

Richmond and Bushy Parks Forum
Transfer of The Royal Parks to the Mayor of London
Points to be incorporated in transfer arrangements

The Localism Bill, secondary legislation or a binding agreement between central government and the Mayor should set out mandatory requirements for the future management of the Royal Parks. The following points should be included:

1. The 8 Royal Parks should be kept together
 - Bushy Park should include the Longford River
2. TRP should be kept as a single, semi-independent entity and retain its own management support functions, such as property management, commercial, marketing, finance, HR, IT
 - Individual parks should keep their own management teams
 - Current Park Managers should be retained
3. There should be a central TRP Board, with executive powers
 - The Board should include representatives from local Boards, and external experts in ecology, historic buildings/landscape and managing large parks
 - Its executive powers should include approval of TRP's strategy, policies, budget, main spending programmes and significant new initiatives
4. There should be local statutory consultative Boards for each Park or group of Parks
 - Richmond and Bushy could have a combined Board
 - Local Boards should include representatives from local councils, local user, wildlife, friends, amenity and conservation groups, concessionaires, park management and outside expertise (e.g. for RP/BP in managing SSSI/NNRs)
 - TRP/MoL should have a statutory duty to consult local Boards on all matters
5. There should be specific commitments to environmental protection.
 - A commitment to get SSSI status for Bushy Park, with funds allocated.
 - No further cuts in maintenance of green spaces within the Royal Parks
6. There should be protection against further significant commercialisation
 - No concerts, new sports pitches, intensive sports or national events in RP/BP
 - Revenue raising only from options with low environmental impact
7. Central government funding and commercial income should be ring-fenced, i.e. only able to be spent on the Parks
 - It should include a programme and resources for reducing the £56 million maintenance backlog

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Notes to the Points

- Introduction. Prompted by the lack of consultation and information over the proposed transfer of the Royal Parks to the Mayor, the Richmond and Bushy Parks Forum was formed with a mission “to provide input from a wide range of local stakeholders in the two Parks on the governance, protection and enhancement of the Parks for current and future generations of park users”. It comprises 30 bodies – Friends, users, local amenity and conservation groups, and organisations operating in the two Parks.
- Introduction. Strong governance and protections are important because the Mayor will have fewer constraints on his action from the Assembly than the Minister currently has from Parliament. The Royal Parks agency is currently part of DCMS and the Minister is accountable to Parliament, which can override his decisions (as the Lords attempted to do on parking charges). The London Assembly does not have similar powers over the Mayor; it can only scrutinise his actions and vote down the whole annual budget (not individual items). The Localism Bill proposes that the Assembly can override the Mayor’s strategies with a two-thirds majority, but this is still less power than Parliament has with its simple majority.
- Point 1: Longford River was built as a canal to feed Bushy Park (and Hampton Court), and keeping it in TRP will ensure the supply of water. It is a green or natural ecological corridor linking the River Colne with the River Thames, and important for fish, invertebrates and water fowl.
- Point 2: At present TRP is a semi-independent agency within DCMS (of which it is legally part). It has all its own management support functions (e.g. ecology, property management, commercial, marketing, education, finance, HR and IT), although it relies on DCMS for some expert advice, e.g. in legal and pensions; even so, it suffers from some bureaucracy and sometimes slow/poor response by the centre to park management. There is talk from MoL of changing TRP from a semi-independent agency into a department within the GLA - because making it (in GLA terms) a “functional body” or its equivalent would be legally difficult – and merging some or all of its functions other than direct park management into other GLA departments. This would undermine the identity and effectiveness of TRP, introduce another layer of bureaucracy and poor response, and risk losing valuable expertise; also, the GLA administration has a poor reputation for effectiveness. Therefore, a way should be found for TRP to remain as a separate entity, retaining all its present management support functions.
- Point 2: The current structure of park management teams should be retained to ensure local management is responsive to the needs of each park and its stakeholders. Current park managers should be retained for the foreseeable future (say 3-5 years), subject to normal performance review, to provide continuity and expertise to implement any changes.
- Point 3: The 23 July agreement between the Mayor, the London Assembly and London councils about the central Board is for 4 Mayoral appointments, including the Chairman, and 3 council reps; the Mayor’s office has recently agreed to add a Palace nominee. This is narrow in terms of both stakeholders and expertise. The Board should include representatives of local stakeholders (say one person from each local Board) to ensure local input, and expert appointees from outside bodies, e.g. the ecology member from Natural England, historic buildings expertise from English Heritage, large parks management expertise from the

National Trust or the Corporation of London (which manages Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest); all of these need to be non-political appointees. Such a structure is not unusual; for example, Hampstead Heath, which is managed by the City of London, has a Management Board with a majority of City representatives, but also representatives from local stakeholders, Natural England and English Heritage.

- Point 3: The Board's executive powers would cover TRP's strategy, policies, budget, main spending programmes and large new initiatives. The Mayor would still have the power to direct the Board to do something if required. The alternative of a purely consultative body does not provide constraints on the Mayor - it can be ignored by him, with its only recourse being to make its disagreement public.
- Point 4: Local Boards for each park or group of parks ensure that local stakeholder views and knowledge are input to TRP decisions, and it is responsive to local conditions, thereby avoiding situations such as parking charges. The Forum has agreed that there can be one Board for Bushy and Richmond. Members should all be selected and appointed by stakeholder groups on a basis agreed when the Boards are set up. The Boards would be statutory consultative, i.e. TRP/MoL would have to consult them on matters affecting that park or group of parks. Hampstead Heath is an example of such a statutory consultative arrangement, and there is a good working relationship between the Management Board, park management and local stakeholders.
- Point 5: Richmond Park has good environmental protection from its status as a SSSI, NNR, SAC and local Conservation Area; of these the most important is SSSI. Bushy Park has been considered for SSSI status and there was the intention to designate it in 2011. Cuts in both TRP and Natural England make this problematic, and the Mayor should be required to pursue it, with the necessary funding. TRP already prioritises maintenance of green spaces, but spending is still being cut by 12% under the CSR. Green spaces are the defining characteristic of both Richmond and Bushy Parks and should be protected from further cuts.
- Point 6: Reports suggest MoL sees the Royal Parks as prime entertainment and sporting venues; certainly its application to put large screens in Regent's Park for the World Cup and Assembly members' demands for more football pitches are not a good omen. Entertainment and more sports in the two parks would damage their ecology and tranquillity, and urbanise them further, while raising relatively little money.
- Point 6: TRP is currently testing new revenue raising options, including a farmers' market and selling Christmas trees in Richmond Park. Both of these small-scale activities raise very little money (it would need 30-50 of these a year to offset all of the funding cuts in Richmond Park). But cumulatively they have a major impact on the character and environment of the Park. Revenue raising should only come from large, low environmental impact activities.
- Point 7. TRP's income comes from two sources – government funding (currently 60% of income but reducing to under 50% with the CSR cuts), and commercial income (the rest). Both sources should be ring-fenced for the Parks, i.e. it cannot be spent on anything else and the Mayor cannot divert them to other uses. The case for government funding being ring-fenced is obvious. Commercial income is derived from assets that central government has entrusted to the Mayor through the transfer, so it should also be ring-fenced.

- Point 7: With the transfer of the Royal Parks, DCMS is also transferring a maintenance backlog of £56 million, mainly for buildings, which has reduced from £64 million in the last 2-3 years. There should be an agreed programme and resources for eliminating the backlog, maybe over 5-10 years, funded jointly by central government and MoL.

Richmond and Bushy Parks Forum

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