Even if it's off the record – accurate 'off the record' knowledge is still more valuable to you than inaccurate spin.
- Explore opportunities in fluid systems...  
e.g. Friends groups monetary equivalence?  
Research the terms of land donation/endowment
- Avoid over-romanticising the Victorian funding models!

Friends play a more pivotal role in the promotion and protection of public parks. Their importance is now widely recognised by Government, the HLF and local authorities. Although involvement of local people and communities was always encouraged by the HLF - and indeed the formation of Friends groups is now a condition of Parks for People grants - the loss of local authority personnel and reductions in routine maintenance since 2010 have placed increasing demands on them. While there are many benefits from this direct community involvement, including the cultivation of a sense of ownership among local people who gain a more direct say in the future of their local park, these cannot be taken for granted.

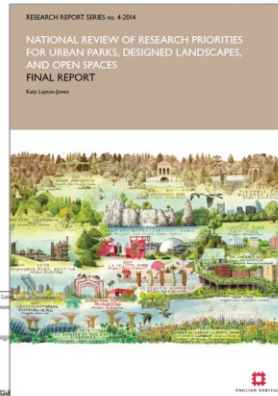
\* Millennium Greens, an initiative by the Countryside Agency to transfer small areas of local authority-owned land to local communities was launched in 1996 with the aim of creating 250 new public open spaces by 2000. Today, many struggle to raise enough money to fund even baseline maintenance tasks, such as grass cutting. The Countryside Agency's successor, Natural England, concluded that too many of the Greens were unsustainable, leading to abandonment. In some instances the local authority has become the trustee of the Green.



# Riding the wave...

- Healthy scepticism
- Be wary of chasing transient policies
- There's no such thing as a free lunch...
- Long term commitments vs. short-term political cycle
- Plan B, Plan C, Plan D.
- Volunteerism is not a substitute for a professional service
- Simply surviving may be an achievement in the coming years.

# Know your enemy...



# A selection of recent studies and reports on funding parks.

- CABESpace, *The Value of Public Space: how high quality parks and public spaces create economic social and environmental value* (2004).
- CABESpace, *Paying for Parks* (2006).
- CABESpace, *Making the Invisible Visible: the real value of park assets*(2009).
- DCLG, *Report of the Select Committee on Public Parks* (2017).
- GreenSpace, *Impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review (interim report)*(2011).
- Harding, Stewart 'Life after funding' *Green Places* 40, (2007)10-12.
- Heritage Lottery Fund, *State of UK Public Parks 2014: Renaissance to Risk* (2014).
- Heritage Lottery Fund, Big Lottery Fund and Nesta, *Learning to Rethink Public Parks* (2016).
- Layton-Jones, Katy, *History of Public Park Funding and Management (1820-2010)* (2016).
- National Audit Office, *Enhancing Urban Green Space* (2006).
- Neal, Peter, *Rethinking Parks. Exploring New Business Models for Parks in the 21st Century* (2013).
- Worpole, Ken *Park Life Revisited* (2012).