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PM ANDY BURNHAM URGED TO PROTECT **ENGLAND'S GREEN OPEN SPACE REVOLUTION** **PIONEERED IN GREATER MANCHESTER**

Andy Burnham has been urged to make the protection of the historic parks and gardens which began England's open space revolution, and which were pioneered in Manchester, one of his first key decisions as Prime Minister.

The call has come from the Gardens Trust, which has written to the outgoing mayor of Greater Manchester, asking him to preserve its role as a statutory consultee in the English planning system.

The Trust, founded in 1966, is the only national charity with a statutory responsibility to protect and conserve our heritage of designed landscapes.

Under previous Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government began a consultation on removing the Gardens Trust's statutory consultee role.

The Trust supports the drive for new housing, but insists this needs to be delivered with expert advice making sure that historic green space supports new communities. It says removing its statutory consultee role would put the nation's

treasure of parks, gardens and green spaces, created and enjoyed over hundreds of years, at immediate risk from poorly-informed development.

It is extremely concerned that these developments would impact on the views to and from parks and gardens and the peace, tranquility and connection to nature they offer.

Green spaces such as historic parks and gardens save the NHS around £111million through the health benefits of spending time in them. Over 90% of people are concerned that the government's plan to build 1.5million new homes could threaten green open space.

The Trust's letter to the new Prime Minister urges him to acknowledge the green space revolution which began in his beloved Manchester and work to protect historic parks and gardens across England from poorly-thought out and intrusive development.

As factories multiplied and the population soared during the Victorian era, Mancunians increasingly recognised that a successful city needed more than industry, housing and transport. It needed parks.

Manchester's 19th-century parks were ambitious and pioneering civic projects, created to improve public health, provide opportunities for recreation and bring communities together. They reflected a bold belief that access to beautiful, well-designed green spaces should be part of everyday urban life.

In 1846, a trio of public parks were opened in the north, west and east :Peel Park(Salford), Queen's Park and Philips Park. Their creation represented a remarkable commitment to investment in green space at a time when many British towns had little or no equivalent provision.

Today, many historic green spaces across the country are on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England.

These places include internationally famous and locally loved parks and gardens such as Hyde Park in London, Painshill in Surrey, Heligan in Cornwall, Chatsworth in Derbyshire, Wicksteed Park in Northamptonshire, Sheffield Botanical Gardens in Yorkshire, and Leazes Park in Newcastle.

In the 1980s, before the Gardens Trust was a statutory consultee, Belhus Park, designed by world-famous Capability Brown in the 18th century and an important Grade II free-to-access community asset, was cut in two by the M25, which dramatically impairs its quality as a landscape and the enjoyment of local people (see attached photos).

The Gardens Trust's Chair, John Watkins, said: "Ending the Gardens Trust's role as statutory consultee would devalue these special places and make them vulnerable to poorly informed development."

"Andy Burnham has a track record on championing the national importance of Greater Manchester. We hope he will support the protection of historic green spaces, yet another example of Greater Manchester leading the rest of the country, for all and future generations to enjoy."

"Without proper consideration of registered parks and gardens in the planning system through our statutory consultee role, the checks and balances of the planning system will be eroded and many much-loved Grade II sites in particular will experience greater vulnerability."

Parks and gardens have key roles in addressing issues facing us all in the 21st century, such as:

- They add hugely to the UK's tourism economy, being one of the biggest drivers in this field, nationally and internationally. Around 20% of total international visitor spend in the UK is on visits to parks or gardens – around £2 billion.
- Help to ameliorate the impacts of climate change.
Parks and gardens, due to the properties of trees, will play an increasing important role by providing shade and cooling islands in and around urban areas.
- Support nature recovery, particularly in our cities, where established older landscapes can provide necessary complex habitats.
- Public parks play an important role in social cohesion by offering space for people to come together and build communities, as well as offering places for wellbeing, play and recreation.
- Parks help reduce demand on the NHS by offering free-to-access places to exercise and enjoy fresh air, critical for health and wellbeing.
- Nurturing opportunity for all, because not only does an active parks and gardens sector support inclusive access to leisure but it also offers a range of accessible career pathways.

You can read more about the role of historic parks and gardens in the 21st century in the Gardens Trust report *Harnessing : Parks and Gardens in the 21st Century: How Historic Landscapes can Support our Today and Tomorrow.*

As a statutory consultee, local planning authorities and the Planning Inspectorate must consult the Gardens Trust in relation to all planning applications that may affect historic designed landscapes on the national

Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England. It is the only consultee for Grade II Registered sites.

In 2024-25 the Gardens Trust only made 69 critical objections to planning applications on a variety of issues, including schemes that would have seen a total of 1,135 new dwellings built on or affecting the sites it protects.

The Gardens Trust receives a Government grant of around £45,000 to support its planning system work. The cost of all local planning authorities having to deliver this service themselves is estimated at £3,692,846 per annum.

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Issued on behalf of the Gardens Trust

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