



The
PARKS
Alliance

MAKING PARKS COUNT
THE CASE FOR PARKS



Parks: The Smart Investment

MAKING PARKS COUNT



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MAKING PARKS COUNT

Introduction

The COVID19 pandemic has undoubtedly changed the way we live our lives now and for the foreseeable future. During the 'lock down' parks became the only public open spaces where millions of people could exercise, relax and meet others for the limited periods allowed. At the time these spaces were quite rightly championed by politicians and scientists (including the Prime Minister and each of the devolved nation's Chief Medical Officers) as key to maintaining people's physical and mental health as evidenced by numerous studies over many years. Many people used their local parks for the first time during the 'lock down' and as restrictions were eased parks became busier than they had ever been previously. Not only has the pandemic changed the relationship between people and their local parks for ever it has underlined the multiple and proven benefits these spaces provide for health and wellbeing as well as the environment.

As we move from managing the pandemic to planning the recovery the government has set out its commitment to a science-led, clean and resilient recovery aimed at creating employment in the industries of the future whilst ensuring the linked challenges of public health, climate change, and biodiversity are addressed. This Business Case was completed just prior to the COVID19 lock down. Its primary purpose was to demonstrate the value of parks to communities and government and set out how local places could make their parks count. I hope now that the Business Case can be used, by government and stakeholders across the parks sector, to ensure parks play an important role in the 'Green Recovery'. The evidence of the multiple benefits of parks is set out including the extraordinary value that they create in supporting public health, tackling climate change and increasing biodiversity as well as creating the jobs of the future. It also highlights the things local places can do now to secure these benefits for their communities.

To guarantee that the multiple benefits of parks are secured for the next generation parks must be part of the Green Recovery. After years of underfunding and neglect they need investment to bring them up to standard and ensure that everyone can enjoy and benefit from a great park. A truly 'Green Recovery' will invest in the green space sector as an industry of the future uniquely placed to tackle the 21st century challenges of public health, climate change and environmental protection and one that provides a significant return for the investment made.

It's time to make parks count.

Matthew Bradbury,
Chair of the Parks Alliance
June 2020.



THE CASE FOR PARKS



Parks are a smart investment. But to realise these returns for their communities, places need to make their parks count.

Why parks are a smart investment

For every £1 spent on parks in England an estimated £7 in additional value is generated for the health and wellbeing of local people and the local environment. Parks provide natural benefits to the communities valued at £6.6bn annually including £2bn of avoided health costs. These benefits are worth £140 per year for every urban resident. Parks are a really smart low cost investment in civic infrastructure. But these returns are not the only reason for places to invest in parks.

Why parks matter now

Parks have never mattered more to local people. They are the most visited green space in the country and local people's most favoured community space. They provide a range of 'hidden' natural benefits from improving health and wellbeing and enjoying getting together with family and friends to avoiding pollution and reducing temperatures.

Parks matter to places too. They are often top of resident surveys as the best feature of local areas. But they also provide important public spaces for people to come together helping to strengthen communities.

At a national level the government is committed to improving the wellbeing of people living in disadvantaged areas and narrowing the productivity gap between regions in England. Plans are being drawn up to invest in key infrastructure across the regions and new place based programmes are already underway investing in the prosperity of towns and cities across England. At the same time government has set ambitious targets for making people more active and improving their mental health; for cleaner air and reducing obesity; for enhancing the natural world and protecting the environment; and for delivering cleaner economic growth and greater productivity in places across the country.

Given the returns on investment made by good quality parks they provide a smart investment choice. Compared to 'grey' infrastructure parks offer a relatively low cost, low risk investment that will not only deliver on local priorities but also provide a long term return for the public purse.

Making parks count

For places to make these smart investments in their parks they must understand why parks matter. In recent times, the quality of some parks has fallen, the amount of urban green space reduced and opportunities for seizing the proven benefits lost. To turn this around places must recognise and demonstrate the true value of parks and the benefits these key natural assets provide to local people. They must provide the leadership to create a shared vision for their parks and ensure future investment decisions are made based on the value they create not how much they cost.



Why Parks are a Smart Investment

Natural Capital Values for Parks in England

- Annual economic value £6.6 billion
- Annual saving to the NHS of £2 billion
- Asset value of over £200 billion
- Every £1 spent provides between £7 and £10 of quantified benefit

As towns compete to attract investment, the presence of parks, squares and gardens becomes a vital.

Urban green spaces raise nearby house prices by an average of £2,500.

Mental ill health costs the UK £1058m pa

London's parks alone help avoid an estimated £370m of mental health related costs each year.

Disconnected communities could be costing the English economy £27 billion every year.

Nearly half of all people say that parks are the most important public space. They create opportunities for social interaction in ways that enhance health and wellbeing.

An 'urban heat island' effect is created in cities by solar radiation trapped within the built environment.

Parks in England provide an urban cooling benefit of £4.8m pa.

High Streets are struggling. The focus of high streets is shifting away from retail to food and leisure services.

Parks are one of the top priorities when addressing the factors that influence viability and vitality and viability of high streets.

Increases in greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide trap heat, warm the globe and drive climate change.

The value of carbon sequestration by trees in public parks in England is estimated at £9m per year

Air pollution is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK, causing up to 36,000 deaths.

The benefits of air pollutant removal by trees in public parks in England is estimated at £60m per year.

The number of species worldwide is in sustained mass decline, threatening the environment.

Parks are among the most species rich types of urban green spaces and 1,500 species of UK's pollinators deliver an estimated £680m in value to the economy.

A third of people are disconnected from the places where they live.

There is a social return of £8.60 for every £1 invested in nature conservation volunteering.

Every year physical inactivity costs the UK around £1bn. Active visits to Parks in England result in £2bn in avoided health costs.

The proportion of impermeable surfacing in towns and cities has risen by 22% since 2001.

Urban green spaces store and filter water, reducing the risk of flooding and improving water quality.



Why parks matter

Figure 7 Parks help address the big policy issues of the day



How to make parks count

Figure 8 Making Parks Count Framework





Figure 1 People, Place and Parks



Figure 2 Introducing Natural Capital and Natural Capital Accounting

A natural capital approach is about thinking of nature as an asset, or set of assets like parks, that benefit people. The ability of natural capital assets to provide goods and services is determined by their quality, quantity and location. These in turn can be affected by background pressures, management practices and drivers of demand. Understanding nature as an asset which provides flows of services to deliver benefits provides a framework to manage it well to deliver for society's needs. Decision makers can more easily consider how investment in environmental assets, such as parks, contributes to wider societal aims and trade-offs which affect the quality or quality of assets.

Natural capital accounting is increasingly being used to provide an overall assessment of the value of a stock of parks in an area. It provides a snapshot of the value of parks expressed in annual flow terms (parks provide £ million services per year) or as capital asset value (the lifetime value of parks is ££ million).¹⁶

WHY PARKS MATTER

People, places and parks

People love their local parks. They connect people to the natural world and are at the heart of life in many towns and cities, providing places for people to enjoy the outdoors, exercise their pets, keep fit and meet their neighbours.

Good quality parks are proven to improve people's mental and physical health. 'More than half of the UK population visit their local parks at least once a month.'¹⁷ Gardens, parks and woodlands are used more than just about any other facility for recreation * with urban parks alone generating over 1.5 billion visits in 2019.¹⁸ No wonder over two thirds of people think parks are the most important public space in their community where they can meet and mix creating stronger communities.¹⁹

Parks are also incredibly important to places. They form part of a place's essential physical infrastructure alongside roads, homes, schools and railways. Here they function as important natural assets to local places providing a range of natural services and environmental benefits including flood alleviation, tackling climate change and improving air quality.²⁰ Good quality parks are also cultural assets making places more attractive and desirable bringing in visitors, workers and businesses boosting the local economy and providing jobs.²¹

Parks matter because they can provide a range of benefits that support prosperous and resilient places and the health and wellbeing of local people.

The government is committed to 'levelling up' across the country, addressing inequalities in health and wellbeing, for people living in the most disadvantaged places in England. This is beginning to be reflected in policy terms with place based programmes such as the Towns Fund, the Future High Streets Fund and the Cultural

Investment Fund being launched. Health and social care continues to focus on prevention moving from dealing with the consequences of poor health to promoting the conditions for good health and wellbeing. These are examples of place and people based programmes that are offer opportunities for future investment into local parks.

To realise the potential of parks for their communities, local places can take a number of actions. They can ensure parks are properly recognised in their place-based infrastructure plans, in their local economic development strategies and their plans to tackle climate change and improve the local environment. They can also ensure parks feature in their plans to support the health and well-being of their local residents and their efforts to build stronger communities. Understanding the broader outcomes parks support and the local policy objectives they help achieve will support this approach. But equally important will be understanding the value of parks as a stock of assets and ensuring this is factored into investment decisions.

The estimated 27,000 parks and green spaces in England²² represent a stock of natural capital. (See fig 2). They provide a flow of natural benefits directly to local people and the places they live. Taking a natural capital approach these benefits are estimated to be worth over £200bn to society over the next 60 years. The annual economic value of these benefits is estimated to be over £6.6 billion or seven times the current spending on parks meaning they are worth £119 a year to every single resident of England.²³ This represents a significant return on investment. Parks are a smart investment and this is why parks matter.





Figure 3 Boosting physical health outcome - Active Parks Birmingham

Active Parks uses local city parks and greenspaces to create opportunities for Birmingham's residents to participate in a wide range of fun physical activities to improve their health and wellbeing. The informal flexible nature of the sessions mean they are attractive to some groups that traditionally have lower rates of participation in sport and physical activity.^{xxx} The societal value placed on the Be Active programme was greater than the operation cost therefore the Be Active physical activity intervention results in a net benefit to society^{xxx}.

Parks are good for people's health and reduce the burden on local health services

Natural environments have been shown to influence health in a variety of ways and there is clear evidence to suggest an association between living in greener environments and a range of physical, mental and other health outcomes.^{xi}

Increasing the use of good quality green space for all social groups is likely to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities.^{xii} Every £1 spent on parks creates over £2 in additional value in physical health benefits.^{xiii}

What's the Problem	Why Parks Matter
<p>Physical inactivity is responsible for 1 in 6 deaths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical activity helps prevent and manage over 20 chronic health conditions, while physical inactivity costs the NHS in the UK around £1 billion per year (including costs to wider society £7.4 billion a year).^{xiv} The additional cost to the healthcare system of the people most likely to reduce their exercise levels as a result of a decline in greenspace is estimated to be £23.6 million per year.^{xv} 	<p>Good quality parks get people active</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessing and using natural environments is associated with higher rates of physical activity and activity in natural environments is more beneficial to health than that undertaken in other environments.^{xvi} The welfare value of parks visits is estimated at £4.5 billion per year with an asset value of £118 billion. Active visits to parks in England result in £2 billion of avoided costs of ill-health every year, providing an asset value of £81 billion.^{xvii}
<p>One in four adults and one in 10 children experience mental illness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental ill health is the single largest cause of disability in the UK.^{xviii} Mental ill health has an estimated annual cost of £105.2 billion as well as £34.9 billion in lost working hours.^{xix} 	<p>Parks connect people to nature improving mental well being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parks can provide a natural environment to support mental wellbeing directly through the restorative effect of nature.^{xx} London's parks avoid an estimated £370 million of mental health related costs each year.^{xxi} Birmingham's parks and green spaces provide an estimated £10 million in annual mental health benefits.^{xxii}



Figure 4 Boosting mental health outcomes - Myplace

Myplace is an exciting and innovative ecotherapy project delivered by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust in partnership with the Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust. Myplace empowers young people, adults and their communities to connect with local environments in order to learn new skills, build resilience and improve their physical health and mental wellbeing. Research has shown that such activities can reduce stress, anxiety and many low level mental health conditions whilst also improving physical fitness, health and wellbeing.^{xxx}

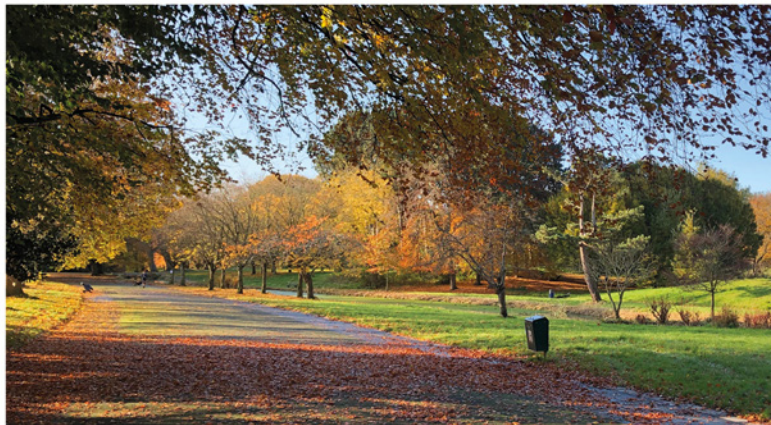


Figure 5 Tackling climate change - Mayesbrook Park Barking and Dagenham

The Mayesbrook Park project demonstrates how a green infrastructure approach to urban river restoration is a strong alternative to traditional hard engineering. By using green infrastructure to address flood-water management, the project has created an attractive public amenity that limits the effects of climate change producing a long-term return to society of at least £7 for every £1 spent. The restoration of the Mayes Brook river provided a catalyst for changing the static and neglected feel of the park landscape improving the environmental services of the urban river, increasing biodiversity, can be linked with improvements in the park users' experience.⁴⁴⁴

Parks help tackle climate change and protect the environment

The impact of climate change leading to rising temperatures, increasing air pollution and declining biodiversity - create risks to the environment, health and the economy.

The impacts are concentrated on the most vulnerable, contributing to health inequalities. In recognition of this, the vast majority of councils have declared a 'climate emergency' and many have ambitions to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030.⁴⁴⁵ The Committee on Climate Change recommends the introduction of an urban greenspace target to ensure towns and cities are adapted to more frequent heatwaves in the future and that the 25-Year Environment Plan goals are met.⁴⁴⁶

Parks provide flows of natural benefits including flood management, heat reduction, carbon capture and pollution control, which in turn reduces the burden on the public purse.⁴⁴⁷

When assessed over their productive lifetime, green infrastructure investments, including parks, are a very low-risk policy response to climate-related challenges compared to major physical infrastructure projects.⁴⁴⁸

Many councils have developed Climate Change plans and strategies that include developing and investing in more parks to help mitigate carbon emissions and rising temperatures.⁴⁴⁹





What's the Problem

Urban heat is a risk to lives and the economy

➤ An 'urban heat island' effect is created in our towns and cities by loss of vegetation, waste heat from buildings and vehicles, and solar radiation trapped within the built environment.^{xxxx}

Urban areas are major contributors to greenhouse gas emissions.

➤ Increases in greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide trap heat, warm the globe and drive climate change. The effects of increased urbanisation, such as increased temperatures and flooding, are exaggerated by the impacts of climate change.^{xxxxiv}

Declining biodiversity threatens our economy and environment

➤ The number of species worldwide is in sustained mass decline,^{xxxxvi} threatening the environment as well as the economy. For example, the UK's 1,500 species of pollinators deliver an estimated £680 million annual value to our economy.^{xxxxviii}

Air pollution has high health risks and costs

➤ Air pollution is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK, causing up to 36,000 deaths each year and risks to children's respiratory health,^{xi} and estimated health and social care costs of at least £42.88 million.^{xii}

Urban greenspace is declining increasing flood risk

➤ Urban greenspace reduces flood risk but continues to decline, from 63% in 2001 to 55% in 2018. The proportion of impermeable surfacing in towns and cities, which increases flood risk, has risen by 22% since 2001.^{xiii}

Why Parks Matter

Parks reduce urban heat

➤ Greenspace is an important mitigation measure for managing overheating as it can provide shading and reduce the Urban Heat Island effect.^{xxxx}

➤ Parks in England provide an urban cooling benefit estimated at £48m per year, with a 60 year asset value of £3.4 billion.^{xxxxii}

Parks help capture carbon

➤ Parks and greenspaces are the main urban land use type that contribute to carbon storage in cities.^{xxxxv}

➤ The value of carbon sequestration by trees in public parks in England is estimated at £9m per year, with a present value of £523m over 60 years.^{xxxxvi}

Parks promote biodiversity

➤ Urban parks are among the most species rich types of urban green spaces for all species groups.^{xxxxviii}

Parks can remove air pollutants

➤ Parks and urban vegetation, if carefully designed, can successfully remove air pollutants at a local scale. The benefits of air pollutant removal by trees in public parks in England is estimated at £60 million per year, with an asset value of £2.4 billion over 60 years.^{xix}

Parks can mitigate flood risk and improve water quality

➤ Urban green spaces store and filter water, reducing the risk of flooding and improving water quality in streams, lakes and rivers.^{xiv}

➤ Urban green space can provide essential benefits to flood management and co-benefits to society. Investment in landscape conservation for example is cost-efficient and provides improved infrastructure solutions.^{xiv}





Figure 6 Building social relationships - Improving Wellbeing through Urban Nature (IWUN)

Improving Wellbeing through Urban Nature (IWUN) is a three year research project aiming to find out more about how Sheffield's natural environment can improve the health and wellbeing of the city's residents, and especially those with disproportionately high levels of poor health. Its findings included five principles for policymaking.

Green infrastructure is social infrastructure as well as physical. It is a vital part of how people experience urban life.

A city's network of parks and open spaces supports mental wellbeing and social inclusion as well as supporting biodiversity, cleaner air, flood relief and urban cooling.

The ecological and the social are interrelated. Habitats should be planned to support both human and non-human wellbeing, paying attention to the ways people connect with nature.

The richer the experience of 'nature' that people have, the more likely it is to enhance their mental health.

Wildlife, especially a wide variety of bird life, and planting that provides interest throughout the year, increases the wellbeing benefits of natural spaces.

It is not enough just to calculate the amount of green space in an area: quality and ease of access matter too. Poor quality spaces that are lacking in biodiversity and intimidating to reach will not support mental wellbeing or encourage use.



Parks support social connections and promote community cohesion

Shared spaces, including parks, are a key pillar in the Government's Integrated Communities Strategy, loneliness strategy and the Communities Framework.^{36a}

Parks and green spaces that provide the opportunity for local people to participate in activities or gatherings can improve social interactions and increase social networks.^{36b,c,d,e}

What's the Problem	Why Parks Matter
<p>Social isolation and loneliness is widespread and can have damaging impacts on health and wellbeing</p> <p>A third of people are disconnected from the place where they live. 'Disconnected communities could be costing the English economy £27 billion every year over half of which may be attributed to the value of lost neighbourliness and health benefits.'³⁷</p>	<p>Parks provide people's favourite communal spaces</p> <p>Nearly half of people say parks are amongst the most important public spaces.³⁸ They create opportunities for social interaction and inclusion which may be particularly valuable for marginalised groups³⁹ and cultivate social cohesion in ways that enhance health and wellbeing.³⁹</p> <p>Parks provide people's favourite communal spaces</p> <p>There is a social return on investment value of £8.50 for every £1 spent, for people with average to high wellbeing at baseline, who were part of a nature conservation volunteering programme.³⁹</p>





Figure 7 Attracting Inward Investment - Winckley Square Preston.

Winckley Square's historic gardens were sympathetically restored in October 2016. The restoration was sensitive to the square's heritage taking into account the trees and biodiversity, archaeology, drainage, community involvement, recreation, volunteering and education. The £1.2million project was funded through lottery grants and smaller grants and contributions from partners. The project was led by Winckley Square Community Interest Company a CIC created by a group of Preston business people local to Winckley. The CIC was created to support the regeneration of the area and now manages the square with a range of partners. The restoration project involved Groundwork, Preston City Council, Lancashire County Council, Preston BID and Preston Historical Society. The square is now recognised as an important asset in encouraging inward investment. Invest in Central Lancashire (created by the Central Lancashire City Deal) describes the square as an established and highly sought-after location for high value professional, legal and accountancy businesses, with new creative and digital companies recently choosing it as their preferred location and the wider area as buoyant following the transformation of the historic gardens.³⁴

Parks are good for business and attract investment

Parks are also good for the local economy, making places more attractive to businesses and workers, increasing local property values and providing valuable jobs and opportunities for volunteering.

Well managed green spaces can contribute to the economy in many ways and this can enhance the desirability of an area as a place to live, work, play and invest.^{35,36}

What's the Problem	Why Parks Matter
<p>Cities and towns have to compete for investment</p> <p>As towns increasingly compete with one another to attract investment, the presence of good parks, squares, gardens and other public spaces becomes a vital business and marketing tool.³⁷</p> <p>Many city centres and high streets are struggling. The focus of high streets in successful city centres is gradually shifting away from retail to a greater emphasis on food and leisure services.³⁸</p>	<p>Good quality parks and public realm attracts businesses and investment into cities</p> <p>Increasing the attractiveness of an area through investment in high-quality parks, increases inward investment and increases the number of visitors attracted to, and spending in, the local area.³⁹</p> <p>Good quality parks bring people into town centres, increasing footfall</p> <p>Recreational space including parks is one of the top priorities when addressing the factors that influence vitality and viability of High Streets.⁴⁰</p> <p>Good quality parks bring people into town centres, increasing footfall</p> <p>Good quality parks make places attractive to live and work. Urban green spaces raise nearby house prices by an average of £2,500.⁴¹</p>



Winckley Square Preston.





Parks help address the big policy issues of the day

There is irrefutable evidence that shows parks positively contribute to the health and wellbeing of local people and the prosperity of local places.

For every £1 spent on Parks in England an estimated £7 in additional value for health and well-being and the environment is generated.

These benefits are worth £140 a year to every single urban resident of England.¹⁰⁰

Investing in parks not only returns a substantial economic benefit and significant public value it also helps places address a range of public policy objectives.

At a national level challenging targets have been set that will require action at the local level not only to enable delivery but also to secure the necessary investment.

The NHS Plan aims to provide exercise programmes to tens of thousands more patients with heart problems, preventing up to 14,000 premature deaths and help 380,000 more people get therapy for depression and anxiety by 2023/24.¹⁰¹ Public Health England aim to deliver healthier weights amongst people, cleaner air and better mental health.¹⁰² The 25 Year Environment Plan aims for environmental net gain over the next 25 years¹⁰³ and the government has set a target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050.¹⁰⁴ The environmental protection is at the heart of the UK's Industrial Strategy priority for 'Clean Growth' and increasing productivity.¹⁰⁵ These targets simply won't be achieved without good quality parks accessible to all. Good quality parks won't be achieved unless local action is taken to make parks count.



MAKING PARKS COUNT

Despite compelling evidence the full benefits of parks are still not widely understood and therefore they are often taken for granted.

They are often measured purely on their costs and not their benefits and this can lead to disinvestment and failure to capitalise on the wider benefits and opportunities. As with any asset, failure to invest in maintenance leads to poor performance and reduced returns.

Changing the way parks are perceived is critical to unlocking their potential. Parks should be seen as natural capital - key natural assets and essential infrastructure that supports a place's economic, social and environmental priorities. Estimating the value of parks using a Natural Capital

approach enables decision makers to understand their contribution to places and people as well as the impact of changes in resourcing of the parks service. It also helps bring the right decision makers together, creating better and stronger partnerships, opportunities for investment and for more efficient use of public resources and enhanced public value.

Place based investment programmes and regional infrastructure investment provide an opportunity for local places to invest in their parks enabling the social, economic and environment benefits afforded by these natural capital assets to be properly realised. To grasp this opportunity those planning these places must understand why parks matter, their true value and how to make them count.

Realising the potential of parks

To make parks count and maximise the opportunities they afford local places must do four things. They must recognise and demonstrate the true value of parks; provide the leadership and partnerships capable of creating a shared vision and plan for parks,

equitably sharing the costs and benefits parks create; secure the investment needed to maintain good quality parks as part of essential green infrastructure; and finally manage their parks in a way that secures the benefits identified.

Figure 8 Making Parks Count Framework





Figure 9 Understanding the benefits and value of parks – Birmingham City Council

Birmingham City Council commissioned a study looking at ways to unlock the potential of its parks and green estate to maximise the benefits for the city's citizens and visitors. The 'Health Economic Assessment and Natural Capital Accounts' mapped the city's entire estate. The study found that for each £1 the Council invests in its parks and greenspaces returns over £24 to society; Council-managed woodlands capture more than 350 tonnes of pollutants; the total health benefits provided are valued at nearly £4.1 billion; parks and greenspaces store more than 2.1 million tonnes of CO2 and Council-managed allotments are estimated to produce 2.9 tonnes of food each year with a value of approximately £4.3million.

GI Green infrastructure describes the network of natural and semi-natural features within and between our villages, towns and cities – crucial to climate change adaptation, biodiversity and human health and wellbeing.



Figure 10 Parks as essential Green Infrastructure - West of England Local Industrial Strategy and Green Infrastructure

The West of England will grow its natural capital, including its parks and green spaces by supporting locally identified priorities to support nature recovery, ensure gains in green infrastructure and biodiversity, and maximise the multiple benefits of green infrastructure. This will help meet the aspirations set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan, including the ambition for 'leaving our environment in a better state than we found it' and 'connecting people with the environment to improve health and well-being'. Working in partnership with the West of England Local Nature Partnership, which includes Natural England, the West of England will explore forms of support for this ambition, including access to better quality open-sourced data to help enable the identification of local green infrastructure priorities.¹⁰⁰

Creating a clear value proposition for parks

Understanding the benefits and the value of parks

Investigating and understanding the natural (and other) benefits a system of parks and green spaces deliver for local communities is critical. A solid evidence base not only helps makes better policy but provides useful data for future investment. Understanding the economic value of parks helps make better decisions and importantly brings partners to the table. A local

natural capital account can help to clarify and measure the existing state of assets and the services that are provided and is a valuable approach to estimating the value of parks in a local authority area.¹⁰¹ Importantly it can highlight the major benefits parks bring to local communities and how they help address the key policy priorities of elected members.

Parks area key features of Green Infrastructure

Parks are an important element of the wider Green Infrastructure (GI) in a place. This means when infrastructure investment plans are drawn up the benefits of green infrastructure (GI), such as parks and green spaces, should be considered alongside the economic returns flowing from better roads and enhanced public realm.¹⁰² Embedding natural capital into Local

Industrial Strategies at the outset will help demonstrate the value of parks and ensure major infrastructure development decisions maximise these opportunities. It will also help improve wider strategic planning and decision-making by ensuring the contribution parks make to local social and environmental priorities is recognised.¹⁰³

Providing leadership and partnerships for parks

Deciding with your partners

Parks deliver benefits for a wide range of public sector partners seeking to improve the health and wellbeing of local communities and the prosperity of the places they live and work. Building the right partnerships with key stakeholders, such as Health and Wellbeing Boards and Town Investment Partnerships is critical.

Successful places achieve this through strong political leadership for parks with a Cabinet position acting as a champion. Equally important is senior managerial leadership for parks that enables those who work in planning, public health and greenspace to work closely together to deliver the desired outcomes.



Figure 11 Partnership working for parks - Warrington Health and Wellbeing Board - Strategy for Warrington 2019 - 2023

The Well Warrington Health and Wellbeing Strategy includes a strategic priority ensure the local environment enables people to make healthy choices. It recognises that parks and green spaces play a key role in promoting health and happiness. It acknowledges that the evidence shows multiple benefits from quality green space including improved air quality; less noise pollution; increased social interaction; reduced antisocial behaviour, isolation and stress and improved mental health. It commits the partners to ensuring quality and accessible green infrastructure in future growth plans and maximising opportunities to protect and improve existing parks and community gardens. Importantly partners will also use their collective green estate so that it best supports local health and social care.



Figure 12 Creating a bold vision for parks – Glasgow City Council Our Dear Green Place – A vision for Glasgow's parks and greenspaces – working for our communities 2019

Glasgow's vision for its parks is "Parks and greenspaces will be lively, welcoming and safe places; sustainable, well connected and accessible to all, providing opportunities for activities and shared use for current and future communities". The vision and its supporting strategy were established after extensive consultation with the city's communities that underlined how much the city's parks mattered to the people who live, work and visit the city. The results of the consultation placed people at the centre of the aims to pursue the vision reflecting that their park keep them mentally and physically healthy, reduce the impact of climate change, they provide spaces to meet and bring communities together. The strategy has three main elements People, Places and Delivery.

Creating a bold vision

Every place should have an overarching and bold vision for its parks, created through partnership, and based on the benefits and value its parks create and

the overall priorities for the local area. This means every place must be clear on what it wants to achieve with its system of parks and green spaces.

Tackling inequality in accessing the benefits of parks

There is unequal access to parks and green space across England with 2.6m people not living within a 10 minute walk of a park.¹⁰⁵ People living in the most economically deprived areas are less likely to live near good quality green spaces, and this impacts negatively on health outcomes.^{106,107} Unequal access means that those who are at greatest risk of poor physical and mental health have the least opportunity to benefit from being near and using greenspace.¹⁰⁸ All demographic

groups benefit, but disadvantaged and lower socioeconomic groups are thought to benefit the most from access to green space.¹⁰⁹ However it is precisely these groups who are least likely to access green space.¹¹⁰

Recognising that greener neighbourhoods provide disproportionate health benefits to disadvantaged groups, well-planned parks and green spaces can be one approach toward reducing place based health inequalities.¹¹¹

Investing in parks to maintain the assets

Sharing the burdens as well as the benefits of parks

Local parks budgets have come under financial pressure in recent times as they have had to compete with other service priorities. The burden of paying for parks falls largely on local councils but the benefits that flow from parks to local communities have an indirect financial benefit for other partners such

as reduced health and environmental costs or increases in property values. For most places the share of the financial burdens and benefits of parks is not equitable. The shared responsibility for the delivery of health outcomes is a good example of where greater equity can be achieved.



Figure 13 Sharing the burdens and the benefits – A partnership approach to managing parks for health – The Parks Herts Project

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) is responsible for public health services across the whole of Hertfordshire with the delivery of local public health services delegated to District Councils. The Parks Herts project is funded from a joint Partnership Fund and addresses the problems of no single access to information about parks and the recognised link between population, health and wellbeing and access to greenspace. It aims to encourage residents to make more of their valuable local space and visit parks they may not have previously explored, whilst also supporting people to make getting outdoors part of their daily lives by finding places to enjoy and share with others.





Figure 14 Creating new income streams to support parks - The Bournemouth Parks Foundation

A Parks Foundation (not to be confused with a whole service Parks Trust) is a non-profit organisation that supports a specific park or parks across a whole area with time, expertise and fund raising. Their goal is to bring together fundraising, sponsorship, other income and volunteering to support local parks whilst management and maintenance remains with the local authority. Bournemouth Parks Foundation's mission is to create inspirational parks that improve health and wellbeing, reconnect people with nature and bring diverse communities together. They do this through supporting projects involving children's play, conservation and wildlife, art and culture, horticulture, health and wellbeing, sport, and activities for local community groups. They go beyond the local authority's parks plan to transform parks into fantastic spaces, fundraising for and undertaking projects for communities to enjoy. Since 2015 they have raised in excess of £500k and now have a turnover of over £200k.¹⁰⁰⁰

Diversifying income streams to help pay for parks

The capacity to deliver additional on-going revenue streams to support the maintenance of parks has become increasingly important. For both the future capital and revenue requirements

of parks a more 'blended' approach may be required in the future with funds from a mix of sources including local tax payers, commercial income and contributions from the private and community sectors.

Increasing capital investment into parks

Local development is managed by the planning system with developers making contributions to local community infrastructure, such as parks, through planning gain. This provides opportunities for the provision new parks and the enhancement of existing parks within an area. Opportunities can also arise for new joint ventures and partnerships (such as management companies, Trusts or Community Interest Companies) to provide access to additional capital investment (public and private) and the capture of revenue funds to support maintenance.

A number of local authorities are also experimenting in delivering parks through new models such as Trusts or Local Authority Trading Companies with an aim of achieving greater long term financial sustainability.

Enhancing biodiversity is a new condition of planning policy introduced by the 25 Year Environment Plan and may also provide future investment opportunities for parks. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requires a 10% increase in biodiversity

after development, compared to the level of biodiversity prior to the development taking place. BNG will require developers to work with local authorities and local stakeholders to support their priorities for nature conservation.¹⁰⁰⁰ In many situations delivering BNG within the original development will not be possible meaning local offsets habitat creation may be more viable. In such cases developers will work with the local authority to identify local land best placed for biodiversity recovery and enhancement providing the opportunity for investment into local parks.

More recently places have prepared Natural Capital Investment Plans in an attempt to mobilise existing and new sources of finance. These plans are aimed at securing investment where there is a return to the investor alongside a positive impact on a place's natural capital resulting in improvements in the environment and local health and wellbeing. The market for Natural Capital Investment is still developing and the impact of these plans yet to be determined.



Figure 15 Creating new income streams to support parks - Nottingham City Council, Parks and Open Spaces Social Entrepreneurship & Commercialisation.

Nottingham City Council's Parks and Open Spaces prioritised social entrepreneurship and commercialisation to diversify their income streams. This has enabled the Parks Service to the drive up productivity, maximising efficiencies and develop a wide range of commercial income generating projects enabling them to sustain service delivery and continue a Parks Improvement programme. The Parks Service now brings in income covering 88% of the service costs.



Figure 16 A strategic approach to investing in new models of provision - Greater Manchester Natural Capital Investment Plan

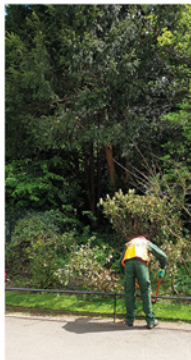
The Greater Manchester Natural Capital Investment Plan aims to broaden the range of potential sources of investment in natural capital. The plan was based on review of existing projects aiming to maintain and enhance the benefits natural capital provides and identifies key priorities and opportunities where additional investment can help the project achieve the desired outcomes. The projects included those aimed at improving health through access to the natural environment; greening places to make them more attractive stimulating inward investment; tackling climate change and conserving wildlife and habitats. The plan sets out a pipeline of potential project types which need investment and explores different finance models to facilitate private sector investment and the role of public sector.¹⁰⁰⁰





Figure 17 Community Empowerment - Asset Transfer to Community Organisations - Dudley Council

Dudley Council has invested in building the capacity of Parks Friends and community groups. These groups have worked closely with the Council in recent years restoring dilapidated parks buildings and then, when ready, they have taken on responsibility for the whole building through an asset transfer. This has enabled the parks service to focus on improving the sustainability of parks and open spaces whilst the community groups have focussed on volunteering and raising income to maintain the buildings through fund raising and providing services to the local community. In turn this has built community ownership for the services and buildings enhancing their long term sustainability. Dudley Council has been so impressed with the willingness for community groups to take on the responsibility for investing in and caring for their local spaces, that now asset transfers have become standard with 38 different Parks Friends groups (about 430 people) and other community organisations helping deliver parks services providing over 15,500 volunteer hours annually valued at £110,400 per year.¹⁰⁰⁰⁰



Managing parks as essential assets to secure the benefits

Investing in capacity

Parks sector professionals need new skills to make sure their parks thrive in the 21st Century. This new context demands new skill sets, and parks staff need to be empowered with skills in critical areas including commercial entrepreneurship, income generation, marketing and

promotion, 'influencing decision making' and the ability to demonstrate the value of parks to a wider range of services and priorities.¹⁰⁰⁰⁰ Park managers believe the most important skills for the future of the service will include financial and partnership skills that focus on funding and resources.¹⁰⁰⁰⁰

Figure 18 Future competencies of Parks Managers



Involving and empowering communities

Local parks have never been more important for local citizens and more precious for local communities.¹⁰⁰⁰⁰ Understanding how citizens value their parks by asking the right questions and surveying periodically is essential. Volunteering remains hugely popular in

parks with thousands of Friends Groups up and down the country. Increasingly volunteers getting more involved in the day to day management and stewardship of their local park resulting in multiple benefits for the local authority, local communities and the volunteer groups themselves.¹⁰⁰⁰⁰





Figure 19 A strategic approach to planning for parks - Sheffield Building Better Parks Strategy 2018-23

The Building Better Parks Strategy is intended to be used as a framework for decision making. It recognises the need to invest further in the cities' parks to enhance the quality of life of people living and working within the city. Sheffield natural capital account identified a cost/benefit return of £34:1 on parks and that its parks have a combined asset value of around £1.2 billion. The city intends to use its assets to enable positive social and economic outcomes whilst delivering a better service. In delivering the Building Better Parks Strategy, the council will be applying asset management principles, in recognising that each land and property asset within the Parks Portfolio is potentially unique, diverse and they city is putting in place a robust assessment criteria for each proposal. The city's parks will need to maximise investment and optimise income to help navigate the council's continuing budget pressures. The overall approach to investment in parks will be based on the following income streams to generate new investment:-

- ✓ Planning gain from Developers
- ✓ Public Health Funding
- ✓ National Heritage Lottery Funding
- ✓ Capital Grants
- ✓ Revenue income generation from sponsorships / income from cafes and concessions / ancillary offers such as adventure play facilities
- ✓ Any additional revenue income would form part of the overall budget process.²⁵¹



Managing parks as 'natural assets'

Understanding nature as an asset which delivers benefits provides a framework to manage it well to deliver for society's needs.

Decision makers can more easily consider how investment in environmental assets such as parks contributes to wider societal aims and trade-offs which affect the quality or quality of assets. Using Natural Capital

Accounting to value a local authority's parks provides a snapshot of their value expressed in annual flow terms or as capital asset value.

These valuations can then be updated periodically allowing an assessment of any changes that may have occurred to inform future investment decisions similar to maintaining other key assets.

Planning for parks and setting standards

Places that consider their parks to be a priority, have a parks strategy in place, and an elected member as a parks champion, tend to have better parks²⁵² but less than half of councils have a plan.²⁵³ A simple green space plan will set out an authority's vision for using its green space and the goals it wants to achieve, the standards of quality it wants to achieve (many authorities use the Green Flag award standards) plus the resources, methods and time needed to meet these goals.²⁵⁴

The government's 25 Year Environment Plan aims to connect more people with the environment to improve their health and wellbeing. The plan aims to create more Green Infrastructure (GI) in towns and cities, especially in areas where there is not enough accessible green space or where

it is of poor quality. It intends to do this by drawing up a National Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards and encourage places to assess GI provision, including parks, against these new standards.²⁵⁵ The standards will cover partnership, funding, stewardship, planning, functions and benefits and will incorporate natural capital into the expectations of good stewardship.²⁵⁶ Measuring the enhancement of GI, including parks, over time and monitoring progress at a national scale will be achieved through the outcome indicator framework for the 25 Year Environment Plan.²⁵⁷ When places plan their parks it will be important to include locally determined standards that reflect the national standards to drive improvement and enhancement in their provision.





RESOURCES TO HELP MAKE YOUR PARKS COUNT

Leadership and Partnership

The National Trust and National Heritage Lottery Fund Future Parks	Eight urban areas are part of a pioneering programme designed to find ways to manage and fund parks and open spaces across entire towns and cities.	https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/our-vision-for-the-future-of-parks https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/our-work/landscapes-parks-nature/future-parks
Nesta Rethinking Parks	Rethinking Parks is funding and supporting organisations to develop innovative ways of managing and financing the UK's public parks. The projects aim to make sure our parks and greenspaces are financially sustainable for the future and that they are run more impactfully for their local communities.	https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/rethinking-parks/
Local Government Association (LGA) Culture and sport improvement toolkit	Developed to help the culture, sport, green space and tourism sectors continually improve performance based on self-assessment and external challenge through validation and peer supported improvement.	https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/culture-and-sport-improvement/culture-and-sport-improvement
Local Government Association (LGA) Public health and prevention	A suite of sector-led improvement support for public health and prevention.	https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/care-and-health-improvement/public
Local Government Association (LGA) Leadership essentials	'Leadership Essentials' is a series of events designed as themed learning opportunities for councillors. There are specific programmes for Cultural Services Leaders and Climate Change and events concentrating on Health and Wellbeing and Sports.	https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership/leadership-essentials
Fields In Trust Green Space Index	The Green Space Index is Fields In Trust's barometer of publicly accessible park and green space provision. It maps and analyses publicly accessible local park and green space provision as mapped by Ordnance Survey.	http://www.fieldsintrust.org/green-space-index
Land, Environment, Economics and Policy (LEEP) Institute Business School University of Exeter Outdoor Recreation Valuation (ORVal)	ORVal is map-based and allows users to explore the distribution of greenspace across England and Wales, plotting out the locations of recreation sites, be those beaches, recreation areas like parks and nature reserves, paths through the countryside or along river banks.	https://www.leep.exeter.ac.uk/orval/





Understanding the benefits and value of parks

Parks Alliance Why Parks Matter Evidence Base	National surveys and reports on the benefits of parks. Key research documents that support the economic, environmental and social arguments in support of investing in parks.	https://www.theparksalliance.org/why-parks-matter-evidence-base/
Eco-systems Knowledge Network	Resources to help people manage the environment as an asset for the benefit of everyone. Includes a wide range of published guidance, reports, tools, case studies and much more.	https://ecosystemsknowledge.net/resources
DEFRA Enabling a Natural Capital Approach (ENCA)	A natural capital approach to policy and decision making considers the value of the natural environment for people and the economy. Enabling a Natural Capital Approach (ENCA) resources are data, guidance and tools to help you understand natural capital and know how to take it into account.	https://www.gov.uk/guidance/enabling-a-natural-capital-approach-enca
Natural England Access to Evidence	Catalogue providing access to evidence used by Natural England. It shows the information used to reach decisions and inform advice. Includes details about studies and site-specific information.	http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/
Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) Green Infrastructure Resource Library	The Green Infrastructure Resource Library (GIRL) is a unique database of documents, case-studies, videos, tools and other information about green infrastructure and its benefits.	https://www.tcpa.org.uk/green-infrastructure-research-database
Fields In Trust Green Space Index	The Green Space Index is Fields In Trust's barometer of publicly accessible park and green space provision. It maps and analyses publicly accessible local park and green space provision as mapped by Ordnance Survey.	http://www.fieldsintrust.org/green-space-index
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Managing Parks

Parks Alliance Resource Library	Resources and guides on Managing Parks, Paying for Parks, Natural Capital and Providing Parks.	https://www.theparksalliance.org/resource-library-2/
The Fields in Trust Knowledge Base	Provides a library of information to support landowners, managing agents, Friends of Parks groups and park users maintain their parks and green spaces.	http://www.fieldsintrust.org/knowledge-base
Association for Public Service Excellence Parks, Open Spaces and Horticultural Services Portal	Access to briefings and presentations on parks, open spaces and playgrounds, grounds maintenance, amenity land services, horticulture and arboriculture as well as allotments and cemeteries and crematoria.	https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/members-area/advisory-groups/parks-horticulture-grounds-maintenance/
Parks Community UK 'One stop shop' of information for the Friends Groups movement	Supports Friends' groups to feel better equipped and more confident in their active involvement with their local park. Includes a range of learning resources including 'How to' guides, best practice case studies and links to complementary websites.	https://parkscommunity.org.uk/





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