

## Green Spaces

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This project will look at ways in which green spaces can be protected and enhanced across London, with a view to informing the development of Mayoral work on the Environment Strategy and other relevant policies.

### Background

London is one of the greenest cities in the world with 47 per cent of green space.<sup>1</sup> Benefits of this extensive green space range from the economical to environmental. However due to the cut in local authority budgets the presence and quality of these spaces, along with their associated benefits, are now at risk. The Mayor has made a number of manifesto commitments to protect London's green spaces and will be setting out key policies in a new Environment Strategy next year.

The Environment Committee is conducting an investigation into how green spaces are currently managed and how they can be enhanced to maximise the benefits they offer. The investigation will primarily influence the Environment Strategy and other relevant policies as they develop.



*Map showing only rivers and green space. Source: Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC*

### What is green space and why is it important?

There is no single definition of green space, so for this investigation the committee will focus on areas of vegetation that are currently publicly managed and publicly accessible, be these currently used or unused. Other green spaces, such as those that are privately owned, will be considered relevant on a case-by-case basis.

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<sup>1</sup> 47 per cent of London is green space: Is it time for our capital to become a national park? Independent, 2014

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Green infrastructure is when green spaces are planned, designed and managed to provide environmental, physical, mental, social and economic benefits.

- Environmental benefits of green space include flood water alleviation, green travel routes, water purification, cooling temperatures, pollution management and enhancing biodiversity and ecological resilience. A recent assessment found that London's urban forest provided £2.8 million of storm water alleviation and £126.1 million pollution removal per year.
- Public health benefits include having a positive impact on both physical and mental health. Recent analysis suggested that people experiencing mental distress frequently use physical activities such as walking, gardening and exercise to help lift their mood, reduce stress, provide purpose and meaning, and reduce their vulnerability to depression<sup>2</sup>. Green spaces also provide outdoor spaces for exercise and fitness classes. In Hampstead Heath, almost 150 people gather each Saturday to take part in the free-of-charge 5km run organised by ParkRun<sup>3</sup>.
- Many use green spaces as a meeting place to socialize and playgrounds make a prominent feature of many green spaces in London. Over 80 per cent of local authorities felt that their green spaces promoted community cohesion.<sup>4</sup>
- Research estimated that Clapham Common alone provides £10 to £45 million of benefits from around six million visitors per year.<sup>5</sup>

Increasingly, green space is being valued in monetary terms. This encourages green infrastructure policy and recognition of the potential benefits that individual pieces can provide. It also makes a sufficient business case about the intrinsic worth of green spaces and its potential to save money in areas such as public health. A recent study conducted by Sheffield City Council found that for every pound spent on green spaces, average £34 of services are supplied.<sup>6</sup>

The National Capital Accounts Committee, who seeks to influence governmental policy, supports this analysis of green space and the recent Greater London Authority Green Infrastructure Task Force expressed the need to measure green space in fiscal terms. Currently the GLA Environment teams are developing a Natural Capital Accounting framework in London, which allows benefits to be measured more accurately and held against the cost of maintenance. This also highlights the potential value in sites from seemingly unused space.

### What is the current state of green space in London?

Approximately one third of London's green space is owned by local authorities and other public bodies. In recent years, London boroughs' spending on open spaces has fallen by 18 per cent, with

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<sup>2</sup> Mind, Feel better outside: feel better inside, 2013

<sup>3</sup> Average number of run per week, Hampstead Heath parkrun event statistics, 26/10/2016

<sup>4</sup> Association of Public Service Excellence, State of the Market in Parks and Open Spaces- Survey Result and Analysis, 2015

<sup>5</sup> National Park City, A proposal to make Greater London the world's first National Park City, 2015

<sup>6</sup> Vivid Economics, Revealing the true value of green space in cities: Sheffield's parks natural capital account, 2016

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a drop of more than 10 per cent in 2014/15 alone.<sup>7</sup> Evidence indicates that cuts in funding have led to a reduction in maintenance services and further reliance on the community sector, whilst reducing skilled and knowledgeable council staff to support voluntary groups<sup>8</sup>. A 2016 UK-wide survey found that 78 per cent of friends groups now help with maintenance activities, up from 73 per cent the previous year<sup>9</sup>.

A recent government inquiry submission from a London Friends Group member stated that “London Borough of Enfield would really want to support volunteering...but it is too easily distracted by other demands”. With the associated council providing similar evidence “In 2010 there were six Council Officers whose role was to support the volunteers and help them to deliver their wide range of activities. Since then the cuts to funding have resulted in the reduction of the team to just one officer”<sup>10</sup>.

To address some of these issues, a number of local authorities are considering transferring their management of green spaces from the public sector to private and charitable sectors.<sup>11</sup> For example, the Royal Parks who were previously funded by Department for Culture, Media and Sport, has now become a charitable trust. As explained on the Royal Parks website, “one single charitable body at arm’s length from the government can also present a more compelling case for support to corporate sponsors, private donors and charitable trusts, as well as attracting new volunteers”. The option to open alternative revenue streams, away from statutory bodies, are therefore becoming progressively utilised in London.

### How can we protect and enhance London’s green spaces?

Over the past 20 years parks and green spaces have grown increasingly popular with the communities that they serve. Funding from charities such as Heritage Lottery Fund alone has contributed £850 million. These ameliorative efforts have resulted in a rise in quality and visitors and the opportunity to maximise other beneficial outputs of green spaces. However without clear direction on how the funding deficit will be met and consistent support for those expected to meet these gaps, quality green spaces are at risk. The possibility of this has prompted National Trust to actively recommend and promote a Parks Trust model in cities. They argue that the Parks Trust would provide management for parks and finance them through a model of endowment and enterprise, thereby creating a sustainable financial model based on the value of the green space.

Green spaces can also be protected by enhancing their value. One of the ways to do this it would be to make green spaces ‘multifunctional’, enabling the land to perform a range of functions, such as the provision for healthy recreation whilst performing services to alleviate flood risk through the use of sustainable drainage systems. Making green spaces multifunctional also opens additional revenue streams. An example of this is the jointly funded flood alleviation schemes on parks. Through joint funding from Southwark Council, Environment Agency and Thames Water

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<sup>7</sup> London Councils, The future of London parks, 2016

<sup>8</sup> Evidence submitted to the Communities and Local Government Committee Future of public parks inquiry, 2016

<sup>9</sup> Heritage Lottery Fund, State of UK Public Parks, 2016

<sup>10</sup> Evidence submitted to the Communities and Local Government Committee Future of public parks inquiry, 2016

<sup>11</sup> Heritage Lottery Fund, Public parks under threat, 2014

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Herne Hill and Dulwich, schemes delivered surface water flood protection for over 100 homes at risk and brought investment and improvements to Dulwich Park, Belair Park and the Dulwich Sports Grounds<sup>12</sup>.

The development of London's green spaces also present an opportunity to re-engage the community. A recent survey found that nearly 70 per cent of young people wanted to volunteer to help create better green spaces in their community but only 7 per cent said they currently do.<sup>13</sup>

### Role of the Mayor and the GLA

The Mayor has statutory strategies on biodiversity and on climate change adaptation, as well as the London Plan.

The Mayor's election manifesto included the following pledges<sup>14</sup>

1. Protect nature and play space
2. Protect the green belt, green spaces and play spaces, prioritising development on brownfield sites
3. Strengthen protections for open spaces within the London Plan, including playing fields, Metropolitan Open Land, and our Sites of Importance for Local Nature Conservation and nature reserves
4. Protect wildlife and biodiversity by creating green corridors through the city
5. Make London the first 'National Park City'
6. Set a long term target to make more than 50 per cent of our city green and ensure that all children have access to nature.

In a recent Mayoral response to the reduction in local authority funding for green spaces, the Mayor stated "I will continue to highlight the adverse impact of this and lobby government to ensure local authorities are adequately resourced to deliver a full range of necessary and important local services. I'll also be developing an environmental improvement programme and tree-planting campaign to provide local communities with support to conserve and enhance local green spaces"<sup>15</sup>.

The London Plan describes "A city ... which makes the most of and extends its wealth of open and green spaces, natural environment and waterways, realising its potential for improving Londoners' health, welfare and development". The London Plan also promotes the concept of green infrastructure and states the appropriate distance a home should be from green space.

The All London Green Grid (ALGG) is a green infrastructure policy framework set out in supplementary planning guidance to the London Plan. It has been previously used to promote a shift from grey to green infrastructure to secure environmental, social and economic benefits. The ALGG is currently being reviewed by the new administration.

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<sup>12</sup> Herne Hill, Herne Hill Flood Alleviation Scheme Shortlisted for Award, 2014

<sup>13</sup> BBC News, Young people urged for park-life views, 2016

<sup>14</sup> Sadiq Khan for London, A Greener, Cleaner London, 2016

<sup>15</sup> Mayor's Question Time, London Parks and Open Spaces, 22 Jun 2016

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The previous Mayor launched the Green Infrastructure Task Force following the publication of the London Infrastructure Plan 2050. Its final report concluded that green infrastructure must be considered as essential as the city's transport, energy, water, waste and digital infrastructure, and made several recommendations for delivering a more coherent green infrastructure across Greater London. The previous Mayor also provided £2 million of funding to help establish 100 pocket parks to improve streets, squares, parks, and canal and riverside spaces across London.

### Non-GLA bodies

Green infrastructure is addressed in national policy via The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature White Paper and the National Planning Policy Framework. These policies explain the intrinsic value of natural capital and provide a framework for achieving sustainable development through green infrastructure.

The Natural Capital Committee is an independent advisory committee advising the government on natural capital. Now in its second term, the committee will be focussing on the government's 25 year environment plan. It has previously championed natural capital accounting.

The National Park City Campaign, a campaign to get London recognised as a National Park by Natural England, has gained both public and political traction. The campaign suggests applying National Park principles to the natural environment in Greater London.

Heritage Lottery Fund, National Endowment for Science, Technology and Arts and Big Lottery Fund supported 11 local authorities through their Rethinking Parks programme, giving them time and money to trial fundraising ideas such as using jobseekers or volunteers for maintenance and creating charities and endowment models to run parks. Hackney built a pop-up, translucent meeting space for local businesses and proceeds from the space paid for park maintenance.<sup>16</sup>

The Communities and Local Government select committee has launched an inquiry into public parks. This will examine the impact of reduced local authority budgets on open spaces and consider the risk to their existence. Evidence has been published and a selection is included in this report. Oral evidence will be heard in October 2016.

### Previous and current Assembly work

The Environment Committee heard from biodiversity and green infrastructure experts on 4 February 2016. Discussion included biodiversity and green infrastructure elements of the Environment Strategy under the next mayoralty and how the report of the Green Infrastructure Task Force may be taken forward.

The London Assembly Housing Committee is currently investigating the promotion of biodiversity in new housing developments. It will examine what the Mayor could do – through the London Plan

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<sup>16</sup> Guardian, Reimagining park life: how Britain's green spaces are scrambling for cash, 2016

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– to better protect, maintain, enhance and encourage opportunities for biodiversity in new housing developments. A draft report should be available by December 2016.

### Scope of the investigation

The investigation will cover the following themes:

Theme	Description
Extent	The Environment Committee will investigate the extent of green space in London; establishing current ownership, usage and funding pressures. The Committee will utilise existing data to provide a baseline measure of green space in Greater London, as well as highlighting gaps in knowledge.
Governance and management	The Committee will review existing and future governance and management models of public green spaces. By using best practice models, the investigation will identify opportunities for better collaboration and co-ordination of green infrastructure. Research will focus on using the community to govern and/or manage public green space and stating what support is needed for this model.
Valuation	The Committee will consider the benefits of green space and what the Mayor can do to support these. The investigation will include current studies into the benefits of green spaces such as the Natural Capital Accounting framework for London and research into the social capital provided by green space.
Maximising the benefits	The Committee will consider the variety of roles and purposes of urban green spaces by visiting sites and hearing from user groups and experts. It will seek to recommend ways to enhance green space. Where green spaces already have a range of functions available, the Committee will work to suggest ways of enhancing and making these accessible to a wider range of the public.

### Terms of reference

1. To examine Mayoral policy and programmes regarding London's public green spaces, focussing on:
  - a. Extent
  - b. Governance and management
  - c. Valuation
  - d. Maximising the benefits
2. To contribute to the development of the Mayor's Environment Strategy and other relevant policies and programmes.

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Impact Category	Evidence of impact
Challenging	Challenging governance, support and development plans for green spaces.
Influencing	Making clear statements about the benefits of green spaces and how these can be maximised. Investigating green space management and providing best practice examples for the benefit of green infrastructure. Influencing Environment Strategy.
Engaging	Providing additional channels for stakeholders to contribute to City Hall policy making in this area. Engaging and promoting the benefits of green space, wider green infrastructure and National Park City Campaign. Giving Londoners a voice and understanding local needs for green spaces.

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### Stages of the investigation

- 1. Further desk research** (October onwards). Could include:
  - Using available secondary data to map London's green space
  - Reviewing current and future governance structures and management of green spaces across London
  - Researching the benefits of quality green space in London
  - Listing and show casing multifunctional uses of green space
- 2. A call for views and information in writing** (November - December). We are especially keen to hear from:
  - Local authorities, London Boroughs Biodiversity Forum and the London Councils
  - Environment Agency
  - Natural England
  - Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC
  - Natural Capital Committee
  - Academics and other independent experts
  - Third sector organisations such as the London Wildlife Trust, Open Space Trust, National Park City Campaign, Friends of the Earth, Groundwork and Parks for London
  - Operating trusts such as the Wandle Valley and Lea Valley Leisure Trust
  - User groups such as fitness, dog-walkers and parent-child groups.

Questions on which views and information are sought are set out below. More general contributions would also be welcomed.

### Questions seeking written views and information

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1. What models of governance and management of green space exist, and which of them represent good practice? Contributors could consider volunteers, community governance, charity and private management as well as public sector management.
2. What could the GLA do to support the governance and management of green space?
3. What could the GLA do to promote better 'green infrastructure' thinking across London and in individual boroughs?
4. How would documenting the benefits of green spaces assist in making the most of them?
5. How would it help to put monetary values on these benefits?
6. What barriers do you face in trying to make better use of green space?
7. How could the GLA encourage multifunctional uses of green space in London?
8. How can currently un-utilised green spaces (scraps of land and quiet corners) be brought in to multi-functional use by communities?

### 3. Site visit (Either November or early spring).

#### Suggested options

- Mayesbrook Park, Barking & Dagenham- UK's first 'Climate Change Park'. The project transformed a rundown 45 hectare park to show how public green space can help a community to cope with the risks from climate change, such as increased flooding and higher summer temperatures.
- Queen Caroline Estate, Hammersmith- project that provided community with green space, including meeting space and sustainable drainage systems, from previously unused land.
- Streatham Common Co-operative - local social enterprise, not-for-profit management of Streatham Common.

4. **Meeting** (December). The Committee has allocated this meeting and half of the next to this project. The first meeting could include the GLA Environment Team reporting on initial findings of the Natural Capital Accounting pilot, representatives from the Natural Capital Committee and Parks for London. The purpose of this meeting would be to reflect on the use and value of green spaces.

5. **Meeting** (January 2017). A second meeting in the investigation could cover governance and diversification of green space, or could pick up on issues identified at the first meeting that merit further investigation.

6. **Report** (April). The Committee plans to publish a report setting out the findings and recommendations from the investigation.