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GREY PLACES NEED GREEN SPACES

THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN OUR NATION'S NATURAL ASSETS

FOREWORD

All over the UK, people seem to be gardening and growing. There is renewed passion in crafting, creating, cultivating and tending landscapes. Making bountiful and productive spaces is not only fashionable but has become an essential ingredient to many of us – and it is not just the traditional gardening classes that are seizing the initiative.

The remit of gardeners, young and old, now extends far beyond the cultivation of individual plants for their aesthetic rewards alone; modern exponents are actively helping to reshape our society in response to new challenges.

Improving and looking after the local environment, and green spaces in particular, is a powerful tool for social and economic good, kickstarting wider interest in environmental and community action and making a positive difference to quality of place and quality of life.

People across the country are creating gardens in their communities, looking after spaces that may or may not belong to them and in some places working as fully fledged 'community gardeners' helping local people develop the skills and confidence to do things for themselves. There are new strains of radical activity – guerrilla gardeners creating pop-up parks or horticulture acting as the spur to address entrenched social division or mental health issues.

Empowering communities to take ownership where previous custodians have failed to deliver the quality and quantity of green spaces is vital in creating robust and diverse neighbourhoods. Helping people to organise things 'communally' can be enormously powerful in helping to address complex social and environmental issues in an economically cost-effective way.

We live on a small island that is increasingly urbanised and subject to global forces – whether economic recession or the impact of climate change. How we use our natural assets – in particular our land and open spaces – is a key issue.

To transform our landscapes, especially those adjacent to where we live, is to maximise resources and productivity. Failure to properly identify potential spaces and then improper treatment and provision within these areas has, in some cases, resulted in squandered opportunities. The role of design and continuing care in all of this is crucial. Too much of our land is wasted, inaccessible, unproductive or even damaging to our health and well-being, with a lack of cohesive and balanced strategic planning.

We need a constant effort to make sure people are able to live, learn and work in places which lift rather than sap the spirit. But we also need to design intelligently and inclusively to make sure people feel connected to their surroundings and can play a part in taking collective responsibility for what's around them. Once created, these green spaces require appropriate management, allowing for change over time to match the evolution of needs of the local community. Only by adopting such a process can landscapes be futureproofed.

Groundwork has been doing this in some of the country's most challenged neighbourhoods for three decades. This work can be difficult, costly and is often under the radar but can and does have a transformative impact on the way people think, feel and act. There are many others making similar efforts.

The UK is at a crossroads in how we manage our green infrastructure. As public spending cuts bite, old ways of doing things may no longer work and so social networks give local communities a sense of what they can achieve together. This report asks all of us to play our part – from government to businesses, local authorities to individuals, formal voluntary groups to informal community networks.

Let's all preserve and care for the land around us.

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We work in 98% of the most deprived areas of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, completing around 6,000 community projects each year.

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CREATING COMMONS:

A FUTURE FOR OUR GREEN SPACES

Executive summary

After years of improvement and investment, our urban green spaces are threatened with a new spiral of decline.

We have been here before. At the end of the 20th century three decades of neglect led to national outrage, Parliamentary inquiries, task forces and government action. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force's report, a turning point in the fortunes of many of our public places.

The achievements since then have been remarkable, but risk being short-lived. And the tests we face now are greater than those we overcame in the past. There is not only the immediate conundrum of how to keep green spaces and parks in good condition as public spending declines rapidly; there is also the longer-term challenge of a changing climate.

Over the past decade ample evidence has been gathered of the social and economic benefits of our natural environment. We know that towns and cities with high quality green spaces attract investment and are seen as good places to work; we know well maintained parks encourage exercise; we know children socialise better where there are good places to play outdoors.

More recently, policymakers and academics have begun to research and articulate the overarching benefits provided by our green infrastructure – the network of formal and informal open spaces that underpins our economy and society by providing natural products, maintaining air and water quality, providing drainage and absorbing carbon.

Yet government and businesses, more often than not, still fail to factor this 'natural capital' into financial decision-making, regarding our environment as a free good which, if it is anyone's responsibility, is someone else's. Green spaces are viewed as liabilities that attract the cost of maintenance, not as assets that must be looked after because they add and preserve value. This is despite the evidence and advice of government's own research and guidance.

The problem we face is not a lack of evidence: it is a lack of will to act effectively on the evidence before us. It is time to apply new thinking about the importance of our green spaces, because we cannot afford another quarter-century or more of decline while we wait until the public purse is full enough to mount a rescue mission. While public funding will always be stretched, we should expect intelligent decision-making. This report seeks to set out a framework for such thinking and galvanise a new debate about what we as a nation really value and care about.

The financial difficulties we face are real enough, but so are the challenges and opportunities of the future. In 1951, when rationing was still in force, the UK created National Parks, a National Health Service, and new towns with improved housing. The issue is as much one of priorities as of resources.

The need for action

The Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria was marked by the creation and improvement of public parks across Britain. It would be tragic if the Diamond Jubilee of Elizabeth II was marked by cuts and closures, but this is already starting to happen.

Some cities, such as Liverpool, have withdrawn from the prestigious Green Flag award scheme because they do not think they can afford to meet the required standard. Others are disbanding park ranger teams, closing sports facilities and cafés, or introducing charges for services that were previously free.

The welter of reports issued at the turn of the millennium show us where this trend leads: to unsafe, neglected places that people choose to avoid, and the loss of the many benefits that come from cared-for green spaces.

But at the same time there is a new and dynamic surge of interest at community level in food growing, community gardening and the natural environment, and many new green spaces are being created. Public bodies need to ride this wave, not wait for it to break.

A shared responsibility

There is a growing public awareness that we all need to be stewards of our natural environment, preventing its degradation and ensuring it is passed on to our children and grandchildren in healthy condition.

Yet this awareness is not always mirrored in the actions of government and local authorities. The absence of any statutory duty to care for our parks and green spaces means they are often first in line for cost-cutting; and the effort of ascribing a financial value to the benefits they provide often means that their owners act as if that value does not exist.

This flies in the face of common sense. The idea that publicly accessible green spaces are a shared resource, to be enjoyed and cared for, is an ancient one. It is captured in the concept of the commons, areas of land on which local residents enjoyed particular rights and privileges.

The remaining historic commons are now covered by legislation, the Commons Act 2006, that protects public access and reaffirms the responsibilities of care and maintenance. What is significant about the commons is not who owns the land – many are privately owned – but the continuing right of public enjoyment and duty of care. They provide a model for flexible partnerships of public, private and voluntary interests working for everyone's good.

This report argues that this model of the commons should be applied to all publicly accessible parks and green spaces, enshrining in perpetuity their role and value as public goods, as well as the responsibilities of care that accompany public rights and privileges.

Such a framework allows a variety of approaches to ownership and management, from local trusts to traditional local authority management, but on a foundation of clear principles of stewardship that apply to owners, managers and users.

Green space for all, and all for green space

In recent years we have come to understand that our parks and green spaces are not just individual sites, but a network of 'green infrastructure' that supports the whole of our society and economy, just as the hard infrastructure of energy grids and transport networks enables society to function.

The 'ecosystem services' our green infrastructure provides are foundations of the life we enjoy, not optional extras. As the government's white paper, *The Natural Choice,* puts it: 'We should be thinking not of isolated spots of green on a map of England but of a thriving green network linking wildlife sites with farmland, forestry and urban parks and gardens across the country.' [1]

Similarly, there is a growing understanding that human beings naturally organise themselves in networks of shared interest and concern rather than in the rigid hierarchies and bureaucracies associated with the industrial age.

Social media and the internet have demonstrated how these self-organising systems can emerge and grow exponentially. Movements like Transition Towns and initiatives like Project Dirt in London exemplify how such approaches are emerging in connection with green spaces and environmental projects.

Just as the concept of the commons encapsulates the idea of shared rights and responsibilities, the idea of networks stresses the importance of links and connections in guaranteeing the common good.
The report argues that parks and green spaces should be managed in ways that maximise these connections, building on and drawing in the wider public, businesses and expert practitioners rather than concentrating power and decision-making in the hands of a few.

A networked approach will enable our green spaces to become more democratic, allowing all to participate according to their interests without working at cross-purposes. This will require a new role for central and local government as a leader and facilitator of national and local networks, not merely as legislator or funder of services.

A look at the fragmented nature of roles and responsibilities at present underlines the need for a new approach. While all have important parts to play, current pressures encourage organisations to avoid taking responsibility: there are hundreds of players concerned with our green spaces, but often little semblance of a team.

There is much that community effort or philanthropy can achieve, but it cannot simply fill gaps left by a retreating state. We need to find new ways of working together creatively to develop new approaches, building on the enthusiasm and imagination already evident on the ground.

Principles for the future

Six principles should underpin future thinking about green spaces in order to help us move towards models of shared rights and responsibilities, and a duty of stewardship that protects and enhances green spaces for future generations.

These are:

Future readiness: A changing and unpredictable climate and the continuing loss of wildlife and biodiversity have underlined the vital role our green infrastructure plays. We have to be far-sighted. Green spaces are not merely civic amenities: they are part of the fabric of ecosystem services that support human life, wellbeing and economic activity.

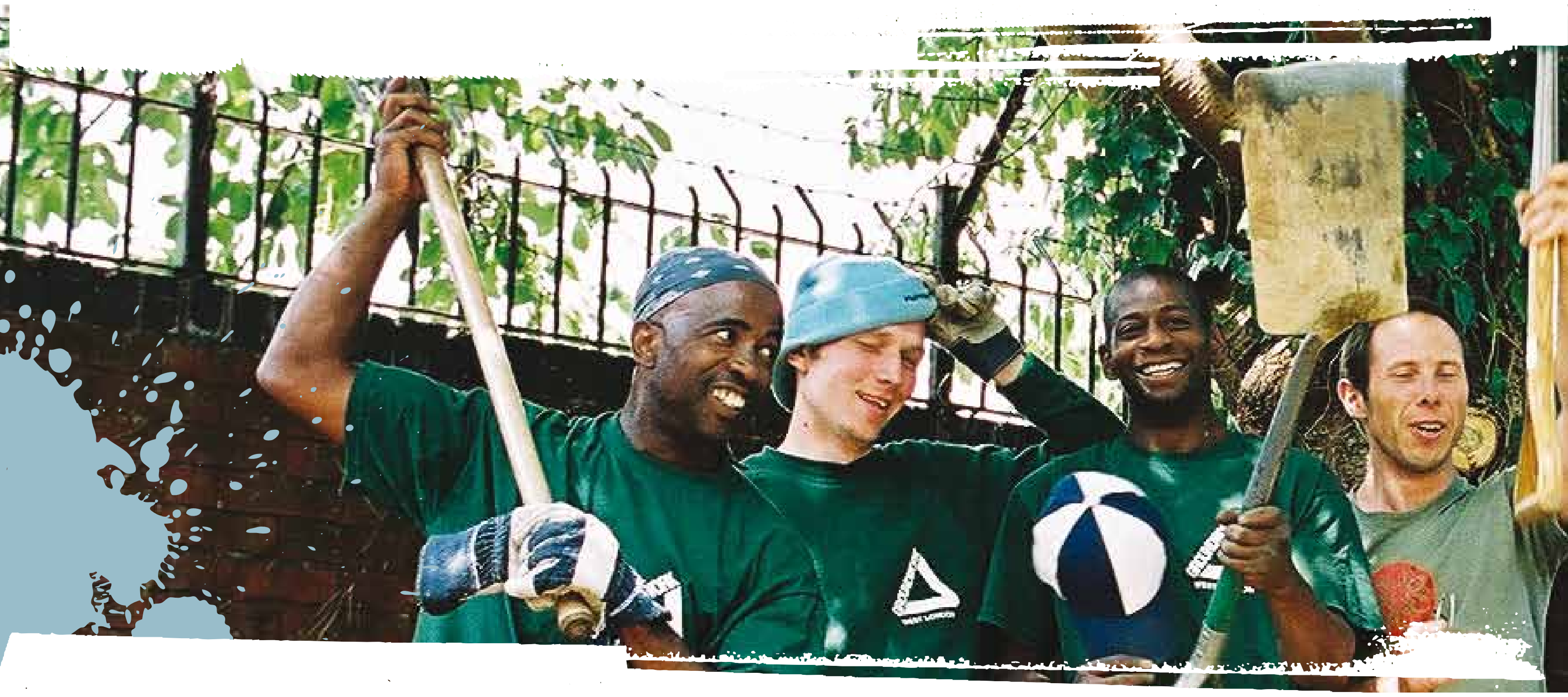
Equity: Our parks and green spaces are a shared resource. Even those that are in private ownership contribute to the common good. We need to invest in and manage them in ways that enhance these shared benefits. We must protect and increase public access, especially for those who face disadvantages, and reward owners who contribute to the common good through their land management.

Multifunctionality: Green spaces serve a wide variety of functions which cannot be divorced from each other. It is not just the green infrastructure that matters – it is the huge range of social goods that come with it. These need to be balanced in ways that minimise and resolve conflicts, recognising that different people value green space for different reasons.

Buck sharing: The biggest risk in a localist policy climate is that nobody takes responsibility. All – central government, local authorities, communities, and businesses – have a stake in the quality of our green spaces. A core principle of equity is that all who benefit should contribute in line with their resources, skills and abilities.

Enabling: The role of government, central or local, should be to encourage and reward responsible stewardship. This requires facilitation and catalytic investment, sharing knowledge and linking people with resources, and removing barriers to local action and involvement.

Involving: A defining principle of localism is 'nothing about us without us': that decisions should, as far as possible, be taken by the people they most affect. Green spaces are both a local and a shared resource. Decision-making should encourage local involvement, design and management in ways that complement an overarching understanding of the function spaces fulfil in the whole of our green infrastructure. Because all benefit, nobody should be excluded.



Making it happen: our recommendations

The report sets out 13 recommendations, ranging from national legislation to facilitating local action, that can help us towards a view of green spaces as a vital national asset and shared resource with enduring rights of public enjoyment. Their purpose is to help ensure decisions are made in line with the evidence rather than contrary to it. The recommendations apply particularly to the governance arrangements in force in England, but the overarching themes will be relevant to the other nations of the UK.

Recommendations to link communities, voluntary organisations and businesses:

1: Government, businesses and local authorities should work together to identify schemes that incentivise and reward public involvement and voluntary contributions, and test them as models for generating financial investment and volunteering in green spaces.

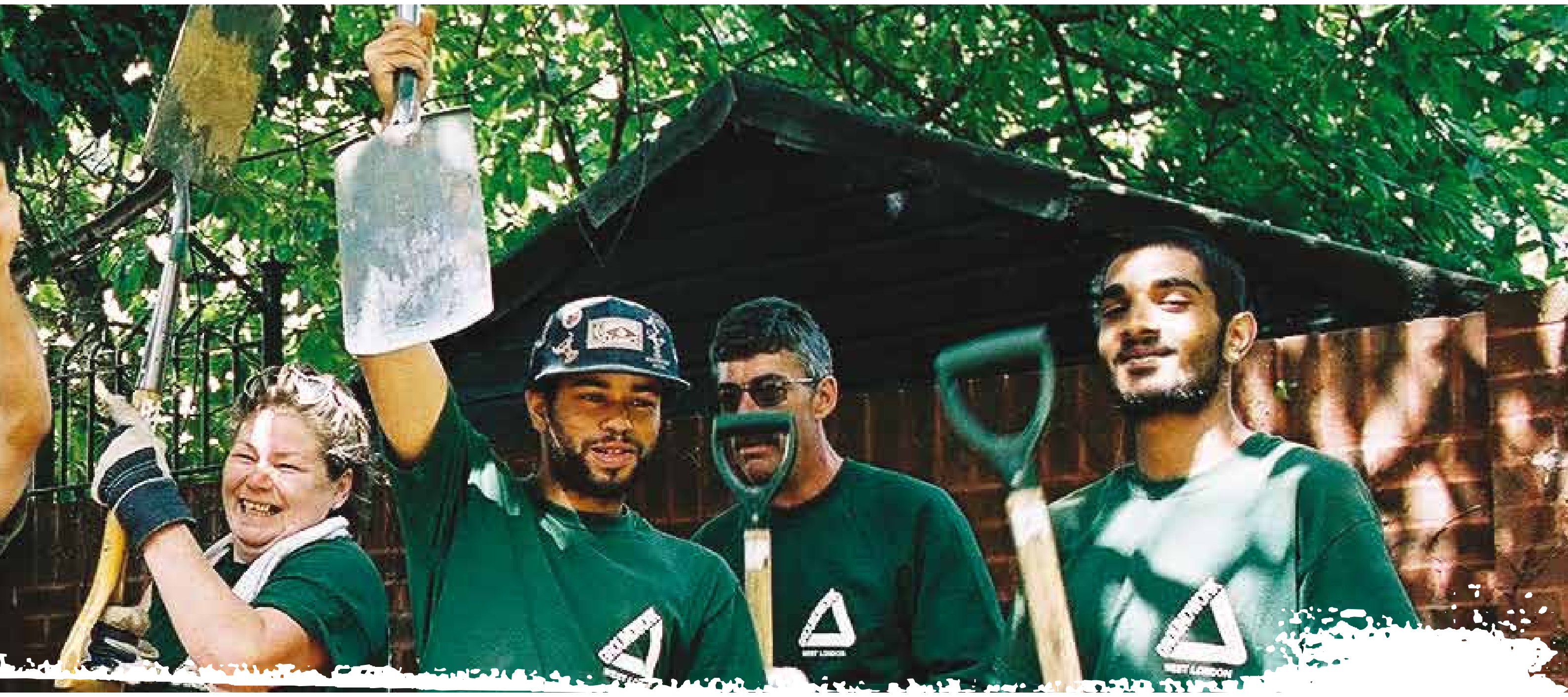
2: An independently-run national endowment fund should be created, financed by business and philanthropic contributions, to match fund community-led initiatives and community share issues in order to create new green spaces or upgrade existing ones.

3: The Treasury, pension funds, housing providers and local authorities should work alongside government and the accounting profession to develop social impact bonds as a model for investing in green infrastructure.

Recommendations for local government and public agencies:

4: The community budgets programme should be expanded to pilot ‘total place’ approaches to the natural environment, green spaces and climate change adaptation and mitigation. These pilots should also explore the scope for joining with health services to create ‘community wellbeing budgets’, bringing together green space management, health promotion and the treatment of conditions such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

5: England’s core cities should draw up plans for ‘green city deals’ to fund investment in green infrastructure and link this directly with training and employment opportunities. Such deals should include the management of public green spaces, carbon reduction and enterprise creation.



6: Where city deals or community budgets are not available, local authorities (or Local Nature Partnerships) should draw up community green space charters to generate a shared local vision with other public services, landowners, businesses and community organisations.

7: Local authorities should be encouraged to pilot 'green improvement districts', bringing together partnerships of local stakeholders and residents to take concerted action where green spaces are neglected or failing.

8: Councils should set out and regularly update a strategic approach to green spaces in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure. Councils should ensure the value of green space as an appreciating asset is fully reflected in their accounting and financial planning.

9: Local government funding should be targeted to support staffing and maintenance rather than capital spending. Councils should use their resources to build networks of mutual support for parks and green spaces.

10: Commissioners of services should add value through procurement. Local authorities and other owners of public green spaces need to commission services that retain the multifunctional value of their assets rather than simply opting for the lowest cost.

Recommendations for central government:

11: A Parks and Green Spaces Act, based on the principles of the commons, should enshrine in law the responsibility of stewardship for all green spaces that are currently open to the public, whether or not they are publicly owned.

12: Central government departments and public agencies should ensure the value of the natural environment is reflected in planning and accounting, applying and building on guidance recently issued by HM Treasury. [2]

13: As well as valuing the 'natural capital' of our green spaces, it is essential that the social capital generated through them is adequately valued. Government should work with the Office for National Statistics and the accounting profession to develop robust indicators of social value that can be readily used by commissioners of services.

PART 1

THE BEGINNING OF THE END, OR THE END OF A BEGINNING?

> *“No previous civilisation has survived the ongoing destruction of its natural supports. Nor will ours.”*
>
> Lester Brown, World on the Edge

Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897 coincided with a huge investment in public parks and open spaces to serve and improve Britain’s expanding cities and proclaim local civic pride. In 2012, another Diamond Jubilee year, the talk is about whether we can keep them.

You can’t travel far in Britain without coming across a Victoria Park. There’s the huge Victoria Park in London’s East End, 86 hectares of open space known as the People’s Park and the oldest public park in the capital. There’s the award-winning Victoria Park on the banks of the River Sow in Stafford town centre, with its traditional bandstand, bowling green and aviary. And Leamington Spa and Salford boast two of the numerous Victoria Parks created to mark the 1897 Diamond Jubilee.

London’s Victoria Park is one of the few that is being spruced up in time for the Olympics. Away from the capital, and in many less noted parts of it, the talk is of cuts and savings, facilities being closed and staff being made redundant.

Like dry rot or death watch beetle, the damage to our parks and green spaces begins a long time before it’s noticed. Gates are locked earlier or opened later. Buildings are left unrepaired. Maintenance is scaled back. The park ranger you used to meet on a Sunday afternoon isn’t there. The kids’ activities – the bug hunting, bat walks or football training – are cancelled.

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The café closes. Footpaths become overgrown, litter is left uncollected. The place to go to becomes a place to avoid.

In early 2011 a survey by the charity GreenSpace found 52 of 63 councils were cutting budgets, with 15 of the 52 facing cuts of one fifth or more, and five losing more than 40 per cent of their budget. Most green space teams felt they would be less able to provide attractive and welcoming sites, maintain standards, repair vandalism and meet users' needs. [3]

This deterioration is set to continue with further rounds of cuts. In Sheffield, which has 22 Green Flag awards for the quality of its green spaces, the city is pruning its parks and countryside budget by more than one seventh in 2012. Keep Britain Tidy, which runs the awards, has reported councils withdrawing from the scheme because they feel they can no longer afford to reach the required standard – including major cities like Liverpool. [4]
In London, the Parks and Green Spaces Forum found that a quarter of senior posts in local authorities had been cut in the last 18 months, while staff who retired were not being replaced. [5]

A recent survey by Greenspace Scotland found that public use of green spaces was already declining after several years of improvement. Just under half those questioned said their local green spaces were safe places to exercise, down from 60 per cent in 2009.

Greenspace Scotland chief executive Julie Proctor laid the blame firmly on spending cuts, adding: 'What may seem a relatively easy, low-impact cost-saving on green space now could have a disproportionately negative and far-reaching impact on Scotland's health and prosperity.' [6]

The natural environment white paper highlights the same trend: one in six local authorities, it reports, say their green spaces are declining (*The Natural Choice*, page 31). It calls for green spaces to be 'recognised as an essential asset and factored into the development of all our communities'.

We have been here before, and not long ago. In 1999 a committee of MPs took stock of the state of Britain's town and country parks. They declared themselves 'shocked at the weight of evidence, far beyond our expectations, about the extent of the problems parks have faced in the last 30 years. It is clear that if nothing is done many of them will become albatrosses around the necks of local authorities.' [7]

Two years later the Urban Parks Forum published its seminal Public Park Assessment. [8] It echoed the MPs' findings, with some alarming numbers about the scale of decline over the previous 30 years.

Britain's 27,000 parks cost £630m a year to maintain, the forum reported, and received more than one and a half billion visits every year. Since the 1970s investment in these spaces had been continually chipped away, leaving a cumulative deficit of £1.3bn by 2001. Councils were spending £126m a year less than in 1979/80; 13 per cent said their parks were in poor condition; and 39 per cent of parks were declining. A gulf was opening up between parks with high public profiles and those in more affluent areas, many of which were being improved, and those in deprived areas, which were deteriorating more rapidly.

Many councils weren't even able to tell accurately how bad things were because they didn't keep adequate records. More than a quarter of the councils the Urban Parks Forum surveyed couldn't say how much they spent in the previous year.

'Unless some mechanism is put in place to halt the decline an increasing number of parks will become unusable,' the forum warned. It would not be enough just to invest a chunk of capital to give these parks a facelift: continuing care was needed: 'Without increases in revenue expenditure, new investment will not receive adequate levels of maintenance and upkeep with the danger of rapid decline and degeneration.'

For several years, the warnings were heeded. National government, buoyed by the drive to create an 'urban renaissance' in Britain's cities and convinced that a better quality of place was integral to its concern to tackle social inequalities, gave green spaces a profile they had not had for many years. The Heritage Lottery Fund, building on its pioneering work in the 1990s, became a major funder of park renovation projects and its investment through the Parks for People programme created a sense of optimism and achievement.

Following the publication of the Public Park Assessment, the Urban Green Spaces Task Force – set up as a result of the 1999 select committee report – drove home the message about the need for investment with *Green Spaces, Better Places.* [9] It called for funding of £100m a year for five years to improve our parks and a national agency to oversee this revival.

'Our vision is of towns and cities which more fully meet human social, cultural, economic and physical needs, and which do so by involving and serving all sectors of society,' the task force proclaimed. Echoing the views of the Victorian reformers and philanthropists, they saw parks as the great civilisers of our cities.

The government of the time took up the baton. While it rejected the idea of a new national agency, it amplified the call for public spaces that were 'cleaner, greener and safer' [10]. In line with the task force's recognition of different types of urban green spaces, including allotments, city farms, and community gardens, it incorporated this typology into planning guidance.

New guidance on open spaces required local authorities to assess the needs of their communities and the quality of their provision. The national Commission on Architecture and the Built Environment spawned a new and vocal advocate for parks and open spaces, Cabe Space. Community gardens and allotments were encouraged, complementing the established city farm movement, through Big Lottery Fund programmes including Living Spaces and Local Food and Community Spaces.

The legacy of that optimism is still with us in the form of a network of improved spaces, a mass of community groups and friends' organisations, and a far better knowledge base than previously existed. Volumes of research, guidance and information left those responsible for urban green spaces in no doubt about the importance of their role, the benefits to individual health and social integration they provided, and the need for improvement – both in the physical spaces provided and the skills of those responsible for them.

Ten years on from the Urban Green Spaces Task Force's report, the renaissance is in doubt. The post-2007 administration of Gordon Brown saw a change in emphasis and increasing demands for economic justification for investment, despite rising awareness of the overarching challenge of climate change. The financial crisis and subsequent recession of 2008-9 cemented this shift of priorities. Since the change of government in 2010, deficit reduction has been the overriding political priority, often to the exclusion of longer-term economic value.

The voice of Cabe Space, now absorbed within the Design Council, is little more than an echo. There is already early evidence that the process of decline is repeating itself. This time, though, we will not have the excuse that nobody warned us. The National Audit Office, the government's spending watchdog, spelled out the consequences in some detail in 2006. [11] (see page 14)

These warnings need to be taken seriously when we consider the lessons from the past and the challenges of the future.

As well as marking the tenth anniversary of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force and its call to action, 2012 is the 30th anniversary of Groundwork. When Groundwork began many of Britain's towns and cities were fringed with industrial devastation: slag heaps, contaminated land, closed factories. Towns like St Helens were a byword for blight.

Much of that has changed thanks to the work of Groundwork and many others who share its vision for accessible, multifunctional green spaces. The former Bold Colliery at St Helens is now a community woodland that, according to the district valuer, improved local property values by £15m and helped to bring in £75m of development. [12]

Back in 1995 Groundwork called for a 'national trust for derelict land' (a vision now realised through the creation of The Land Trust) to give Britain's blighted spaces the same care and attention that is lavished on many of our national treasures. [13] Part of Groundwork's case, as important now as then, was a call to share learning so that we do not create new wastelands through ignorance wand neglect. [14]

Groundwork's involvement in green spaces over the last 30 years has demonstrated the wealth of achievement behind the simple slogan 'Changing places, changing lives'. From the reclamation of the shattered Taff Bargoed Valley in South Wales to the opportunity for an unemployed youth in Wolverhampton to start his own gardening business or the creation of a showcase for permaculture in Burnley, Groundwork's experience has shown in practical, down to earth ways the value of investing in green space.

If the past is not a sufficient spur to action, the future should be. In an economic climate where everybody's focus is on austerity and cost savings, a clear understanding of the benefits of green space helps us to foresee and understand the risks that lie ahead and the costs that may be involved.

The NAO report, astonishingly for a document produced only six years ago, did not mention climate change. But investing in well maintained green spaces may be one of our best insurance policies against the damage a changing climate can inflict.

Introducing the *UK National Ecosystem Assessment* in 2011, Lord Selborne, chair of the Foundation for Science and Technology, described the importance of the natural environment succinctly:

'Our wealth as a nation and our individual wellbeing depend critically upon the environment. It provides us with the food, water and air that are essential for life and with the minerals and raw materials for our industry and consumption. Less obviously, it provides the processes that purify air and water, and which sequester or break down wastes. It is also in our environment where we find recreation, health and solace, and in which our culture finds its roots and sense of place.' [15]

These processes are known as ecosystem services. Without them, all life becomes difficult or impossible. Yet they are too often regarded as infinitely replenishable free goods and their value is often ignored in financial planning and decision-making. Our urban green spaces, from formal parks to allotments, woodlands, gardens and even railway embankments and motorway verges, play a vital role in creating and maintaining these ecosystem services.

This 'green infrastructure' is every bit as important as our hard infrastructure of transport links, water pipes and buildings. It matters as much as our information infrastructure of broadband, television and mobile phone coverage, or our energy infrastructure of gas and electricity services.

Our green infrastructure helps us adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. As weather patterns become more unpredictable our green spaces help to cool our cities in heat waves, drain them during storms, and provide habitats for wildlife and pollinators.

This has an economic impact, reducing risks and preserving the value of business activity. Trees help to cool and drain urban areas; air conditioning and flood defences are costly and carbon-intensive substitutes. This year London opened its first desalination plant, providing fresh water at a cost of £270m in a country that is still one of the wettest in Europe. Well maintained green infrastructure helps to reduce water run-off and preserve aquifers; the less we look after and value it, the more we will need to turn to expensive alternatives, and the more those costs will be passed on to businesses and taxpayers.

While the work of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force helped us understand the value of individual green spaces and public access to them, recent thinking on ecosystem services has helped us appreciate how they all work together: the whole is much greater than the sum of the parts. This is particularly true when it comes to biodiversity, one of our main protections against the impacts of climate change. A species of bird or insect cannot rely on one green space; it needs a network of suitable habitats to provide food and shelter.

The government-commissioned Lawton Review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network, published in September 2010, called for 'large-scale habitat restorations and re-creation' to rectify continuing damage to our natural environment. Lawton's watchwords were 'more, bigger, better and joined' – a network of improved green spaces that give our flora and fauna the best chance of survival. [16]

Climate change is a challenge that will not go away. Similarly, the costs and risks of sedentary lifestyles, mental ill-health and social care will not disappear just because there is less money available. Well run green spaces provide safe and welcoming places to exercise, act as stress-busters, and are open to all. Extensive research has mapped and documented these benefits (see part 4 and Appendix). Green spaces are fundamentally linked to the quality of human life: when we neglect them we simply pick up the tab elsewhere.

A central message of this report is that we do not need more research and evidence in order to act appropriately. But we do need to exercise more intelligence in formulating public policy and funding local action, and we need a shared understanding that while our green spaces are a public good, they are not a free one.

This report sets out a framework for an intelligent approach in difficult economic times, and outlines how all need to rise to the challenge of making it happen. Neither central nor local government, neither private companies nor community and voluntary organisations, can afford to think of our green spaces as someone else's problem. While its recommendations are specific to England, its principles apply across the UK.

Much has been made of our economic difficulties, but the UK remains one of the wealthiest nations on the planet and our circumstances are far from impossible. As the Lawton Review points out, our national parks were created at a time of austerity. Food rationing was still in force when Dartmoor, the Lake District, the Peak District and Snowdonia were declared national parks in 1951. The same period saw a huge investment in creating the National Health Service and building new towns. Austerity was a spur to action.

We have far greater evidence of the value and functions of green spaces than we had in 1951. The doubt is whether we have the same will to preserve and improve them.

That will is not lacking at community level. Nearly 88,000 people across England are waiting for allotments – for every 100 plots provided by local authorities there are another 57 people on waiting lists. [17] Similarly, the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens has seen a sustained growth in community gardens. Other emerging trends in local food growing include guerrilla gardening, skip gardens and temporary gardens in vacant spaces, [18] such as Camley Street Natural Park in King's Cross, London. [19] In response to increasing demand for land, the Community Land Advisory Service has been established, helping community groups navigate bureaucratic and legal obstacles.

New growing and gardening movements are proliferating. One community growing initiative, Incredible Edible Todmorden, is now known globally and gets 15,000 hits on its website every day. The Transition Towns network has spread from one initiative in Totnes, Devon in 2006 to more than 400 worldwide, most of them in the UK. Ten new members a day are joining the London green network, Project Dirt.

These enthusiastic and committed volunteers are bringing a new energy and vitality that is greening our towns and cities. But on their own they can't invest at scale in managing and maintaining the green spaces we already have; neither can they provide a strategic approach. Government, central and local, must play its part. We must find better ways to link up energy and strategy.

By working with the 'social capital' within our communities – networks of friendships and interests and family connections – government can protect and enhance the value of our 'natural capital', the green assets that if looked after can add at least as much value to our towns and cities as portfolios of property and buildings.

The Localism Act provides important new rights that can help people build on this new local energy, influencing the provision and planning of local services and amenities. But the energy will be dissipated if government simply tries to pass the buck, or uses the 'big society' agenda as an excuse for inaction. This is why local councils and central government need to invest directly and also partner with trusted intermediaries who are experienced in working with local communities and skilled in creating and looking after green spaces.

It would be tragic if, instead of celebrating this year's Diamond Jubilee with new investment and care for our public places, it will be remembered as the year the rot set in – the beginning of the end rather than the end of a promising beginning. That gloomy prospect is a real risk, but it can be avoided. Just as in 1951, we can use our current challenges as an opportunity to create lasting value.

We have been warned: The National Audit Office report

When the National Audit Office produced its 2006 report, *Enhancing Urban Green Space,* there was real hope that the decline in Britain's parks had finally been reversed. The report lauded the efforts of government, local authorities, Lottery funders and green space experts over the previous few years and reflected the sense of optimism about what had been and could be achieved.

By the time of the report £700m a year was being spent, 70 per cent of it from local authority budgets with a further 15 per cent from central government and Europe. Private contributions made up another 5 per cent and Lottery funds 8 per cent, with just 2 per cent coming from voluntary contributions.

But the improvements were far from universal. Green space was still not a high priority for many local authorities. Unlike child protection or housing homeless people, it is not a statutory duty. Parks managers with limited budgets and less political clout were expected to make their case in competition with services with a voice at executive level.

Despite improvements since 2002, the NAO found local authorities had been slow to assess local needs for green space or even to audit their own provision. While more were adopting green space strategies, these varied widely in quality. The management of parks and green spaces was fragmented and seen as low in the pecking order.

'Green space makes a vital contribution to the quality of urban life and to the achievement of a range of Government objectives,' the NAO said. 'Access to green space is a powerful weapon in the fight against obesity and ill-health, especially amongst children.'

This contribution was at risk because one third of local authorities did not have green space strategies, so were not able to invest intelligently; there were wide variations in maintenance costs; and green space was still too often treated as a 'Cinderella service'.

The NAO warned: 'Central government expects local green space managers to make the case for green space expenditure against other pressing priorities and to forge links with the private, community and voluntary sectors. Green space managers' training needs to be tailored to the new role expected of them. Otherwise there is the danger that when budgets are tight, the case for green space will not be made effectively, will slip down the local priority list and decline will set in again.'

SPOTLIGHT 1.

THE DIFFERENCE INVESTMENT CAN MAKE: TAFF BARGOED COUNTRY PARK

> *“This is not just an ex-mining valley – it’s an outdoor experience valley,”*
>
> says Dave Lewis, Community Director at Groundwork Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taff in South Wales.

Dave Lewis, Community Director at Groundwork Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taff is showing off the climbing centre at the heart of the Taff Bargoed valley, in the middle of a site once deemed too polluted and dangerous for the public to enter.

In the river nearby, dippers can be seen and anglers are waiting for a catch; 20 years ago nothing could live in this water. A network of reedbeds at the top of the valley filters out pollutants from the former mine workings. Now the valley is a country park, created by Groundwork and the local community, and hugely popular with anglers, cyclists and canoeists.

Howard Jackson, manager of the climbing centre, works for Taff Bargoed Development Trust, set up to create new jobs and opportunities in a valley where once nearly everyone worked in the pits.

‘I live just a mile down the road. I’m an ex-miner as well – I’m exactly what this centre was built for, to create local employment after the demise of the mining industry,’ Howard says.

The climbing wall, which opened in 1997 as the Welsh International Climbing Centre and is now known as the Summit Centre, is the largest in Wales and along with the nearby caving facility is leased out to adventure sports firm Rock UK, bringing in income for the development trust.

Built around one of the few surviving colliery buildings, it also hosts a fitness suite, workshops where people can learn construction skills or motor trades, and the offices of a coach company which provides transport for Rock UK customers. There are plans to expand the accommodation at the site to bring in more of the tourists who come up from Cardiff or Bristol or pass through on their way to outdoor climbing on the Pembrokeshire coast.

‘We’re not going to put the same amount of jobs back in as the mines – there were 1,200 jobs – but the centre at the moment employs 35 staff and with the development plans we’re looking to go up to 65. With these regeneration plans and extra employment it is starting to look more positive,’ Howard says.

‘We did have one or two doubters in the community at the start who said why build a wall in the middle of the valley, but we’ve proved all those doubters wrong. We’re still here, we’re still employing people and looking to a much brighter future.’

Such a future couldn’t have been imagined back in 1991, when the Deep Navigation mine between the villages of Trelewis and Treharris closed. The pit, along with the nearby collieries of Taff Merthyr and Trelewis Drift, dominated and damaged the valley.

Shirley Bufton, who at the age of 76 is still active in a community group dedicated to greening Trelewis, has lived in the valley all her life.

‘It was brilliant when I was growing up because everybody left their front doors open and everybody was aunties and uncles. But it was filthy. Our parents worked really hard just to keep us and the place clean,’ she recalls.

‘There wasn’t a blade of grass you could touch. If there was a daisy it was dirty. People accepted their lot – if you were born into a mining family you worked in the pit.’

While the coal industry destroyed the valley physically, its demise devastated it economically and emotionally. British Coal saw its responsibility as clearing up and walking away.

‘The whole village I reckon was sitting up on that mountain the day they blew the klaxon horn and the pitheads were blown up,’ Shirley remembers. ‘Then all the jobs went and it went very quiet. Then all the shops started closing and that was the end of it.’

For the Taff Bargoed valley, like many of the South Wales valleys, it seemed the heart had been ripped out when the coal industry went. Cardiff, then as now, could not provide jobs for everyone who had worked in the mines or the businesses that served them. Efforts to attract new industries were patchy and their impact was limited.

So the reinvention of the valley as a country park did more than just provide a few jobs. It gave local people a sense of hope and pride in an area that had lost both.

'It used to be the dole, men looking for jobs, hanging around on corners – it wasn't a good time,' Shirley says.

'Then all of a sudden Groundwork came in, they started work on this pathway, it was like a tunnel of light had started to come back, the place started to look nice and you had something to look forward to.'

'When the park opened my husband and I went straight out and bought bikes. On that first day we went out I think about 100 people must have passed us going the other way, it was unbelievable. We were in our sixties when we bought our first bikes.'

In fact there was nothing sudden about the country park: it was the result of hard negotiation involving Groundwork, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, British Coal, Wales Government and – crucially – the Millennium Commission, which provided the essential funding. Without that input Taff Bargoed might be like other parts of the south Wales coalfield where, Dave Lewis says, 'a black scar has just been replaced by a green scar'.

The other important change is that people have started to think differently about the kind of place the Taff Bargoed valley is.

'The reality we're seeing in the post-industrial schemes is that there is still a rural environment and a rural economy that has an equally valid opportunity of bringing jobs back in,' says Groundwork executive director Margaret Hannigan-Popp.

‘We need innovation and industry as well in terms of the scale of jobs and the types of jobs, but the thing that’s happened, and I think Taff Bargoed was at the front of that, was creating this kind of rural green economy that could safeguard the environment for local communities, provide healthy facilities for local young people and a different context for them to grow up in.’

Visit Groundwork’s base at Fedw Hir near Aberdare and you’ll see that transition to a more rural economy in action. The centre teaches environmental skills, from beekeeping to woodworking, gardening and construction.

This positive view of new possibilities has been central to the success of Taff Bargoed Country Park. It hasn’t sought to erase memories of the past – the valley walkway is full of reminders of the mining industry – but neither does it sentimentalise them. It has shown how a new landscape can help provide a new outlook.

‘There was a very long time frame in terms of reclamation but the moment people could get on to that cycle track and walkway it was just inundated with people from the local village,’ Margaret says. ‘It became very much part of the local community. We’re told that the bicycle shop in Treharris sold out in the first month that people could get onto the park.

‘They may sound like small changes but actually they’re hugely meaningful because once one group starts using the park more people feel encouraged.’

The local authority no longer views Taff Bargoed as a reclamation project and is promoting it as a tourist destination, employing park rangers and giving guided tours. Art groups are thriving and there is an annual festival.

‘What I think we set out to do was create more than just environmental improvement,’ Margaret says. ‘Yes, it was to create facilities for the local community, it was to bring nature back into the valley but I think it was to give people a sense of their own history.

‘It’s about much more than having very clever engineers and landscape architects. It’s much more than being able to work out which facilities are viable. It really is about engaging with people and giving them the opportunity to get excited and do their own creative things. It’s about encouraging the creative spirit that can be drummed out of people.’

‘What I think we set out to do was create more than just environmental improvement,’ Margaret says.

PART 2

A COMMON CAUSE

> *"A city's greenspace system is the inherited commonwealth of an urban population to which each generation should contribute as well as enjoy."*
>
> Alan Barber, Green Future

Many thousands of children will have grown up with an awareness of their local 'common' – a place to play and explore, for sport or just somewhere in the open to be with friends or family.

Wanstead Flats in East London, on the border between Newham and Redbridge, is typical. On a Saturday you might find football teams playing in organised amateur leagues, kids learning to ride bikes or feeding ducks on the pond, dog walkers, runners, cyclists and model aircraft enthusiasts. Occasionally you might even find someone exercising their ancient right to graze cows.

As London expanded relentlessly in the last 300 years, pockets of common land remained. Unlike public parks they were open and relatively unregulated. Many are now in the capital's least affluent areas, from Peckham Rye in Southwark to London Fields in Hackney. Others, like Hampstead Heath, attract tourists from across the world as well as local residents.

There are more than 7,000 commons in England, covering nearly 400,000 hectares – three per cent of the country's land. Contrary to popular folklore, they are not everybody's property. Many are privately owned: Wanstead Flats, for example, is part of Epping Forest, owned by the City of London Corporation.

But the public have access to and rights over these commons, originally enshrined in law in the Commons Act of 1285 and reinforced by Parliament as recently as 2006, in legislation which set out standards for their management and protection.

Despite names that often suggest poor quality land of low value – Wormwood Scrubs, Roadside Waste, Nether Mire – these commons are hugely important. Nearly half England's common land lies within national parks, 30 per cent within areas of outstanding natural beauty, and one fifth of them are within sites of special scientific interest. More than one tenth of England's scheduled ancient monuments are on common land.

The commons are vestiges of much larger areas that were historically open to all for foraging, grazing and recreation. Although these open spaces are no longer required for subsistence, they are recognised as public goods that provide benefits to all of us, even if the title of the land is in private hands.

Far from being a historical anomaly, the commons have been a rallying point for civic pride and involvement and are seen as prized local assets, from village greens to large expanses of green space. They have also been centres of protest and politics: Blackheath was the setting for Wat Tyler's Peasants' Revolt of 1381, while Putney Heath hosted the famous Putney Debates during the English Civil War in 1647.

This history of activism is now being revived in the international move towards 'food commons', new shared spaces for the production of fruit and vegetables for local consumption. [20] While food commons are generally small scale community initiatives, they show how the principles of access to communal space and a right to grow can be put to work to produce affordable food for people on low incomes and counter the trend towards globalised, energy intensive food supply chains. [21]

This belief that green and open spaces are a public good, whether or not they are communally or state-owned, has been reinforced when put to the test by government. A survey by the Forestry Commission in 2009 found that 98 per cent of respondents believed forestry should be supported with public money, with wildlife, climate change and recreation cited as the most important issues. [22]

When the government proposed the sale of Forestry Commission land in 2010, a petition of protest attracted more than 530,000 signatures. Polls suggested 84 per cent of the country opposed the sale, and in February 2011 the plans were unceremoniously ditched.

In the wake of the outcry, the government appointed an Independent Panel on Forestry, chaired by Bishop of Liverpool James Jones. The panel published its interim report in December 2011. Significantly, its early conclusion was that woods and forests in public ownership could not be considered in isolation. It would not be possible to make sensible recommendations for the management of the 20 per cent of woodlands that are publicly owned without considering the 80 per cent that are in private hands, only half of which are actively managed. [23]

Bishop Jones reported: 'More than 42,000 people responded to the panel's call for views. They overwhelmingly expressed their passion for the public forest estate, and woods more generally, as places of recreation, a way to connect with nature and as a vital source of resources, not least of wood.'

One of the most important observations in the panel's interim report is that forestry and biodiversity do not sit well within the short-term approaches of politics and business planning: 'The economic and ecological timescales of woodland management are simply not in step with electoral cycles. The number of forestry policies that have been brought forward over the last 50 years – within the lifetime of a single tree – bears witness to this.'

The report added:

'We need to describe a new relationship between the public forest estate, public institutions and the public within which these different timescales are a source of strength and security, rather than of tension.'

What the Independent Panel on Forestry has recognised is both that public benefits accrue from forests and woodlands, and that public responsibilities and a duty of stewardship apply irrespective of ownership status. This holds true for our urban parks and green spaces too.

This idea of a duty of stewardship may be simple to articulate but it is tricky to implement, because it involves a web of different legal titles, interests, and public benefits. This green infrastructure needs to be thought of as a whole, not just as the sum of its constituent parts, and the diverse social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits they provide need to be clearly understood (see part 4).

Our green spaces must be managed and looked after in ways that share the buck rather than pass it; the challenge is to do so in ways that divide responsibilities and cost burdens fairly. The following sections set out how we might do so, but first we need to explain the dilemmas we face.

The first dilemma: accounting for public benefits

Even in prosperous times, most decisions on public spending and investment, and many decisions on public responsibilities and duties, are driven by cost-benefit accounting, with the costs taking precedence. The same tends to be true of private companies. If an action does not visibly contribute to the bottom line, its value is questioned. In times of insecurity, these financial equations tend to brook no argument.

The difficulty here is that most of the benefits provided by green spaces are off the balance sheet – they are 'externalities' that do not feature in anyone's sets of accounts, either because no value has been assigned to them or because the only value that appears is the cost of improvement or maintenance.

Assets thus become labelled liabilities. Parks that may be the jewels of their cities are frequently listed on local authorities' registers of assets with a nominal value of only £1. As Cabe has reported the result is that they become 'financially invisible'. [24] Their upkeep is a cost to be trimmed when the going gets tough, but the value they create goes unreported, even when the impacts are relatively easy to uncover, such as the effects on nearby property values. [25]

Fully accounting for the public benefits created by green spaces is time-consuming and a cost in itself. Sometimes simple measures can be very helpful: volunteers at community gardens in Manchester were asked to log their hours, and it was calculated that if this work was paid for at the minimum wage it would cost £1.7m a year. This helped justify a £10,000 city council programme to support community gardens, but it is a rough and ready calculation: it does not take into account 'deadweight' (work which would have been done anyway); nor does it factor in value that doesn't have a financial proxy, such as the effect on local people's sense of community or wellbeing.

More sophisticated forms of analysis are available to measure what is known as social return on investment (SROI). An analysis by the New Economics Foundation of the Greener Living Spaces programme, managed by Groundwork on behalf of Marks & Spencer, found that every £1 invested created £2.15 of additional value. [26]

However, it warned that as well as discounting deadweight, the analysis also had to meet the challenges of attribution (identifying the factors responsible for the additional value) and displacement (the possibility that additional value is achieved at the expense of other activities). A further complicating factor is drop-off – the fact that momentum for any project or activity tends to decrease over time.

Proving social value can place heavy burdens on those being asked to do the measuring. Greenspace Scotland found that while community groups were able to demonstrate the value of their work in improving green spaces, they needed significant help in order to do so and at first struggled to understand the calculations they were being asked to make. [27]

'From the outset there has to be a recognition that SROI requires time, resources and commitment,' Greenspace Scotland cautioned. It warned, too, against attempting to boil the worth of green spaces down to a simple ratio of money invested to value added: 'SROI is much more than just a number. it is a story about change, which is told through case studies, qualitative, quantitative and financial information premised on the belief that value can be assessed by measuring change and this can then be expressed in monetary terms by using a financial proxy.'

Despite the difficulties in accounting for the public benefits of green space, serious attempts are being made within government and business to move towards approaches that more accurately reflect the real value created, enhanced and protected by well maintained, ecologically diverse green spaces. This work is important because concepts of value, particularly concepts with numbers attached to them, drive decision-making.

Our Victorian forebears invested in parks because they believed they had a moralising and civilising influence. Those arguments tend not to hold sway in a society dominated by economic calculations. In today's milieu, cultural and environmental value tends to be ranked secondary to financial value. Ruskin's aphorism that 'there is no wealth but life' cuts little ice in budget meetings.

This, as Lord Selborne argues in his introduction to the *UK National Ecosystem Assessment,* creates a series of perverse incentives: 'This underestimation of the value of natural processes in economic terms means that we take inadequately informed decisions on how to use these resources. The result is pollution, the loss of species and ecosystems and damage to the processes we need, with real economic costs either to recover them or to provide artificial alternatives.'

In its white paper, *The Natural Choice,* the coalition government accepts this analysis and asserts that a healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing. The paper specifically recognises the importance of urban green spaces (page 31): 'Greener neighbourhoods and improved access to nature will improve public health and quality of life and reduce environmental inequalities.' Further, it pledges to 'put natural capital at the centre of economic thinking and at the heart of the way we measure economic progress nationally', and promises to develop a set of key indicators to measure this. Alongside this, the Treasury has issued guidance *(Accounting for Environmental Impacts)* showing how ecosystem services can be factored into financial decision-making, and explaining how the concept of 'total economic value' can be applied.

This remains easier to discuss than to put into practice. While the Office for National Statistics is currently consulting on how to measure wellbeing [28] and the French government commissioned Nobel prizewinning economists Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz to examine alternatives to Gross Domestic Product, [29] decision-makers remain wedded to traditional approaches to measuring value and there has been little progress at local government level.

There is a discernible direction of travel within the scientific and research community, even if it proceeds at a snail's pace. In the policy arena, Defra has worked hard to explore alternative approaches to valuation. Its 2007 report, An Introductory Guide to Valuing Ecosystem Services set out five key steps to be taken: [30]

- Establish the environmental baseline.
- Identify and provide qualitative assessment of the potential impacts of policy options on ecosystem services.
- Quantify the impacts of policy options on specific ecosystem services.
- Assess the effects on human welfare.
- Value the changes in ecosystem services.

This approach to valuation has to work at a macro level, because it views ecosystem services as a whole, not as the individual functions of particular habitats or green spaces. The four types of services, usually summarised as supporting, regulating, provisioning and cultural, must all be taken into account to arrive at a value.

The next stage from valuing ecosystem services is to pay for them: to reward those who provide them, and deter those who destroy or diminish them. Internationally, this debate is taking on a rising prominence in the context of the Rio+20 conference, which seeks to reinforce worldwide commitment to sustainable development.

The United Nations Environment Programme has begun to explore how this can happen. Its 2009 report, *Making Payments for Ecosystem Services Work,* examines how those who provide ecosystem services – governments, businesses or individuals – could be compensated for acting in ways that maintain and improve rather than degrade them. But it acknowledges that this is highly complex territory and payment models are often inefficient (page 23). [31]

Despite these unresolved difficulties, there is extensive, though more narrowly defined, evidence of the benefits of green space (see Part 4). A 2008 study of Philadelphia's parks is one good example: it calculates that every dollar the city spends creates one hundred dollars of added value, in the form of municipal revenues, cost savings, and local wealth. [32]

Much of this value, however, can only be calculated on a 'what if' basis: you have to assume the additional costs and reduced wealth there would be if the parks were not there. Because the parks are there, by a skewed logic, the added value tends not to figure in anyone's budget.

Similar difficulties face businesses when trying to assess their environmental impact. A firm that factors externalities into its public accounts is potentially disadvantaged in the eyes of investors compared to one that ignores costs it does not have to bear. Unsurprisingly, progress towards environmental accounting has been slow.

Another UN initiative, The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), is attempting to get to grips with this conundrum. [33] Like the UK Government's Stern Report on the economics of climate change [34] it sees environmental damage as evidence of market failure: 'Companies do not clear-cut forests out of wanton destructiveness or stupidity. On the whole, they do so because market signals... make it a logical and profitable thing to do.'

It recommends all businesses should disclose environmental liabilities and changes in 'natural assets' in their accounts, driven by four guiding principles: no net loss of biodiversity; a 'net positive impact' of business activities; a 'polluter pays' approach to environmental damage; and 'full cost recovery' where environmental degradation takes place.

'Valuation is seen not as a panacea, but rather as a tool to help us recalibrate the faulty economic compass that has led us to decisions that are prejudicial to both current well being and that of future generations,' TEEB argues. 'The invisibility of biodiversity values has often encouraged inefficient use or even destruction of the natural capital that is the foundation of our economies.'

Some firms are already experimenting with environmental accounting. Footwear manufacturer Puma published its first environmental balance sheet in November 2011, reckoning its impact at €145m. The company assessed its liability at €94 for greenhouse gas emissions and water consumption, and €51 from land use, air pollution and waste. [35]

Such reports may be largely of academic interest unless they become standard in the commercial world. But they set a benchmark, as Puma's executive chairman Jochen Zeitz observed: 'The unprecedented Puma environmental profit and loss account has been indispensible for us to realise the immense value of nature's services that are currently being taken for granted but without which companies could not sustain themselves.'

The second dilemma: apportioning responsibility for public benefits

Measuring what is in many ways of immeasurable value is our first dilemma. The second is deciding who should take responsibility for it. The 'tragedy of the commons' is well known: when a resource is shared and individuals act in their own rational self-interest it becomes over-exploited and depleted, even though all know this is in nobody's long-term interest. Avoiding the tragedy of the commons while preserving and improving the shared resource is a brain-teaser we have yet to solve satisfactorily, either at a local or a global scale.

The postwar welfare state consensus was that state intervention and ownership resolved the issue. If a good was of common value it should be publicly owned: this view was expressed vehemently by many of the objectors to the 2010 forestry sale plans.

An alternative view, strongly held by the governments of the 1980s and 1990s and now back in political vogue, is that private provision is a more efficient and cost-effective way of discharging public responsibilities. The state's role then is to become a regulator to ensure fair access and standards of service; it is assumed that competition between private providers will encourage innovation and efficiency while enabling firms to make a reasonable profit.

Both approaches have disadvantages. In the first case, state provision, despite being advocated as a long-term strategic approach, is constrained by constantly changing policies, short-term political demands and poor financial planning. The state can display the same lack of foresight and negligence as any private firm, but without the same financial reality checks.

In the second case, the desire to maximise profit margins combined with a lack of accountability can lead to similar results: corners cut, short-termism and a narrow appreciation of value. The compulsory competitive tendering of municipal parks services in the 1980s and 1990s has been roundly blamed for much of the deterioration of our urban green spaces in recent decades (Urban Parks Forum, 2001) and is an experience few greenspace professionals or users of parks would wish to repeat.

Public policy in the UK has frequently failed to recognise the importance of our green spaces or the attendant responsibilities of stewardship. Competitive tendering dismantled many local authorities' skill base; budget cuts reduced investment in improvement and maintenance; the absence of statutory responsibilities led to a loss of strategic overview. Constant reorganisation in both central and local government removed expertise and demoralised key workers. [36]

Much of our green space, in any event, is outside public ownership. Even the commons, perceived as public goods, are often owned privately (see Spotlight 2). Many of our most important wildlife habitats are private gardens. [37]

A private householder or landowner, though, is not best placed to see how their particular green patch fits within the wider pattern of urban and rural green space. A gardener may plant to encourage biodiversity and take part in the kind of surveys undertaken by the BBC Springwatch programme, but can only intervene at a micro level. Businesses, working at a larger scale, may be more able to manage their land positively but often lack information and need encouragement.

External agencies are often the catalyst for better practice, both among individuals and businesses. A report on the Britain in Bloom competition described ‘truly transformational’ community activities, with neighbours becoming friends and wildlife returning to previously neglected spaces, when individuals and groups took part in a nationally organised contest (Royal Horticultural Society, 2011).

The Natural Benefits for Business programme, which ran in Cumbria between 2006 and 2008, was the result of a partnership between the Northwest Biodiversity Forum, Natural Economy Northwest (a publicly funded research programme), Cumbria Biodiversity Partnership and Cumbria Rural Enterprise Agency. Participants in the programme were able to increase customer loyalty, cut maintenance costs and boost staff morale. [38]

Even large businesses struggle to find a strategic role without assistance. When Marks & Spencer wanted to channel £3m from carrier bag charges into community greening schemes, it called on Groundwork trusts to deliver the programme because of their record of ‘working with the grain’ of local communities (see Spotlight 7). Firms can ensure their own practice is sound and sustainable: United Utilities, for example, has contracted with the Offshoots permaculture project in Burnley to restore Calderdale Moor with cotton grass. They can mobilise their workforce as volunteers; and, like Marks & Spencer, they can encourage their customers to adopt more positive practices.

Private businesses have much to offer and are integral to any systemic approach to the care of green spaces. But they, like individuals, need to understand where they fit within the whole and how they can put their assets and energies to best use.

The same is true for community groups. There is a wave of popular interest in green spaces, from 'guerrilla gardening' where local people take direct action to transform derelict or dead spaces, to more formal community gardens and food growing projects. Many of the most exciting and potentially transformative developments are taking place on a completely informal level, without public or corporate funding and below the radar of local and central government.

But the practical limitations must be acknowledged. Informal and unresourced groups cannot be expected to take on the long-term management and potential liabilities of large open spaces or public parks. Central and local government, private and voluntary organisations and individual citizens must all play a role (see Part 5).

A strategic approach is needed to link up local enthusiasts and enable them to work coherently in partnership with larger landowners, local authorities and public agencies such as the NHS. The important work of a host of green space organisations, from the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens to GreenSpace, BTCV, the Wildlife Trusts and local friends' groups, needs to be recognised, supported, and connected in ways that add value rather than dissipate it.

This requires strong and trusted intermediaries, a research-based understanding of what needs to be done, and a framework to bring it all together. The next section describes how we can begin to construct such a framework.

SPOTLIGHT 2.

COMPLEX OWNERSHIP, COMMON ACCESS: AN EXAMPLE OF GREEN SPACE FOR ALL

You can still trace the route of the former racecourse on Tunbridge Wells Common in Kent. In keeping with the town's genteel reputation, the races were suppressed in 1851 because of the spectators' drunken and rowdy behaviour. The course is now a tree-lined promenade.

Common land is generally thought of as land open to all, but you certainly can't do what you like. In the 19th century the common's managers were known as Hogpounders because of the enthusiastic way they levied fines for animals grazing without permission.

The 257 acres of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall commons have been 'common land' for almost a millennium. Far from being owned by nobody or everybody, they were given after the Norman Conquest to the Lord of the Manor of Rusthall and are still owned by the manorial lord's successors.

The land, known as the 'wastes' of the manor, was assigned in perpetuity to the manor's freehold tenants, who could use it for activities such as grazing, quarrying and collecting firewood.

During the 17th and 18th centuries Tunbridge Wells expanded rapidly as a spa town, and the freeholders persuaded Parliament to pass the Rusthall Manor Act of 1739, which prevented further development without mutual consent.

Picture by *Christopher Cassidy*

From the early 19th century the commons were managed by the freeholders. As tourists flocked to the town, the commons became important open spaces to rival the formal parks being established in larger cities.

Further legislation in 1890 and 1981 established the commons as public open spaces with free access, subject to various bylaws. They are now managed by the Tunbridge Wells Commons Conservators under the 1981 legislation, but funded by the local authority.

The 12 conservators are split equally between the borough council, the manor (now represented by a private company, Targetfollow) and the freehold tenants, and must provide their services voluntarily. Under the 1981 legislation the local authority is obliged to pay the conservators the commons' management costs, which currently include the employment of a warden and an administrator.

Over the 20th century the commons became overgrown with scrub, much of which is now mature woodland. The conservators plan to return substantial areas to their historic state as open heathland, and are being actively supported by a volunteer group, the Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons.

The combination of private ownership, local authority funding, statutory management, community support and open public access may be a quirk of centuries of history, but it demonstrates how all can play a part in the care of green space – as long as action is underpinned by a clear set of responsibilities set out in law.

PART 3

OUR GREEN SPATIAL AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

> “What may look like an innocent raised bed is actually the representation of a radical realignment of human thinking.”
>
> Paul Clarke, Education for Sustainability

In Part 2 we saw how the care of our green spaces is beset by two complex challenges: assessing value, and apportioning responsibility. The rest of this report outlines how we can begin to meet these challenges, and returns to the idea of the commons as a model for stewardship.

To fully appreciate the multifunctional nature of green spaces and the multiple demands of managing them, we need to think of them as networks of places which require the involvement of networks of people. A coherent approach starts with an understanding of how all of these work together, rather than trying to impose a standard solution that is expected to work everywhere or for everyone.

To get the best out of both places and people we need to stop thinking of them as liabilities. Our parks would have much less wear and tear if they were never used, but would be of minimal value to the communities around them. The would cost less if they were not maintained, but would depress the surrounding area and attract crime and vandalism. Both the spaces and the people who use them bring value to their surrounding environment and communities. But both the spaces and the people require care.

Network thinking: more than the sum of the parts

Traditional thinking about green spaces views them as fixtures, rather like buildings or roads, that serve specific functions. These leads to an assumption that they need a management model designed to serve a particular purpose, with clear lines of command and contractual obligations.

It is perfectly possible to manage green spaces in such a way. But the result can often be a space that is used and loved by relatively people, the urban equivalent of a field of cabbages or a pine plantation. A park that is thought of mainly as a place for organised sport, for example, might be a poor place for children's play or provide little to encourage biodiversity. The multiple demands on the urban environment require a multifunctional approach to green space management.

Our growing understanding of the importance of biodiversity and the different services that ecosystems provide can help us appreciate the value of the whole spectrum of green spaces, ranging from formal parks to brownfield sites, railway embankments to private gardens. Each of these can offer a variety of habitats and help us adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change; many provide places where people can plant and grow, exercise and socialise.

In such a context, standard command-and-control organisational models are insufficient. They represent a hierarchical system where, at best, the whole is never more than the sum of the parts. If the hierarchy is dysfunctional, the whole is less than the sum of the parts. An effective network, by contrast, is more than the sum of the parts, because creative connections can occur between its members without central direction or oversight.

The joy and potential of a good network is that it builds mutually supportive connections. In the natural world we observe these as symbiotic relationships: species that do better because they depend on each other. The challenge in a resource-stretched human world is to encourage symbiosis in human networks so that dependency is replaced by interdependency.

In the case of green spaces, this means maximising the number of connections between different groups and participants, and building the strength of those connections. This is hard to achieve through formal contractor-client relationships, which encourage distrust and constant monitoring; the ideal is a social contract between users, managers, volunteers and funders in which mutual gain is seen to be fair and transparent.

The power of such 'distributed networks' has been observed in the way web-based phenomena have emerged and expanded. Clay Shirky describes how the user-generated Wikipedia became so pervasive that it killed off Microsoft's expensive and expert-led online encyclopaedia, Encarta. [39] It is difficult to imagine now that Wikipedia did not exist at the turn of the millennium. If you want to find out about Encarta, however, search engines will direct you first of all to its Wikipedia entry.

The Linux operating system is an example of the same 'open source' approach from the world of computing. By issuing an open invitation to help create the source code, Linus Torvalds – and the thousands of volunteers working with him online – created a complete operating system within three years. The Wordpress blogging platform, similarly developed as an open source project, now powers more than 72 million websites and in its basic form is free to use.

Phenomenal growth is not a given quality of networks. Many are stable, and many wither and disappear. But networks offer the possibility of growing through multiplication rather than addition, whether that is multiplication of members or activities or both.

Project Dirt (see Spotlight 3) is a live example of an expanding user-led greenspace network in London, and demonstrates the potential to connect people, share information and stimulate new activities. The Ocean Conservancy's annual Coastal Cleanup has grown from a single site in Texas to become one of the largest volunteer events in the world, involving nearly half a million people in 45 US states and 108 other countries. [40]

If the physical networks of green spaces can be linked effectively with the human ability to form and grow networks, it should be possible to join up public goods and public responsibilities in ways that create a 21st century version of the ancient commons bargain: all contribute and all benefit.

The spatial network: from places to landscapes

Too often public policy treats green spaces as a patchwork rather than a network. A striking feature of much of the research from the last decade is that nobody knows how many green spaces there are or what functions they serve. This lack of knowledge inevitably hampers decision-making. Without knowing the totality and quality of green space in an area, a local authority will struggle to know whether social and ecological needs are being met.

Cabe Space reported in 2009: 'Nobody knows how many green spaces there are, where they are, who owns them or what their quality is. The information gap makes it extremely difficult to maintain a strategic view, coordinate provision, respond to changing social needs, or plan for a changing climate.' [41]

In response to its own concerns, Cabe Space began compiling a national database. Its Urban Green Nation report (2010) analysed data from more than 70 sources and 16,000 spaces to gauge the state of local parks. [42] But this only covered publicly owned green spaces. Cabe's successor, the Design Council, is not proceeding with this work.

Urban Green Nation sought to draw out connections between urban green spaces and the surrounding environment. It found, for example, that the provision of green spaces tended to be worse in more deprived areas, and that the more satisfied people were with local green spaces, the happier they tended to be with their local council. However, it did not look at how green spaces in an area worked together, or how public spaces connected with those that are privately owned.

Alan Barber (*Green Future,* 2005) described publicly owned green space as a 'greenspace system', drawing on a view of urban green space more familiar in the US; however, the idea that the system can be delineated in terms of public or private ownership fails to reflect the fact that biodiversity ignores human restrictions on access and title.

These shortcomings are significant because when we consider green spaces as providers of ecosystem services and as ways of adjusting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change, we have to look at the totality rather than at individual spaces or particular providers of green space.

The Lawton Review set an important benchmark in terms of viewing green spaces as a network within which different elements support and sustain each other. The review, which focused on wildlife sites, stressed the importance of improving the connectivity between sites as well as the maintenance of individual sites. This connectivity enables species to move from place to place, increasing their chances of surviving extreme weather events such as floods and droughts, and helps to reduce the negative impact of human activity.

The benefits of such links are felt by humans as well as other species. Sheffield's Round Walk, for example, is a 14-mile circular network of river valleys, woodlands, formal and semi-formal parks and open countryside. As well as supporting a wide range of plants and wildlife, it supports all sorts of human activity – from children's play areas and cafés to picnic spots, footpaths, tennis courts and a farm with Highland cattle. It links different social groups, too, passing through both the Gleadless Valley council estate and some of the city's wealthiest suburbs.

The economic importance of green spaces also becomes clearer when they are seen as parts of a landscape rather than as isolated patches. A river valley provides drainage, and, if managed well, reduces the flood risks to businesses and homes in urban areas. It also provides an attractive setting for investment and development and can host leisure pursuits and tourism. If you hide or culvert the river all those benefits are lost.

The Natural Economy Northwest programme, which ran from 2006 to 2009, produced extensive research to catalogue the benefits of green infrastructure. 'Resources such as the countryside, coast, wetlands, urban parks, street trees and their ecosystems are seen as critical for sustainable economic growth and social goals, not just a way of supporting wildlife and "the environment",' it reported. [43]

This green infrastructure, from farmland to wetland, public parks to private gardens, and roadside verges to urban trees, supports 11 identifiable economic benefits, it concluded.

These are:

- Economic growth and investment
- Land and property values
- Labour productivity
- Tourism
- Products from the land
- Health and wellbeing
- Recreation and leisure
- Quality of place
- Land management and biodiversity
- Flood alleviation and management
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation

By looking at the networks of green space at a landscape level it is possible to see how they produce all these effects and underpin economic prosperity and wellbeing. But in isolation, their value is diminished and goes unrecognised.

Once green spaces are understood as a network or series of networks, it is possible to plan improvements and interventions in ways that have impacts beyond the particular location in which they are sited, and at scales that range from the very local to entire regions.

In Hackney, East London, local people and groups are setting up hives on the roofs of buildings, including the famous music studios, The Premises, in response to the rapid decline of the capital's bee population, which has halved since 2008. This is an example of how a series of small actions can influence the bigger picture. In Hampshire, an understanding of the big picture by policymakers and local authorities helps influence local action. The Partnership for Urban South Hampshire's green infrastructure strategy enables planners to see what kind of green spaces are needed to serve local people, reduce the impact of development, support the area's economy and adapt to climate change. [44]

The social network: from organisations to communities

If the value of our green spaces only becomes fully apparent when they are seen as a network, it follows that their management also requires a networked approach. Even governments cannot deliver all the benefits well maintained green spaces can bring if they work on their own.

Green space management and investment has tended to mirror organisational structures and requirements, however, rather than the needs and character of the natural world, and especially of the natural world within urban settings. The departmentalised nature of the UK civil service and local authorities, and the product and service-focused approach of businesses, do not reflect the reality of places, where life is lived as a whole and the natural world provides the basis of life and culture.

In particular, the statutory duties of local government do not involve care for the local environment, even though it is arguably the most priceless asset of each place. This was highlighted by the Urban Green Spaces Task Force in 2002 (p22) which commented that although the majority of urban green spaces were owned by local authorities, councils had no legal obligation to do anything about them.

At its worst, the tragedy of the commons repeats itself: everyone takes the benefit while nobody takes the responsibility, until the benefit is lost. Alan Barber commented: 'Running down local parks over the last 30 years was never a policy put to the electorate – it was never a policy. It happened because, legally and fiscally, a dysfunctional system of local governance could not protect parks.' [45]

Yet an examination of international practice by Cabe Space stopped short of recommending the kind of statutory duties that apply to social services or healthcare in the UK: 'Although a clear statutory basis for green space management can be a significant boon to clearly define powers and to ensure at least a statutory minimum quality is reached, it is more important to have the political will to use the powers, or to creatively find other means to deliver high quality urban green space management.' What it failed to spell out was how green space could be protected in the absence of such political will. [46]

If those 'other means' use the power of partnerships and social networks rather than the leverage of authority, a different set of possibilities opens up. Partnership approaches were pioneered in the early days of Groundwork, but local authorities are increasingly reverting to short-term contractual and project based arrangements in response to funding cuts; partnerships with businesses, too, tend to be project based rather than strategic.

So the idea of partnership needs to be rediscovered and reinvigorated. Today social media makes it easier to share knowledge and information and to mobilise people around common interests. Approaches that bring together multiple stakeholders are also essential if we are to improve the overall quality of our green space rather than a few individual spaces.

The Northwest Climate Change Partnership's 'framework for action', Green Infrastructure to Combat Climate Change lists the range of partners who need to be engaged:

'Organisations include public agencies and service providers, local authorities, environmental, community and voluntary-sector organisations and non-governmental organisations.... Professions include planners and investment decision makers, transport planners, developers, urban designers, landscape architects, engineers, foresters, conservationists, farmers, and tourism managers. Many of the actions will be delivered cumulatively by land owners and managers. This includes both larger, public sector, and easier to reach owners such as local authorities, as well as smaller, private sector, businesses, individuals and harder to reach land owners.' [47]

This begins to sound like herding cats. We need a better approach than a top-down process of forming committees, holding meetings, instructing contractors, reporting back and repeating ad infinitum.

Social networks work in a different way. Each participant in a social network is an active or latent agent who can in turn influence and mobilise others, independently of or in concert with central direction.

Social network analysis maps groups of people or organisations in terms of 'nodes' – those who act as hubs – and the links between them.

The difference between a network and a list is that it is the links between the members that matter, not the number or pecking order of the members. A network where large numbers of members are interlinked is one where knowledge, information and calls to action travel rapidly. Bottlenecks occur when individuals or organisations act as 'gatekeepers' of information between one set of members and another, and influence is highest among members with the largest numbers of connections. [48]

The Royal Society of Arts' Connected Communities project has explored how social networks could help the government's 'big society' concept succeed. 'Understanding patterns of connectivity and the transmission of social values and behaviours offers a new approach to policy making, in which small interventions have the potential to make a big impact through network effects,' it observes. [49]

Urbanist Drew Mackie has spent many years mapping and analysing how such networks operate in the context of planning and urban regeneration. His diagram of environmental organisations in North Lanarkshire (figure 1) reveals what happens in traditional command-and-control structures: a very small number of centrally based 'nodes', based within the local authority, control the flow of information, but the central nodes are poorly connected to each other. The result is that the links between environmental organisations are weak and so, inevitably, any sense of shared purpose is enfeebled.

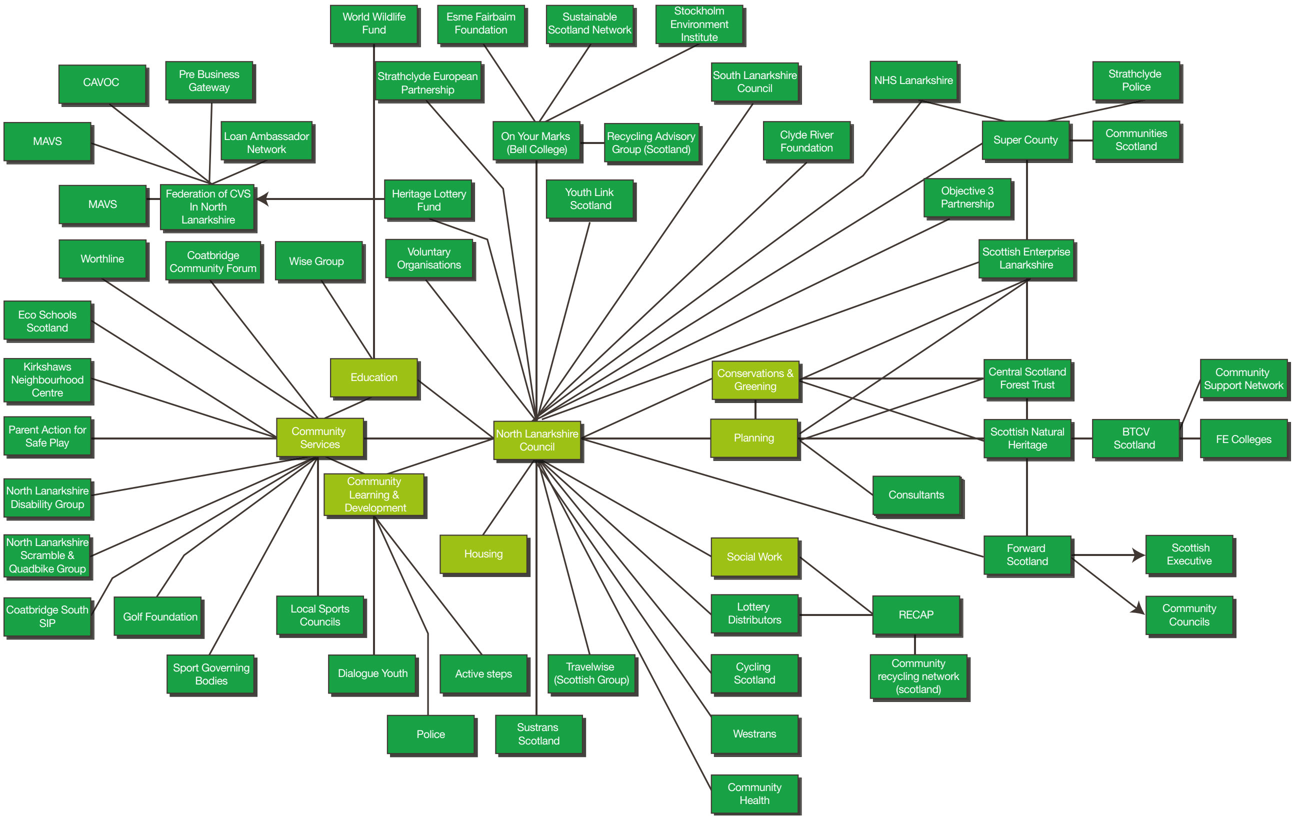

World Wildlife Fund
Esme Fairbairn Foundation
Sustainable Scotland Network
Stockholm Environment Institute
CAVOC
Pre Business Gateway
Strathclyde European Partnership
South Lanarkshire Council
NHS Lanarkshire
Strathclyde Police
MAVS
Loan Ambassador Network
On Your Marks (Bell College)
Recycling Advisory Group (Scotland)
Clyde River Foundation
Super County
Communities Scotland
MAVS
Federation of CVS In North Lanarkshire
Heritage Lottery Fund
Youth Link Scotland
Objective 3 Partnership
Worthline
Coatbridge Community Forum
Wise Group
Voluntary Organisations
Scottish Enterprise Lanarkshire
Eco Schools Scotland
Kirkshaws Neighbourhood Centre
Education
Conservations & Greening
Central Scotland Forest Trust
Community Support Network
Parent Action for Safe Play
Community Services
North Lanarkshire Council
Planning
Scottish Natural Heritage
BTCV Scotland
FE Colleges
North Lanarkshire Disability Group
Community Learning & Development
Consultants
North Lanarkshire Scramble & Quadbike Group
Housing
Social Work
Forward Scotland
Scottish Executive
Coatbridge South SIP
Golf Foundation
Local Sports Councils
Lottery Distributors
RECAP
Community Councils
Sport Governing Bodies
Dialogue Youth
Active steps
Travelwise (Scottish Group)
Cycling Scotland
Community recycling network (scotland)
Police
Sustrans Scotland
Westrans
Community Health

Fig 1. Map of organisations involved in environmental projects in North Lanarkshire.
Copyright Drew Mackie.

Mackie suggests that it is hard to make links where there are more than two degrees of separation between participants in a network. So a community organisation that has to go via a local forum, via a local authority, via a chamber of commerce, to link up with a supportive business may not make that connection at all. The greater the density of links in the network, the easier it is for any member to access help or information from an appropriate source when they need it.

In a dynamic and growing network, there are more well-connected nodes clustering at the centre and they are, crucially, well connected both with each other and with those on the edges. Anyone joining the network is able to expand their connections rapidly using others' links.

Network thinking is not a magic bullet. But it does provide important clues that help us understand how to consider and manage complex interrelationships of spaces and species, and of places, people and policies. If we are to find ways of increasing public engagement and involvement in looking after our green spaces, we have to look at how social networks operate.

In *Connected Communities*, Rowson argues: 'The principal lesson we have drawn from community policy and practice over the last two decades is that defining "communities"solely in geographic terms has major limitations. We believe that a fresh approach to developing communities, based on mapping local social networks in as detailed a manner as possible, is now required.'

In a separate paper for the RSA, economist Paul Ormerod describes how networks are activated by peer influence: you are more likely to behave in a particular way because you see people close to you doing so. In the context of green space, someone is more likely to grow their own vegetables if a neighbour does, or join a 'friends' group to support a local park if they know others who are involved. These shifts in behaviour and involvement can't be dictated from the centre; they happen when people see others whom they trust or respect taking action. [50]

Such peer networks have the potential to multiply. As Scearce argues in *Connected Citizens:* 'In the future, we can be sure that people will be more connected and better able to rapidly share information of all kinds as technology advances. The potential for civic engagement and individual empowerment will only increase, as our interdependence changes how we approach everything from service delivery to daily communications to leadership.'

The organisational challenge for those involved in green space management and ownership, then, is to work with the grain of existing and latent networks rather than to seek to enforce or demand particular patterns of behaviour or decision-making.

This will require a 'whole place' approach in which government and local authorities in particular take seriously their roles as stewards of the local environment. This does not require ownership or direct management but does demand a strategic overview, political leadership and a facilitative mindset: there needs to be accurate information, accessible to all who may need it, and clear messages about the actions required as a result and the resources and skills needed to make those actions effective.

A 'whole place' approach implies an 'all people' methodology. But to involve everyone there needs to be linkage and co-ordination. This requires trusted and capable people and organisations: facilitators and animators at a neighbourhood level, expert coordinators at a local authority level, and sources of knowledge and expertise working across cities or wider areas, providing training, sharing knowledge, mentoring new projects and showcasing innovation.

Businesses are an important part of this matrix. They have the opportunity to reduce waste and embed sustainable practice in the way they look after their assets, manage their supply chains and promote their products (see Part 5). Many businesses, especially utilities, insurance companies and the food sector, are likely to be drastically affected by climate change and will need to adapt their business models.

Different sectors and communities of interest will need to engage with the green space agenda in different ways, but starting from a common understanding that all have a contribution to make. Because there are limits to the actions that anyone can take in space that is owned or managed by others, the role of brokers and network facilitators who can link different players in the system together is vital.

SPOTLIGHT 3.

THE POWER OF NETWORKS: PROJECT DIRT

Every day around ten new members join Project Dirt, London's community-led environmental network. ‘Dirters' are interested in action, not talk, and the network links people up with information and opportunities – from creating a permaculture show garden at Burgess Park, Southwark, to ‘Nature's Gym' workouts in Lewisham. It shows how social networks can achieve what organisations often can't: mobilising people to get involved.

Nick Gardner and Mark Shearer started the network in 2008 when they were members of Wandsworth Environment Forum and saw the need for better ways to share information. Using the Ning social networking platform, they created a forum that individuals and organisations can join, and where members can list their projects and events, submit blogs and photos, and take part in discussions.

The network now operates across London with a sister network in Liverpool, and has been supported by Nesta, which funds innovation in science, technology and the arts. It has more than 5,000 members and over 700 projects are listed on its site. In 2009 it was voted one of the ‘breakthrough ideas for the 21st century' by the Sustainable Development Commission.

As well as encouraging people to get involved in existing initiatives such as the Wandle Trust's river clean-ups, it has helped spawn new ideas like the London Permaculture Festival, now in its third year.

Nick Gardner explains how Project Dirt works and why it is succeeding:

‘We recognised there were a lot of people doing great projects, whether it's encouraging neighbours to compost or Friends' groups. People want to be sustainable but often didn't know where to start, and there's a lot of negative messaging about what you can't do.'

‘Over the last four years it's grown through word of mouth. We eventually called ourselves a south London network, and were then asked to set one up for north London, so we ended up as a London network. ‘We're putting in place a structure to enable things to happen, not putting forward an ideological stance.

There are issues most people feel are important, such as protecting urban green spaces or saving park rangers – through to organising clean-ups. These are actual tangible activities.

‘Where there are great stories we encourage people to blog and upload photos and pictures. It's nice to know you're not alone and that it's easy to take the first steps.

‘Having this positive stance is really important. We've reached the point where people hear through word of mouth. It's like the Facebook effect – I join because ten of my friends invited me. It's about using existing networks and friendships. Wandle Trust regularly get 50-60 people out to clean up the river now.

Picture by *Mak Gilchrist*

'There are a lot of social networks out there. We describe ourselves as a niche network, a green network, and people know they go there to do their green stuff and that's why it's been successful.

'You have to make it very easy for people to find information that's relevant to them on the basis of their experience and interest and locality. To help spread the net wider, we've found it really helps to work with people we like and who we know are good at engaging other people. If you're working to the same goal the amount of help you can get is enormous.

'Local authorities need to get savvy in terms of where they can get most reach and impact and get to the right people in the right way. It's about finding people who are likely to get involved and giving people the power to feel they're doing something useful.'

Lambeth Council in south London, which is pioneering what it calls a 'co-operative council' approach to public services, is testing such an approach.

The borough's Green Community Champions programme aims to build on the growing interest in environmental action by supporting existing community projects, helping new ones to get going, and sharing information and best practice. The scheme works with over 120 community food growing spaces under the banner of Incredible Edible Lambeth.

Lambeth's parks service is promoting community food growing including the Grow-Operative project in partnership with Groundwork, where three food growing hubs are being created in parks to support other food projects nearby. The council is working with GP practices across the borough to set up a food co-op, turning spaces around surgeries into growing spaces.

The council is also supporting residents and encouraging its own transport planners to create growing spaces on streets and transport land.

The Edible Bus Stop is one such initiative. A patch of uninviting pavement, once the site of homes bombed during the second world war, has become a communal garden after two neighbours put out 400 leaflets and persuaded 40 people to turn up one morning and start digging.

Local people donated plants, a helpful councillor kept things sweet with council officers, and a boring, uncared for spot became a community hub, spawning street parties and social events as well as greening a neglected public space.

For more information visit http://projectdirt.com/

SPOTLIGHT 4.

WINDMILL HILL, BRISTOL: THE BEATING HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

You might wonder what an all weather football pitch has to do with a community green space project. But it’s one of the most popular features at Bristol’s Windmill Hill City Farm.

Eric Booth, a volunteer committee member at this community-led farm, displays an obvious pride as he points out this particular bit of open space that is anything but green. It brings in visitors who wouldn’t come to see the animals or grow vegetables – and the four and a half acre farm in one of south Bristol’s poorer suburbs now attracts more than a quarter of a million visits a year.

It isn’t just the football pitch. There’s an adventure playground, handy for the families who come to see the animals. There’s a nursery, offering affordable childcare for local parents. There’s a volunteer centre, used by groups who work on the farm’s allotments and gardens.

If you thought city farms were all about chickens and rare breed sheep, think again.

‘Projects like this are like icebergs,’ Eric explains. ‘People look at it and think, oh, that’s a city farm and they know what that is and what it does. But actually that’s only a fraction of what goes on.

‘Less than a fifth of it is the animals and the green space. It’s the kids’ groups and so on that are built on this platform that are the real value to the community. It was never just going to be a petting zoo. It was about childcare, it was about the nursery, it was about credible food growing.

‘The people who took it on were very clear that they had community and environmental aspirations beyond the basic unit. If you look around the area here there’s a great depth of links that people have had over the years with the city farm. Other projects have often been inspired by things we helped set up.’

Windmill Hill City Farm may be a community project – and it has 35 years of voluntary activity to prove its credentials – but this is far from the popular stereotype of bearded back-to-the-landers. It turns over £850,000 a year, runs £170,000 of contracts on behalf of the city council, and has a full time chief executive.

But neither is it just a small business. It is a membership organisation with more than 300 signed-up supporters, giving it a reach into a community of several thousand people. As a (mostly) green space it fulfils the functions of growing, giving people a space to play and chat, providing wildlife habitats and much more.

The value of the green space and the plants and animals at Windmill Hill is not just in creating a pleasant and attractive environment. It is the setting they provide, and what can be done in that setting that is much harder to do in an environment that is less accessible.

‘It’s not just a matter of going and sitting in the park and that will make you feel better,’ says chief executive Steve Sayers. ‘It’s about coming to the farm where you’re actively engaged in gardening or looking after animals as a therapeutic activity, whether you’ve been referred here as someone recovering from an addiction, someone with mental health issues or someone with learning difficulties. We have groups that deal with all those groups of people and issues. The farm and gardens here are very much about providing a means to an end.

‘There’s a very low barrier to coming in. There isn’t any sense of it being official, formal, threatening – the people you’re trying to access who might have children excluded from school or families with multiple issues can come here without feeling it’s part of the system. That comes from the type of place it is physically.’

As Eric puts it: “This isn’t just a place where you go if you need help – it’s a place where everybody goes.”

That sense, and reality, that it belongs to the community is key to what makes Windmill Hill City Farm work. The site was originally derelict, held vacant by Bristol City Council for a road scheme that never happened. While the council still owns the site, the farm has it on a 40 year lease with 25 years remaining, and there would be an outcry if it was ever told to move.

Over 35 years, bit by bit, members and local people have invested in the site and as they have done so the farm’s role at the heart of the community has both widened and deepened.

That sense that it is there for everyone, whether you’re a recovering drug user or aspirational middle class parent, is something public bodies and special interest groups struggle to create because there is always a ‘them and us’ - the service providers and the service users, or those who belong to a group and those on the fringe or the outside.

As Steve explains: ‘It is partly a visitor attraction, it’s got a café and that’s fantastic. If you look at the turnover of the place half the turnover is from the nursery. Half the staff employed here work at the nursery. But it’s not a childcare centre.

‘Most of the programmes we run are for people with mental health issues or learning difficulties. But it’s not a therapy centre – it’s not a place that people in need or in crisis come to. We do it, but it’s not why we’re here.

‘More than three quarters of an acre is dedicated to an adventure playground for 8-14 year olds. It’s not what we’re about but it’s an important part of what we do, and it’s having that mixture of all of it that makes it work so well. When you come here you’re not labelled as being in one group or another.’

That sense of belonging and of not being an official service has enabled the city farm to extend its reach far beyond its four and a half acres. Other community gardens and food growing schemes in the city look to Windmill Hill for advice and leadership. Local residents use the city farm to inspire their own gardening and food growing at home.

These impacts are hard to measure, but they happen because of the networks of relationships and connections and trust that have grown up over many years. Sometimes things don't work. For a while the city farm owned a working farm in Somerset, but it was too far away for most people. Sometimes relationships are strained. A community project is no recipe for universal harmony.

But the difference is that people are able to develop activities relevant to their needs and interests and do so to a large extent on their own terms. And over time that becomes not just something that some members of a community do together, but an expression of that community's identity.

'Green spaces are very good at mobilising communities,' Eric comments. 'There aren't many things that will get significant numbers of people out doing things.' It might be Bonfire Night or Halloween: the green space provides a place for interaction and conversation, and those conversations may spark ideas and projects – or just allow local families to support each other.

In hard times those connections are more important than ever. 'Interesting times are coming and they're going to stress communities in different ways and what you need is flexible resilient resourceful capacity within communities to enable them to cope,' Eric says. 'The analogy I have for the farm is a beating heart. It's the centre of the community but it also pumps – it's keeping things moving and stirring and all of that is about resilience.'

PART 4

UNDERSTANDING THE SPATIAL NETWORK: THE BENEFITS OF GREEN SPACE

> *"If governments, other decision-makers, and individuals wait for complete knowledge before changing current policies and lifestyles that are not sustainable, it may damage the health of the biosphere beyond repair, with potentially devastating consequences for humans."*
>
> Cecily Maller, Healthy Parks, Healthy People

We will never succeed in looking after our networks of green spaces effectively if we don't understand the benefits they provide. Much work has been done to research and publicise these in recent years, both in the UK and internationally.

This section outlines the key themes emerging from the research. Appendix A provides further information on some of the main research findings and a short list of resources for further reading. Rather than attempting to be a comprehensive literature review, its purpose is to highlight examples of the wealth of evidence that is available.

While research can always be more comprehensive, more targeted or more up to date the challenge we now face is not how to fill the gaps in our knowledge, but how to act appropriately on what we already know.

The consensus on the importance of green spaces has lasted for many generations. Many of the reasons our ancestors cited for investing in parks, both formal and natural, still hold good, and in fact we can now understand through science and research many benefits that previous generations could only guess at or grasp intuitively.

Cabe Space's 2009 report, *Making the Invisible Visible,* quotes the park designer Frederick Law Olmsted, who won the competition to create New York's Central Park in 1858: 'When the principal outlay has been made, the result may, and under good management must, for many years afterwards, be increasing in value at a constantly advancing rate of increase, and never cease to increase as long as the city endures.'

That increase in worth, as we saw in Part 2, cannot be fully measured simply by assigning a monetary value. This is why decision-making needs to be informed by a fuller understanding of the benefits green spaces provide.

These have been catagorised in various ways, but can be summed up under four headings:

- Ecosystem and biodiversity benefits
- Economic benefits
- Health and wellbeing
- Social and cultural benefits

Almost every green space provides, or has the potential to provide, more than one of these benefits and many provide all four categories. All sections of society, from the unemployed to government officials, from pensioners to business leaders, reap the rewards of previous generations' investment, and future generations will be impoverished if we use economic difficulties as an excuse for neglect.

Ecosystem and biodiversity benefits

The most important goods green spaces provide are often the least visible, because they are processes that happen in the background to our everyday lives and are only noticed when they are threatened. Yet without them none of the more obvious benefits would be achievable.

The ecosystem services provided by green spaces, urban and rural, are already under threat. Lawton [2010] compares the severity of the crisis facing our wildlife sites to the loss of our medieval cathedrals:

‘There are 27 ancient cathedrals in England. Imagine the outrage that would have ensued in this country if over the last 100 years, twelve had been partly demolished, nine substantially demolished, and three completely obliterated; only three would remain in good condition. Yet this is precisely what has happened to many of England’s finest wildlife sites.’

What is true in England is also true internationally. The TEEB report, *Mainstreaming the Economics of Nature*, comments (p25): ‘The destruction of nature has now reached levels where serious social and economic costs are being felt and will be felt at an accelerating pace if we continue with “business as usual”.’

Allowing this destruction to continue will have profound effects on all of us. If the bee population collapses, for example, as has begun to happen in some parts of the world, much of our food supply system is put at risk. Even those who never visit or acknowledge the value of any green spaces would feel the impact. A study in Switzerland, cited by TEEB, found that a single bee colony ensured agricultural production worth more than $1000 in 2002, in the form of pollinated fruits and berries. This compared with just $215 in direct products from beekeeping, such as honey and beeswax. The value of insect pollination was worth 9.5 per cent of global agricultural output in 2005.

The ecosystem services sustained by our total network of green spaces and natural environment fall into four categories: [51]

- Provisioning services relate to food and materials, from fish to agricultural products and timber;
- Regulating services include the removal of carbon dioxide and particulates from the air, the breakdown and recycling of organic wastes, water filtration, and drainage;
- Cultural services contribute to human wellbeing, providing places of leisure and enjoyment, relaxation, and historic or spiritual importance;
- Supporting services include pollination, wildlife habitats, grazing, and soil formation;
- Recognising the value of ecosystem services and biodiversity is essential to any coherent response to climate change. If we do not know what functions our green spaces fulfil, we won’t know how they can help us reduce the risks of climate change, or how vulnerable they are to its effects.

Economic benefits

In its 2011 policy document, *Enabling the Transition to a Green Economy*, the government was clear that a comprehensive reappraisal of traditional economics was needed. 'A green economy is not a subset of the economy at large – our whole economy needs to be green,' it argued. [52]

This laudable aspiration can be made real through an understanding of the part green spaces play in supporting a thriving economy. The multiple economic benefits of green space have been thoroughly researched through the Natural Economy Northwest programme, which divided them into eleven categories (see page 90). Several of them overlap with benefits categorised here as ecosystem, health or social and cultural advantages, and this is not surprising – they add value to society or reduce social and economic costs.

The economic numbers only provide one facet of the multifunctional value of green space and as we saw in Part 2, systems of valuation and accounting do not yet measure their importance adequately. But the statistics are significant. Natural Economy Northwest estimated that green infrastructure added £2.6bn of value to the region's economy and directly or indirectly supported 109,000 jobs.

Green infrastructure can underpin the success of other economic sectors. It creates opportunities for an improved environment, jobs, sustainable business, and social interaction. It can help reduce the need for healthcare and enable employees to be more productive.

Health and wellbeing

Parks and green spaces provide a 'natural health service' that complements and relieves pressure on the NHS. They offer places where people can ease the stress of work or daily life; they are places to exercise and keep fit.

The difficulty in measuring the health value of green spaces is that we can only guess how bad things would be if they were not there. But history gives us a clue: the concern to create parks at the height of the Industrial Revolution was spurred by shock at the poor health and squalid living conditions of factory workers.

In February 1833 Robert Slaney, MP for Shrewsbury, called for a select committee to be set up 'to consider the best means of securing open places in the neighbourhood of great towns, for the healthful exercise of the population'. He pointed out that in central London one and a half million people shared three parks, only one of which was fully open to the public. Then as now, debate centred not on the desirability of creating parks but on who should foot the bill. [53]

Public health benefits are often calculated in terms of the number of additional disease-free years the beneficiaries of an intervention can be expected to enjoy. These 'quality adjusted life years' are, all things being equal, years in which a person can be expected to be economically and socially productive and able to contribute to society rather than be dependent on others.

A study of the Walking the Way to Health Initiative, which funded 500 health walk schemes found that it delivered 2,817 quality adjusted life years at a unit cost of just over £4,000. [54] If that sounds expensive, the savings to the health service were calculated at more than £81m, giving a net benefit of more than £70m. When assessing the value for money of a new drug or medical treatment, the ceiling applied by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is £30,000 per quality adjusted life year.

A comprehensive study of the health benefits of parks by researchers at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia [55] reinforces the value of green spaces in addressing physical and mental ill-health.

'The success of nature-based therapy in treating patients who are severely physically and/or mentally unwell is indicative of the powerful effect that nature can have on the psychological, spiritual and physical aspects of human health and wellbeing,' they argue (p66).

This idea of a 'natural health service' is particularly important in the light of the transfer of public health responsibilities to local authorities from 2013. Local authorities, as well as gaining responsibility for the health of their local population, will receive a ringfenced budget for public health in their localities. This provides an opportunity to link health and green spaces in some of the ways advocated by the Faculty of Public Health (see Appendix).

Green spaces can play a broader public health function in helping to address the effects of social inequality. The Marmot Review, [56] which underpins current UK public health policy, reinforces a consistent view since the Black Report of 1980 [57] and the Acheson Report of 1998 [58] that health inequalities are linked to deprivation, and access to green space is not equally available.

'Health inequalities that could be avoided by reasonable means are unfair. Putting them right is a matter of social justice,' the Marmot review argues (p3). 'Taking action to reduce health inequalities does not require a separate health agenda, but action across the whole of society' (p17). Access to and enjoyment of green space is one of those inequalities.

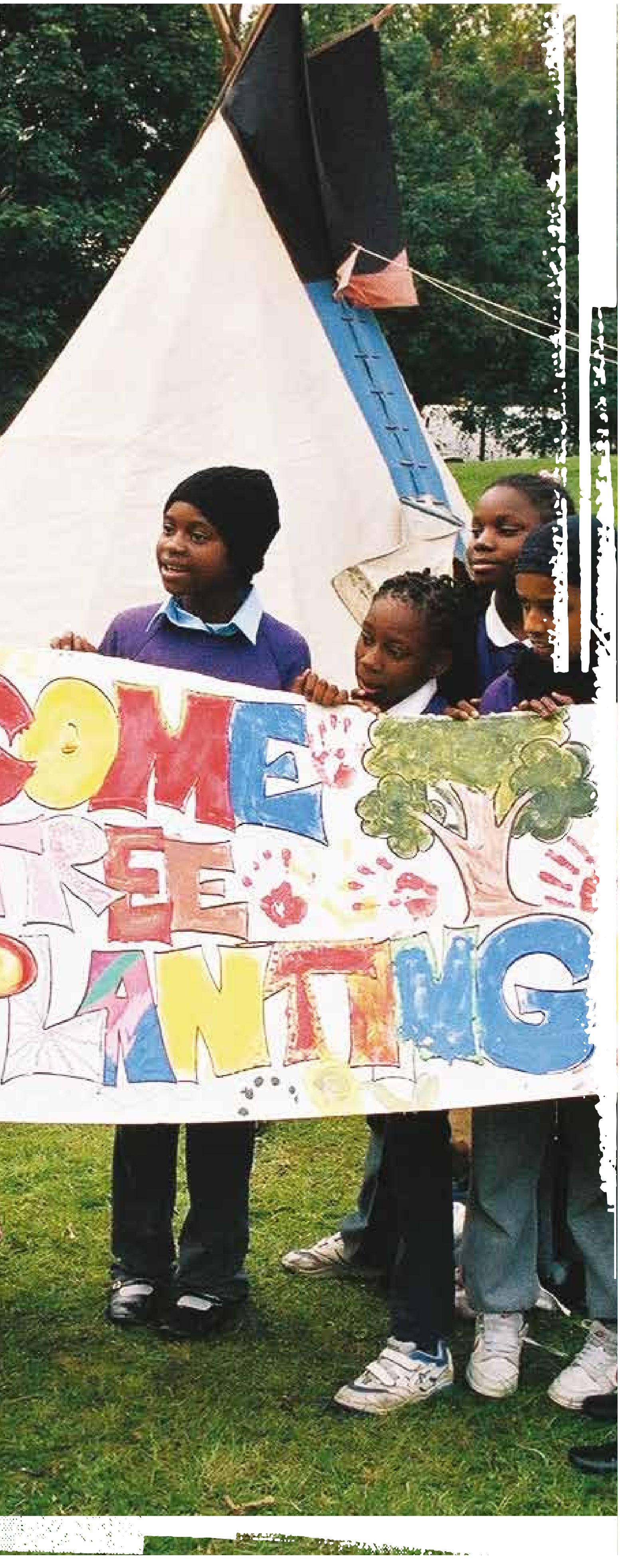
The Department of Health's recent public health framework recognises this, listing the use of green spaces for exercise or health reasons as one of its indicators of public health. [59]

Social and cultural benefits

It can be difficult to disaggregate the social and cultural benefits of green space from those relating to health and wellbeing. Indeed, much of the research on green spaces and health describes benefits that could as easily be categorised as social or cultural – the aesthetic pleasure we get from an attractive landscape or feature in an urban park, the opportunity to spend time with family or friends, or the joy of observing wildlife.

The Deakin University research, *Healthy Parks, Healthy People,* argues that 'humans may be dependent on nature for psychological, emotional and spiritual needs that are difficult to satisfy by other means'. It outlines an 'ecological theory of public health' based on the 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, which argued that good health is based on the 'inextricable links between people and their environment' (p11).

Such a view would suggest that parks and green spaces not only alleviate the negative impacts of ill-health, but are a foundation of good health. There is a symbiotic relationship between natural capital – the resources of our environment – and social capital, the benefits that arise because of links and connections between people.



These deeply ingrained psychological connections with nature also help explain why green spaces support our connections with each other, not only through formal activities such as sport but through the casual interactions of families in children's play areas, dog walkers or simply sitting outside on a sunny day. Groundwork and many others have found that projects to improve the local environment build friendships, a sense of community and civic values.

As Alan Barber (*Green Future,* p7) commented: 'Woven into the physical fabric of urban development, the park system is the largest manifestation of a public realm which enshrines the values of a civic society, and the means by which its youngest citizens learn to care for the natural world. Cultural expression, patterns of behaviour and sociability, equality of access and community involvement – the social currency of sustainable communities – are all encouraged to flourish by well used and well cared for green spaces. This is "liveability" in its most recognisable form.'

Involvement in green space projects can bolster self-esteem and personal empowerment, leading to active participation in decision-making processes, research by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies has found. [60]

The government's research on 'lifetime neighbourhoods' stresses the importance of local green spaces to social as well as individual wellbeing in an ageing society. [61] 'Green spaces are of crucial importance as spaces for exercise, play, de-stressing and social engagement,' it points out. 'Perhaps the main message is that the "do nothing" option is not viable, and that preparations need to be made now at a neighbourhood level to meet the challenges of the coming decades' (p18).

Green spaces should not just be provided for local communities but planned by them in order to maximise social benefits, the lifetime neighbourhoods study suggests. They are an essential feature of 'walkable' neighbourhoods that encourage social interaction and connections and reduce dependence on private and public transport.

But while the social benefits of green spaces are obvious, they are also vulnerable. A green space on its own is no guarantee of a happy or healthy community; it is only when that space is looked after and feels welcoming that these benefits arise.

SPOTLIGHT 5.

BRINGING THE BENEFITS TOGETHER: OFFSHOOTS, BURNLEY

Eighteen months ago Gillian Newlove struggled to leave her house. Her confidence was at rock bottom and she did all she could to avoid meeting people.

Last Christmas couldn't have been more different. Her paintings were exhibited at Accrington Town Hall, she met the mayor and visitors were enquiring about buying her work. The change came after she started an art course at the Offshoots, Groundwork Pennine Lancashire's permaculture project in Burnley.

'I've always doodled but never done anything big or anything,' she says. 'Before I wouldn't have gone out of the house. I'd got to a stage where I couldn't venture out really, I was so insular.

'If I'm not having a great day, if I'm not feeling well I can still come here and scribble and be in a group, so it's helped greatly. This place has given me a lot more confidence about being with people. I feel able to talk to people more – I wouldn't have said three words together before.'

Painting and permaculture don't obviously go together. Permaculture is an approach to planting that maximises productivity with minimal intervention, based on a set of ethical and design principles concerned with living in harmony with nature and eliminating waste. But once you try to do one good thing, you often can't help doing several at once.

Offshoots began 14 years ago in the walled garden of Towneley Park, once a stately home's kitchen garden but more recently part of Burnley Borough Council's works depot. Tucked away behind Towneley Hall, it's not an obvious feature of the park – but it demonstrates just how much can be achieved in a relatively confined green space.

Nick Riley, director of Groundwork Pennine Lancashire, reels off just a few of its activities: 'It's about engaging the unemployed in practical projects, it's about recycling and sustainability, it's about sustainable build and construction, it's about renewable energies, it's about traditional skills and crafts, and it's about the diversity that's within the town.

'It's quite a complicated little puzzle to put together but it's a way of making this demonstration project have something for everybody. It might be British Aerospace, a top quality business, doing some corporate social responsibility with their staff, or it could be a little youth project that wants to learn about healthy eating, or a school that wants to learn about climate change.'

Once you scratch beneath the surface the links between organic growing, community involvement and opportunities to learn and develop enterprise become clearer. Gillian's art class started after Eddie Foster, the teacher, attended a 'traditional skills' course at Offshoots. He is now Offshoots' artist in residence, running classes in illustration and painting, which help people with mental health problems build self-esteem and social skills.

Everybody benefits: Offshoots attracts more people and builds its reputation, Eddie has a rewarding role and now runs his own small business, and Gillian and others like her learn to manage and overcome depression and mental illness.

Others are setting up in business through their connections with Offshoots: Chris Barber, a former professional photographer, got involved after his business went under, and is now teaching photography and chainsaw sculpture.

'The whole thing has been pulled together by Offshoots – without them I wouldn't have done it.' Chris says.

'I looked at what jobs were out there and there was nothing I could do. But I'm earning a good living now. I make a living in a sustainable way promoting issues I believe in.'

Sustainable business is as much part of the Offshoots philosophy as sustainable growing. This is not just a question of surviving financially in a difficult funding climate, but is also about helping other organisations to do business in an environmentally sustainable way by sharing knowledge and expertise.

Nigel Haworth, the award-winning chef behind the transformation of Northcote Manor and owner of Ribble Valley Inns, became a fan of Offshoots because of its Bees in the Borough project, which aims to restore the population of the native British black honey bee.

After declaring the honey the best he'd ever tasted, he invited Offshoots over to supply his restaurants with herbs and vegetables and is now contracting with Offshoots to redesign the garden at Northcote Manor.

It's a commercial arrangement where both sides benefit, Nick Riley explains: 'We will give him advice and help him ultimately to save money, reduce his carbon footprint and increase his profile in the whole green movement.'

Nigel Haworth, in turn, has become a high profile advocate of Offshoots, making a guest appearance on the project's website and a YouTube video, and helping to build its reputation in the hospitality industry.

This is not just a case of a lucky connection. Offshoots also has a £60,000 contract with United Utilities to help restore Calderdale Moor with cotton grass seedlings, and is in discussion with cosmetics firm Lush to help it source more of its organic raw materials from the UK.

Offshoots' experience means it can also help other projects design for sustainability. It now offers a franchise service, advertised through YouTube and its website, which provides other community-based projects with ongoing advice, support and links to recommended suppliers, helping to earn much-needed income. Cloughmills Community Action Team in Northern Ireland has commissioned Offshoots to design an eight-acre former mill as a community growing project, funded through the People's Millions scheme; Offshoots also has a contract to support Grozone, a Groundwork project in Cheshire.

Offshoots shows how the influence of a community-based green space project can spread far and wide, from the bee population of Burnley to the food on the table in Lancashire's poshest restaurants. But success doesn't come easily. Sometimes barriers that ought to be easy to overcome prove insurmountable.

Phill Dewhurst, Offshoots' project manager, says there is much local authorities can learn from Offshoots' approach.

'We get a lot of local authority parks department staff coming here because they have vast tracts of land that they're struggling to maintain and pressures upon them to work with their communities,' he says.

‘If a local authority can’t make it stack up with their budgets you can’t expect a community group to do it. But what they can do is find better ways of improving community group governance and having a realistic understanding of the requirements for sustainability of dead land they wish to take over.

‘There needs to be a strategic effort on behalf of local authorities and their officers to identify groups like transition towns or permaculture groups, help them with their governance and the initial set-up costs and then step back.

‘We have sympathetic relationships with quite senior local authority managers and directors and that’s helpful. What isn’t helpful is when their officers turn round and say a service for 1,500 households is not worth doing. That kind of closed thinking is a challenge.’

While it might be a struggle to get council officers to think differently, Offshoots’ impact is being noticed elsewhere – most recently with recognition at the International Green Awards, where Groundwork Pennine Lancashire won bronze in the education and sustainability awareness category.

As Nick points out, Offshoots is now an internationally recognised programme, achieving three separate ISO quality standards and with a proven track record. It’s no wonder there is growing interest in adopting its approach.

SPOTLIGHT 6.

DAEDALUS, LEE-ON-SOLENT: MAXIMISING ECONOMIC BENEFIT

When the Royal Navy moved out of the former HMS Daedalus air base at Lee-on-Solent in 1996 they left behind what looked like a ghost town. Dotted around, apparently at random, were rusting 1940s aircraft hangars. Barrack blocks lay empty and the listed Ward Room, with its sprung ballroom dance floor, was deserted.

Thirteen years on, there are high hopes for a very different future. After extensive masterplanning and consultation, Daedalus is now one of a new generation of enterprise zones, aiming to attract leading industries that will bring high quality, skilled jobs for local people.

Much of the site has been transferred to the Homes and Communities Agency, and Solent Local Enterprise Partnership will use money from the government's Regional Growth Fund to attract small and medium-sized businesses. Every firm on the site will get a five-year business rates holiday as an incentive to move in or stay.

Green space could be an important part of the attraction. Much of Daedalus is grassed, but it's a low quality landscape, in keeping with its former military use. The opportunity now is to turn it into a setting that will attract investment.

Local residents have made clear they want the redevelopment to include areas of public open space, and there is also a strong demand for new allotments in the area. Nearby, the Alver Valley provides an important green corridor and recreational area running down the centre of the Gosport peninsula to the coast at Alverstoke. Links between the natural green spaces of the valley and more formal parks within the Daedalus site could create a network of spaces serving a wide variety of needs.

This fits within the vision developed for green infrastructure within an area under pressure from residential development and restricted by its topography. The Partnership for Urban South Hampshire's hope is 'to shape and enhance an integrated and multifunctional green network of south Hampshire's distinctive local environments to ensure they can adapt to climate change and are managed and valued as part of sustainable, prosperous and healthy lifestyles'.

Top of its list of objectives is to 'ensure the design of existing and new workplaces leads to diverse and attractive green environments for businesses wishing to relocate, grow or set up in the South Hampshire sub-region.'

To achieve that at Daedalus will involve some radical improvements. As Tim Houghton, executive director of Groundwork Solent, one of the partners in the redevelopment, explains: 'Daedalus is an opportunity to create jobs, not just any jobs but jobs of the calibre and quality that local people in Gosport can aspire to and that people can move here to take and improve the economy of the area.'

The hope is that many of these jobs will be in marine and aviation industries and supply chains connected to them. Some companies already have a presence on site; aircraft maker Britten-Norman is expanding and will take over one of the main buildings.

But as Richard Mackay, chair of Lee-on-Solent Residents' Association, says, this will take time. 'There's a lot of investment to be made – there's probably not a building on the site that's currently occupiable. I think it will happen gradually.

'At the moment it's so depressing, there's businesses there such as storing cars and skips which are really not appropriate to have adjacent to leading edge aviation and marine facilities or other high value-added businesses. You wouldn't want your customers coming to something that looks like a disused builder's yard.'

Mr Mackay favours including formal park areas or even an urban farm within the site, as there are no such facilities within Lee-on-Solent itself. 'We get a lot of day trippers here and they don't all want to spend the whole day on the beach. It would be nice to have something else to do,' he says.

A section from the Daedalus Masterplan
Computer generated overview by *Groundwork GIS.*

‘The one kind of open space we really lack in Lee is the more formal gardens – there’s nowhere if you want to go and sit and read the paper. A traditional public park that’s a bit manicured if you like, but also a place where you could take young children and they could run around safely.’

Local councillor John Beavis concurs. ‘On the outline plan and the strategic planning document there are spaces like that – places which are down as open spaces for public access. I think it’s important that we do that and it’s all part and parcel of bringing the site back into the community.’

Having seen much of Daedalus lie vacant for a decade and a half, local people are determined that whatever is built should be of high quality and bring good jobs to the area.

‘The waterfront area very much lends itself to high quality green space,’ Tim Houghton says.

‘Some of it can be formal but there is no reason why some of it can’t be more informal.’

‘Having some form of kitchen gardens and changing the perception of allotments from a field full of scruffy tin sheds to the idea of growing your own food in a smarter contained kitchen garden area would fit well within a residential development. I’d like to think we can move on from being too compartmentalised in our thinking. Gardens can be productive spaces and look attractive.

‘I see it as a selling point – we have a blueprint that shows the quality and innovation about landscape and open space, shows the different uses we can have in the waterfront area and the more easily managed open space around Hangars East, which is an operational airfield area, and Hangars West, which is a business and aviation area.’

A quick win, Tim believes, would be to create some high quality green space in an area near the waterfront visible to the public, which could set the tone for investors. This would send a clear signal to the market that the new enterprise zone means business

PART 5:

KEEPING THE NETWORK RUNNING: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

"Conventionally, neighbourhood parks or parklike open spaces are considered boons conferred on the deprived populations of cities. Let us turn this thought around, and consider city parks deprived places that need the boon of life and appreciation conferred on them."

Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life
of Great American Cities

The big question with any complex system is how to keep it running efficiently. Earlier we looked at the difference between command-and-control and social network models; we also outlined how the idea of the commons presents a model of management with multiple stakeholders.

But to offer solutions we need to be clear about where the current system falls short and who needs to be involved in any improvements. This section also looks at some approaches to management and funding that have been tried elsewhere or recommended for the UK. The final part of this paper flows from this discussion and examines how we can create a people-powered green space network fit for the future.

If it ain't broke, should we fix it?

The UK's network of green spaces is inadequately mapped (as Cabe Space explained in *The Green Information Gap)* and inadequately funded. It is almost certainly inadequately managed as a consequence, with the danger of a creeping loss of amenity, social value, biodiversity and resilience in the face of climate change.

This situation, as Alan Barber observed in *Green Future,* was never intended, but is the result of a patchwork of policies, responsibilities and ownership that is constantly coming apart at the joins. For the most part, nobody has a legal responsibility to care for our urban green spaces, and everybody is finding cash harder to get hold of.

Although there are failings, the situation is far from uniformly bad. We have seen some spectacular improvements in recent years, enabled by central government, the Heritage Lottery Fund, corporate donations and community action. Some might argue that for all the inconsistencies, we could do a lot worse than try to muddle through.

The reason we cannot resort to muddling through is that the muddle is getting messier. Finance drives decisions that are increasingly short-term and isolated from their wider consequences. This is particularly true of local government, which is the mainstay of our public parks and open spaces.

At a round table event with senior policymakers and green space experts during the preparation of this report it was said that the model of Treasury-led public investment 'no longer exists' – the best case for local government would be another 28% funding cut in real terms.

This chimes with a recent article for *Public Finance* magazine by Tony Travers, director of the Greater London Group at the London School of Economics, who predicts continued cuts or freezes in government spending until the early 2020s. 'We can expect at least a decade of public sector austerity – the longest such period since 1945. For most people working in central or local government, there is little likelihood of seeing significant real-terms growth in provision before, say, 2022,' he comments. [62]

Whether these predictions are over-pessimistic by a few years or not, the implications are very clear. However, seeing the big picture on public finance does not always entail seeing the big picture when choosing where to make savings or what the long-term consequences will be. Neither does it always recognise the opportunities that still exist to make a positive difference at a local level.

Central government: leading or lost?

The challenge of funding is greatest for central and local government. Irrespective of political control over the next two or three parliaments, government departments and local authorities will face a continuing squeeze. However, we should also remember that the National Health Service, national parks and new towns were created during times of austerity. Positive choices have been made before in hard times.

Several government departments have important responsibilities connected to green space. The natural environment is the responsibility of Defra; local authority funding comes from the Department for Communities and Local Government; and the Department of Health picks up the tab for our unhealthy lifestyles and mental ill-health. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is responsible for many green spaces used for sporting activities.

The Treasury, the Department for Energy and Climate Change and arm's length agencies including Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Homes and Communities Agency are also important players whose work on green spaces needs to be co-ordinated. Natural England, alongside Defra, has led the way in exploring new thinking on how to value and care for green infrastructure and this work needs to permeate the thinking of other departments.

Much of the most farsighted research and policy development on the social and economic importance of green spaces has come from Defra in recent years. This has arisen in response to the climate change agenda and Defra is taking the lead in developing the UK's first National Adaptation Programme designed to build resilience. [63] Other government departments, local authorities, businesses and community organisations will be key partners in making this happen.

DCLG, despite good progress in the last decade, has a more piecemeal approach. It talks the talk: government policies, including the new National Planning Policy Framework, recognise the importance of green spaces to quality of life, housing provision and community activity. [64] However, there remains a disconnect between its work and that of Defra, and one of the Coalition Government's first actions was to scrap the annual Place Survey, which had been key to government's understanding of local people's concerns about quality of place. Without knowing whether people think local green spaces are deteriorating or not, it is difficult to imagine government making informed decisions about their future. DCLG's own green spaces team has recently been disbanded.

While ministers would argue that these decisions are being devolved to localities, biodiversity and green infrastructure do not acknowledge local authority boundaries. The downgrading of Cabe within the Design Council in 2011 and the loss of Cabe Space's independent advocacy and research programme have also left a gap; only 20 of the previous complement of 120 staff remain. Others have not been able to fill this void and will struggle to do so with reduced resources.

The Department of Health, despite footing huge and growing bills for ill-health, has been slow to invest in initiatives to improve access to green space and 'green prescriptions'. The reorganisation of the NHS will split public health from GP-led service commissioning, with unpredictable consequences; local authorities will need to be bold in exercising their new responsibilities and in giving a lead to GP consortia.

Major government landowners include the Environment Agency, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), all of which are seeking to meet growing challenges with diminishing resources. The Environment Agency, for example, is a major owner and manager of green infrastructure while the HCA, as a strategic owner of development sites, can oversee the 'meanwhile' use of vacant land in ways that encourage biodiversity as well as ensuring that development creates new public green spaces. The DIO has in recent years made important progress in managing military sites for biodiversity and this work will become more important as the impacts of climate change increase.

Many of these organisations – especially the DIO – will be disposing of large tracts of land in the coming years as it either becomes surplus to requirements or is sold to raise funds. The Ministry of Defence remains one of Britain's largest landowners, owning nearly one per cent of the UK's land across 4,000 sites and spending £2.9bn a year on maintenance. [65] Much of this land will need to be repurposed as the armed forces are reconfigured following the Strategic Defence and Security Review, presenting both a threat to biodiversity and an opportunity to widen public access.

The Homes and Communities Agency has recently released three sites to the Land Trust, including two colliery sites and Greenwich Ecology Park in south London. This illustrates one way in which surplus public sector land can be managed in the long-term for access and biodiversity.

Local government: between a rock and a hard place

At local government level, the challenges of funding are obvious. On top of that we must add the absence of any statutory responsibility for green spaces, which reduces their priority in budget-setting; the failure to value assets adequately; and the fact that while ward councillors might fight hard for their local parks, democratic representation does not favour a 'whole place' approach to green spaces.

However, local authorities do hold some important levers. They have a central role in addressing climate change at a local level, and can make green spaces part of their climate change strategies. The Local Government Association is championing councils as local environmental leaders, and has launched Climate Local, a commitment to update the popular Nottingham Declaration on climate change.

A total of 30 local authorities in nine areas took part in the Local Carbon Framework pilot programme, which explored how councils could integrate action on climate change into their core business. An evaluation of the programme found that protecting local green spaces or starting community good projects could help to raise awareness of climate change issues. [66]

Scottish local authorities have stronger obligations in this respect than in England. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires all public bodies to exercise their functions in ways that reduce carbon emissions and deliver any statutory climate change adaptation programme, and to act in the way they consider most sustainable. This requirement is stronger than the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' in England's National Planning Policy Framework.

The framework, which will guide all local planning in England, outlines some protection for green belt land and locally important green spaces. This strengthens the language of last year's draft, specifically referring to the five principles set out in *Securing the Future:* [67]

- Living within environmental limits
- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
- Achieving a sustainable economy
- Promoting good governance
- Using sound science responsibly

What the framework does not make clear is that *Securing the Future* sets this out as a recipe, not a menu: all the ingredients need to be added. Criticism of the planning framework has focused on government rhetoric that suggests the economic card trumps all others; whether this will be the case remains to be seen, and may well be determined by the courts rather than councils.

The framework notes the importance of providing green space as an element of good design, and creates a new right for communities to designate land as Local Green Space within local plans and neighbourhood plans. This is potentially significant in urban areas as a means of preventing parks and pockets of open space being sold for development. Local Plans must take account of climate change, and councils are advised of the need to plan green infrastructure in 'vulnerable' areas. Importantly, councils are told to 'set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure'.

Local Plans provide an important tool, enabling councils to take an overview of green spaces in their area and specify whether they should be protected or released for development. The local development framework is a powerful document, but both local and national planning guidance have proved weak in the face of 'planning by appeal', the process of repeatedly challenging local authorities' decisions until they capitulate when faced with costly and time-consuming legal battles.

Councils also have important responsibilities for emergency planning, alongside fire and rescue authorities. This includes responding to weather emergencies such as heavy snow, floods, or drought – and a strategic view of green infrastructure can and should be a vital part of this planning.

A significant achievement in recent years has been the number of green space audits undertaken by local authorities, who now have better knowledge of the extent and ownership of local green spaces than ever. However, the data is often not readily available to the public and knowledge of the amount of green space we have does not necessarily lead to action to preserve and improve it. Furthermore, the process of compiling data nationally that began with *Urban Green Nation* has not been continued.

The new responsibility for public health, which comes into force in April 2013, is also likely to be influential. This provides councils with an opportunity to integrate green spaces into the way they undertake a statutory responsibility, allowing more imaginative approaches to health promotion. However, the public health budget that will transfer to local authorities will only cover functions already being undertaken within the NHS; there will not be a new pot of money that can be diverted to pay for parks. Councils may, however, now have a better opportunity to fund activities and events that both improve public health and encourage wider community involvement in green spaces.

Another tool local authorities (and other owners of green space) have at their disposal is procurement. Until the 1980s it was standard practice for councils to employ their own parks staff, covering everything from plant nurseries to looking after the public toilets.

The advent of compulsory competitive tendering and the budget cuts of the 1980s changed all that, with many councils closing down their own depots and contracting park maintenance out to the lowest bidder. The 'best value' regime introduced in the late 1990s sought to mitigate some of the worst effects of contracting out, but by then much of the damage had been done.

There have been important strides towards better practice in procurement in recent years, though once again the calls for 'value for money' are being interpreted by many commissioners as 'lowest price wins'. This need not be the case. The government has made it clear it is as interested in innovation and long-term savings in public services as immediate cost reductions, and the Open Public Services white paper argues that the aim of competition in public services is to 'target funding at the most disadvantaged'. [68]

Ministers have said they are keen to see social enterprises and community organisations compete to run public services as well as the traditional private sector contractors, and the Localism Act includes a 'right to challenge' if communities feel they are not receiving an adequate service. While this provides one potential route towards improving unsatisfactory green space services, it risks being confrontational, cumbersome and costly. It may be better to find ways of forestalling such challenges by exploring new ways of providing high quality and cost-effective services.

Research in Manchester by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies suggests councils can actively use their procurement processes to support local economic development and build a resilient economy, and such approaches can also be applied to the maintenance of green infrastructure. CLES comments: 'In a time of fiscal austerity the whole process of procurement needs to change. We need to use the public sector resources which remain in a cleverer way which tackles both the big global challenges and the localised issues facing communities.' [69]

Supply chains can be managed in order to improve and guarantee quality rather than just to compete on price, with long-term 'supply chain partnerships' that encourage collaboration and innovation across different organisations. Logistics company UPS, for example, has grown its business through long-term partnerships with key customers; Toyota has led moves within the car industry to develop strategic worldwide partnerships with suppliers. Such arrangements could readily be applied to managing green infrastructure, with long-term partnerships with voluntary organisations and community groups as well as larger social enterprises. This kind of approach is being pioneered in the UK by Social Business Partnership, which aims to use public procurement to create opportunities for unemployed and disabled people. [70]

As well as working through formal procurement processes, councils can work with local communities to implement the rights within the Localism Act to take over assets of community value or run certain local services. They can apply the principles of coproduction to partner with residents to improve and maintain green spaces or work with social enterprises that bring additional benefits to the locality. Time banks and skills banks can be set up to make volunteering easier or to reward residents who contribute to the upkeep of local green spaces. [71]

Central government could publicise and champion such approaches via DCLG or the Office of Civil Society as part of its approach to public service reform, helping local authorities overcome issues such as the costs associated with TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings and Protection of Employment) regulations, European rules on contracting and VAT rules.

The Lottery: long-term investment or temporary windfall?

One of the major green space successes in recent years has been the use of Lottery funding. The Heritage Lottery Fund has been a key player in improving many of our Victorian parks and gardens, including flagship projects such as the restoration of Sheffield's Botanical Gardens. It continues to support park improvements through its £20m-a-year Parks for People programme, which allocates grants of up to £5m.

The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) has been an important contributor to smaller scale projects. Three quarters of the schemes funded through its Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities programme were green space projects, and an evaluation found that it had raised environmental awareness and boosted community engagement, often in Britain's most deprived communities. [72]

The growing importance of Lottery funding was recognised by the National Audit Office in *Enhancing Urban Green Space.* By 2004/05, around 8 per cent of green space funds came from Lottery sources, and a survey by the NAO found Lottery cash accounted for 64 per cent of 'supplementary' funding secured by local authorities, compared with just 18 per cent from central government grants and only 1 per cent from private sponsorship (p48).

However, Lottery funding is not guaranteed and – especially from the Heritage Lottery Fund – focuses on capital investment and restoration rather than ongoing maintenance. While the Parks for People programme seeks to ensure continuity through community involvement, there is a risk that this will drop off over time, leaving local authorities responsible for ongoing maintenance.

BIG is currently reviewing its own investment in the environment as demands on its resources continue to grow. The nature of Lottery funding is to provide time-limited interventions in the hope of making a strategic difference, so BIG is examining how its investments can be catalytic, enabling change and building local capacity to ensure such change has a long-term impact. This presents an opportunity to align Lottery investments with the approaches outlined in this report.

Housing providers: local green space catalysers?

Providers of affordable housing have long been involved with green spaces. Often a landlord will own the homes but not the green areas around, apart from enclosed gardens; sometimes it will also be responsible for communal spaces.

Housing associations are becoming increasingly aware of the value that well maintained green spaces add to their properties and the opportunities they present for community involvement. Cheshire Peaks and Plains Housing Trust, for example, has allotments managed by tenants with mental health problems, and is seeking to link them with a local food co-op.

The Neighbourhoods Green programme has sought to provide guidance on design and good practice for social landlords, as a result of which the National Housing Federation has published a guide to managing green space. Importantly, it explains how housing providers can form partnerships with local authorities, residents and others to improve shared spaces within neighbourhoods. [74]

The guide reports a survey of social landlords which found that one fifth used volunteers to help maintain green spaces, and 37 per cent included food growing areas within the spaces they managed. However, 84 per cent used external contractors for their grounds maintenance, potentially missing an opportunity to create employment or training opportunities for their residents.

Housing providers, like local authorities, could use procurement as an important tool for improving green spaces and providing opportunities for community organisations and social enterprises. Groundwork is currently working with the National Housing Federation and Aspire Foundation in a collaboration that aims to create thousands of jobs for young unemployed people by creating and expanding social enterprises.

Neighbourhoods Green sets out ten principles for housing providers to make the most of their green spaces. Most could equally apply to private housebuilders, who have a very mixed record in providing publicly accessible green space. There are exceptions: communal green space, including fruit bushes and apple trees, has been included within the Swindon Triangle development by Haboakus and Studio Engleback, and it has been estimated that this has boosted the development's value by £500,000. [74]

The Aldershot Urban Extension, one of the largest brownfield redevelopment schemes in southern England, will include a network of green spaces within a 4,000-home community, linking to open spaces and the Basingstoke Canal at the town's periphery. This has been achieved through a joint masterplanning process involving Rushmoor Borough Council, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, which owns the land, and local residents.

Voluntary organisations: networks and nodes

Voluntary and community organisations often get lumped together in policy formulation. But they vary widely in their forms and functions and have different roles to play.

At the very local level are informal community growing and gardening schemes, often concerned with very small patches of ground. The Edible Bus Stop in Lambeth, south London, is an example of a project begun by local residents leafleting friends and neighbours; a stretch of pavement beside a bus stop is now a volunteer-led growing project (see Spotlight 3). In Todmorden, West Yorkshire, private front gardens have been transformed through 'propaganda planting' into mini-allotments that get neighbours talking and sharing.

'Friends' groups who come together to support local parks and green spaces are more formal, but again are concerned with a single locality; the Friends of the Porter Valley in Sheffield, for example, is a conservation charity that aims to preserve the natural and historic characteristics of the valley's public areas, which are owned and maintained by Sheffield City Council. There are also local parks forums, which bring together friends' groups on issues of common interest, and a national network of community green space groups run by the charity GreenSpace.

Large numbers of special interest groups have a concern with green spaces, from Transition Towns to local wildlife trusts, allotment associations to city farms and community gardens, and conservation volunteers. This ecology of interest groups reflects local history and initiatives as well as the wide variety of points of contact at which individuals decide to get involved in local action. It may not look efficient or organised, but it corresponds to the way people decide to express their interests.

This diversity may be a frustration for funders and government, but it is also a strength, ensuring a constant renewal of local activism. Many of these organisations are much longer-lived than the organisations that fund (or fail to fund) them: the Peak and Northern Footpaths Society, for example, has existed for nearly 120 years; The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2010; and London Wildlife Trust was set up in 1981.

Groups like these may benefit from the new rights within the Localism Act and from local expressions of the government's 'big society' agenda. They could use the 'right to challenge' to take over inadequate services, or use neighbourhood planning as a tool to protect locally important green spaces. Established and well-resourced groups might be interested in taking over and running green spaces under community ownership.

As well as local groups and forums, there are also specialist organisations that provide spaces and services, deliver expert help for local communities or do work that local authorities may struggle to do effectively, including operating in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods where residents may be suspicious of officialdom. Groundwork trusts fall into this category; so do city farms. They provide the connections and the credibility that enable green spaces to be created, managed successfully and used for the benefit of local communities.

Often these specialist organisations are social enterprises that produce several benefits at once as part of their business. Many Groundwork trusts, for example, train or recruit people who have been long-term unemployed or who have been unable to get regular work because of poor educational attainment or learning difficulties. Environmental work and horticulture can offer important pathways to employment, skills and confidence.

Finally there are national organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Wildlife Trust network and the National Trust that provide a voice for their members, research and publish information, own and manage networks of green space and more. These are important partners for government and local authorities, often having access to knowledge and skills that community groups would take many years to develop on their own. They provide vital independent information, holding national and local government to account or inspiring them with new ideas.

But these groups and organisations too are being squeezed, with fewer funds available from national or local government. Many now face an uncertain future and are being pressed to consider financial survival before their strategic goals. Often programmes of work are being replaced by short-term projects, leading to the loss of staff with years of knowledge and experience.

Private landowners and property owners

Much of the discussion about managing our green spaces ignores the role of private landowners or householders. Yet a large proportion of our green space consists of private gardens – 24 per cent of the total area of Greater London, for example, according to London Wildlife Trust (*London: Garden City?*). One third of this garden space consists of hard surfacing, and the proportion is growing rapidly. The result is a loss of biodiversity and increased exposure to storm and flood damage.

Commercial organisations and property developers are important landowners too. Housebuilders have substantial land banks of property awaiting development, which could be managed for biodiversity in the short-term; owners of retail premises and shopping centres often have responsibility for areas of green space or open land; business parks and industrial estates, similarly, have areas that owners may consider empty but are actually part of our green infrastructure. At present there is no duty of care for many of these spaces, other than the duty to avoid public nuisances such as flytipping.

The role of businesses in green spaces

Many businesses support green space initiatives through staff volunteering schemes or their corporate social responsibility strategies. But most businesses have an impact on green space either as part of their core activity or through their supply chains: there are few that do not use land or the products and benefits of the land, or do business with others on the basis of their land use.

There is not space in this report to list all the ways that businesses impact on green space, but the following examples illustrate the issue:

- Food and drink manufacturers and processes have a central interest in land and water management, both in the UK and globally, to ensure a continued supply of products at prices their customers can afford. Unsustainable exploitation of natural resources for short-term gain reduces our ability to withstand climate change and removes the benefits of the land from others who depend on them.
- Clothing and footwear industries, similarly, have extensive impacts on land use. Their business choices can improve and sustain, or damage and destroy our green infrastructure.
- Construction and built environment businesses are able to influence our resilience against climate change through sustainable building techniques, the use of renewable materials such as timber rather than concrete, provision of well designed green spaces within developments, and design that encourages sustainable transport options.
- Insurance firms, pension funds and financial services companies can exert influence through their investment decisions and by creating financial structures such as eco-bonds which encourage sustainable practice.[75] Insurance firms also have a direct interest in supporting the provision of green infrastructure as a form of risk management.
- Utilities and infrastructure organisations, whether public or private, are responsible for large tracts of green space: water and sewage works, river banks, railway embankments, roadside and motorway verges. Although many of these are necessarily closed to the public, they are significant parts of our green infrastructure and need to be managed accordingly.

At present the involvement of businesses in green space, though often well-meaning and sometimes innovative, tends to be piecemeal and done in isolation from others. Any effective approach to green space management in the future needs to find better ways of harnessing and targeting businesses' energy and resources (see Spotlight 7).

Linking up: the need for advocacy

One of the most important achievements of the green space movement of the last decade was to give parks and open spaces a voice at the heart of policymaking. The formation of Cabe Space stemmed from a concerted push by MPs, the Urban Parks Forum, the Heritage Lottery Fund, local authorities and many others to raise the profile of green spaces as central to government agendas of the time: urban regeneration, sustainable communities and prosperous places.

The political agenda has shifted and Cabe Space's research and advocacy has been curtailed. The interest in parks and green spaces has not lessened, but the voice has been diminished. GreenLINK, a forum co-ordinated by the charity GreenSpace, aims to pick up where Cabe Space left off, but is having to do so without the resources and the research backing Cabe Space enjoyed.

GreenLINK has brought together the voices of many green space organisations to share knowledge and comment on government policy. While it has produced powerful critiques of, for example, the draft National Planning Policy Framework and the public health white paper, Healthy Lives, Healthy People, its status outside government makes it easier for ministers to ignore what they do not want to hear.

The Green Infrastructure Partnership, co-ordinated by Defra, is another forum bringing together green space experts. Here the agenda is to pool knowledge in order to help local communities rather than to influence government policy. The partnership, launched in October 2011, will run for two years and look at the condition of England's green infrastructure, and the scope for improvement. A publication, Local Green Infrastructure offers advice on how local groups can improve landscapes at a neighbourhood level. [76]

Could we manage green spaces differently? Some examples and options

Various models of funding and managing parks and green spaces have been explored in different parts of the world. Two reports by Cabe Space, *Paying for Parks* [77] and *Is the Grass Greener?* explore many of these models, which are summarised briefly below.

All attempt to address the same root issue: how do we ensure maximum public benefit from a public good but without over-burdening the public? There are no easy answers to this conundrum, but it is not an issue that can be kicked into touch: climate change creates a new imperative to find solutions in which all can play their part.

At present the involvement of businesses in green space, though often well-meaning and sometimes innovative, tends to be piecemeal and done in isolation from others. Any effective approach to green space management in the future needs to find better ways of harnessing and targeting businesses' energy and resources (see Spotlight 7).

Paying for Parks set out eight different models for funding public spaces, and it has become more urgent to consider the pros and cons of these now than when the report was published six years ago.

The models are:

- Traditional local authority funding: national and local taxation pays for local councils to run in-house maintenance teams or contract the service out to commercial or social enterprises. Such funding ties in closely with councils' strategic role in local leadership and stewardship, but is subject to reductions in central government funding and competition from other council services.
- Multi-agency public sector funding: a mix of central and local government support from bespoke programmes or from budget pooling between, for example, local authorities, the NHS and the police. While such pooling can support innovation (particularly in the case of community budgets and their predecessors, the Total Place pilots), such a system is only as strong as the weakest link: one partner can jeopardise the whole approach.
- Taxation initiatives: local property taxes or levies can be used to finance the provision and upkeep of green spaces. Tax increment financing allows a local authority to raise revenue based on the uplift in property values that may come from new development or a new park; however, it only works in a rising market and favours areas of higher value.
- Planning and development opportunities: 'planning gain' allows localities to benefit from new development. Payments under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 have traditionally financed public amenities, from roads Homes Bonus channels central government funds to councils that permit new development. The downside is that green space in one locality may be sacrificed to allow the development that funds the provision of green space elsewhere; and, like tax increment financing, planning gain is easier in high value areas.
- Bonds and commercial finance: local authorities in some countries can take out loans to fund green spaces, payable over 25 or 30 years. In the UK, councils have had 'prudential borrowing' powers since 2004/05 that can be used to access finance

from the capital markets. This can be an important source of investment in new parks, especially within new developments, but a revenue stream is required to repay the loan. It does not resolve the problem of upkeep, which is local authorities' main challenge.

- Income-generating opportunities: Councils are increasingly turning to fees and franchises as a way of plugging funding gaps. Everything from parking charges to franchising out cafés has been explored, and in some parts of the world parks have entry fees. Mile End Park in Tower Hamlets, East London, includes shops and restaurants that help defray the park's running costs. 78 The danger of an income-generating approach is that as well as running the risk of over-commercialisation and environmental damage, the widespread use of fees and charges could create a two-tier parks system, where some facilities are only available to the better-off.
- Endowments: Long-term investments in property or the stock market pay for the upkeep and improvement of parks. These can provide a reliable income, allowing planned maintenance and improvements over many years. But they require sums of money that are beyond the reach of public agencies. There is little evidence to date that philanthropists are willing to step into to green space; the New the breach.
- Voluntary and community sector involvement: Local people's time and labour can ease the burden on local authorities and create a sense of enthusiasm and ownership. There are countless examples of community groups forming to get involved in green spaces, often creating gardens or growing food on derelict or neglected land. However, taking full responsibility for a large open space (including public liability and public order) is likely to be well beyond the capacity of most voluntary organisations, and there needs to be realism about what local people can take on. While many Victorian parks were paid for by public subscription, this is unlikely to be a cost effective orreliable way of maintaining them. Is the Grass Greener? looked specifically at international models, some of which overlap with the approaches set out above. While it dealt with many issues above and beyond funding and management, the range of approaches was revealing. For example:
- In Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board looks after all the city's parks as well as public open spaces in the surrounding area. Directly elected parks commissioners are responsible for green space strategy and can levy funds through a tax on residential property. The system has operated successfully since 1883 and the board has its own police force and resident park-keepers.
- In Curitiba, Brazil, the Municipal Secretariat of the Environment is responsible for the city's open spaces, created as a response to problems of flooding and overcrowding. It has its own legislative powers and financial resources, which amount to 4 per cent of the city's total budget, partly raised through fines on polluters.
- In Tokyo, legislation (the Urban Park Act 1956) sets out national standards for provision and a city plan has been devised to meet these standards;
- In Aarhus, Denmark, local politicians have a long-term commitment to environmental improvements, with a Green Structure Plan drawn up in the 1970s and enforced through planning policies;
- In Paris, the elected mayor has responsibility for the city's green spaces and about 1 per cent of the city's budget is permanently allocated to parks.

None of these solutions are panacea, and even Minneapolis was looking at cost savings when the report was produced. However, each of the cases above exemplifies a dynamic that encourages investment and sends clear signals about the political priority of green spaces.

There are few comparable approaches in the UK. One that is frequently cited is the Milton Keynes Parks Trust (Alan Barber, *Taken on Trust*). Set up in 1992, it looks after 4,500 acres of parks and countryside and is an independent charity. It was endowed with a property portfolio which has enabled it to be completely self-financing. While this may be an option for future new towns, it is not a model that can be readily retrofitted to other towns and cities.

Another proposal put forward by Dr Barber in the same article is for a large lump sum to be taken from the NHS budget every year to create a top-up fund for the maintenance of parks and green spaces, distributed by a national agency to independent local parks trusts. The rationale is that the NHS would recoup the investment through the healthier lifestyles resulting from improved parks. This argument presages the idea of social impact bonds, where investors buy into financial instruments designed to create innovative forms of public service, and receive a return based on the savings to the public purse achieved through new forms of delivery.

Dr Barber costed the fund at £200m a year, a one-third increase in revenue funding for public parks at the time. He described this as 'a very small amount to be spared from the extra billions being squandered so unproductively on the NHS'. In the current climate it is highly unlikely that such an idea for repurposing NHS funding would gain traction, yet the call for dedicated resources does go to the heart of the matter.

SPOTLIGHT 7.

FINDING THE RIGHT ROLE FOR BUSINESS: LEARNING FROM GREENER LIVING SPACES

A common refrain in the public sector is that ways should be found for businesses to fill the gaps left by a retreating state. But what can they do well, and what should they not be expected to do?

For the last three years Groundwork has worked in partnership with Marks & Spencer to create or improve 130 green spaces across England. The scheme, funded as part of the retailer's well-known Plan A sustainability programme, has helped to galvanise local action, but has also highlighted both the benefits and the limitations of business partnerships.

Greener Living Spaces arose from the company's efforts to limit the use of plastic carrier bags. Marks & Spencer's research showed customers were willing to accept a charge, but only if they felt the profits from charging were going to a good cause – so a fund, worth £1m a year, was set up to pay for environmental projects.

'We decided that where we wanted to put our money was in improving the spaces in which our customers and employees lived and moved on a communal basis – what were the shared spaces where they had common experiences?' says Mike Barry, head of sustainable business at M&S.

'We looked around for a partner and knew Groundwork was a real expert at working with local communities so decided to work with them.'

Working with a trusted partner was an important decision for M&S. The company knew environmental projects were not its area of expertise.

'Not only could Groundwork dig a hole in the ground anywhere in the British Isles we asked, but they did it in a way that was consensual with the needs of the local community,' Mike Barry says. 'What Groundwork offered us was a way of connecting with the community to work out what they actually needed and that having invested the money up front there would be some sort of commitment and ownership in the community to protect and preserve our green space.

'The reason we worked with Groundwork in the first place was borne out by the way it's gone: you have to work with the grain of the local community. They have to want you to be there doing a particular project in a particular way. Of the 130 projects I can think of only one that caused us a headache in terms of the feedback and response from the local community.'

This Greener Living Spaces project has been supported by the Marks & Spencer carrier bag charging scheme.
M&S

What businesses can offer is resources – their finance, their staff time, their customer base and customers' loyalty – but what they generally lack is the knowledge of how to create and maintain green spaces, how to bring communities together and how to sustain support after the initial enthusiasm has waned or funds have run out.

Sometimes, as with Greener Living Spaces, there are existing relationships that can be turned into fruitful partnerships. But there is a lack of connection between the actions different businesses take under their corporate social responsibility banners, and no guarantee that they are working to the same agenda or with any awareness of each others' impacts.

'For every project we've done there could have been another thousand or ten thousand,' Mike comments. 'The question then becomes, yes, M&S has made a difference, but you would have liked it to have taken place in a much more joined-up structure that says another business has funded 200 football pitches at the same time, and the government has done that, and collectively we're more than the sum of the parts, between us we've transformed ten thousand British communities in a way that none of us on our own, not even the government, could do.'

Mike says businesses can add three kinds of value to green spaces: funding, innovation and their connections with customers and employees. 'It is very difficult for national government to speak from Westminster to the people of Solihull. M&S has a store in Solihull with customers and employees. So you can mobilise around this and you can connect with the local community through your local stores.'

But he warns against any suggestion that businesses should start to fill the role previously occupied by government: what they can do is add value rather than replace it. 'Just as money's tight in government money's tight in business at the moment,' he points out. 'However much government might hope business might fill a funding vacuum it simply cannot contribute that level of resource.

'Government will have to remain the predominant paymaster for infrastructure change in the UK. That's what taxpayers pay hundreds of billions of pounds a year to do. Businesses can't leverage those sums of cash. But businesses can leverage customers, employees, innovation and creativity and a role at the centre of high streets and communities.'

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Mike is interested in how that role can connect with some of the emerging community networks involved in sustainability and green spaces, such as Transition Towns. He recognises that social media and the emergence of new community growing and gardening projects has created a dynamic in which leadership can emerge in all sorts of places rather than residing with the great and the good, and he believes M&S will have to change its practices in response, allowing local store managers more flexibility to take local initiatives and form local partnerships.

This understanding of the energy of local people needs to combine with the strategic overview of central and local government and the dynamism of business, he believes. That means adopting a different approach to spending.

‘I think what we’ve lost is a significant blob of money that’s capital money,’ he says. ‘If I had only £1 to spend in a community I’d utterly spend it on community engagement and getting people to work together rather than invest it in a capital project that people see but don’t buy into in a visceral way.

‘I think the future is utterly about spending money to bring people together and find the benefits of shared solutions. In straitened times it’s people that matter and getting them to work together.’

SPOTLIGHT 8.

LOCALISM IN ACTION: MANCHESTER'S BACKYARD GARDENS

Fifteen years ago the outlook for people living in many parts of East Manchester was bleak. Boarded up houses, antisocial behaviour, abandoned cars and neglected open spaces were commonplace.

The changes that have taken place since have been striking. Across the city, there are many popular and well kept parks and green spaces. The river valleys of the Mersey, Medlock and Irk provide urban oases; the city offers 138 parks, formal gardens and open spaces, as well as allotment sites and nature reserves.

But for many East Manchester residents it is the gardens on their doorsteps that make all the difference. The story of Manchester's community gardens shows the importance of leadership, clout and connections (see Part 6): the leadership and clout of the city council through the New Deal for Communities initiative, and the connections of Groundwork and local residents, supporting and learning from each other.

Lindy Kelly, executive director of Groundwork London, used to work for Groundwork in Manchester and oversaw the acclaimed community environment programme, greening streets and turning communal back yards from dumping grounds into enclosed gardens.

'There was a lack of quality open space, a lot of derelict space and housing, lack of safety and fear of crime,' she recalls. 'There were streets of derelict and boarded up houses. Alleyways had become a big issue for many reasons – they had become dumping grounds for rubbish and places for antisocial behaviour. The spaces behind people's property were derelict.

'There were places where housing had been taken down. We called them "parks with sticks" because palings were supposed to stop vehicles moving on and fly tipping.'

At the same time there were big plans for the area's housing estates and former industrial sites: a multi-million pound New Deal for Communities programme, the Commonwealth Games and the funky Will Alsop-designed New Islington housing project.

For many local residents the promised edifice of the City of Manchester Stadium was a world away from the everyday concerns outside their doors: crime, vandalism, littering and dilapidation. The idea of the community environment project was to revive local pride and give people who were beginning to move out a sense that the area had a future.

Between 1999 and 2002 more than 3,000 local residents were involved in the programme, with 40 community groups formed in the first year and 33 projects completed, with another 30 in the pipeline. Alleyways were closed off, creating play areas and gardens where residents could sit outside without fear of disturbance or antisocial behaviour.

‘The key objective was about enabling communities to be at the centre of development and decision-making,’ Lindy says.

‘The programme looked at whole groups of streets and neighbourhoods and engaged local people in getting to know the needs of the area. A key aim was to develop the skill base of residents and local groups. Groups would then go and support others to take on new projects.’

That programme is no longer running, but go to the ‘alleygated’ gardens of Beswick and Openshaw and, even in winter, there’s evidence that they are used and looked after. In one garden there’s a trampoline and children’s play equipment; in another, signs of fresh pruning at the start of the growing season. Where Groundwork and the New Deal Communities have moved on, local people are still involved.

Manchester, like most councils, is facing cuts to its parks and recreation services. But there is still a proud tradition of working with local residents. Community engagement manager Mel Kirby, who worked with volunteers to create a garden outside the town hall for the Queen’s Jubilee visit in March 2012, says community gardens regularly win Royal Horticultural Society awards.

Volunteers were recently asked to inform Mel of the hours they put in, and he calculated that if they were paid at the minimum wage their work would have cost £1.7m – but it had been achieved with council funding of only £10,000.

Groundwork, too, continues to work with local volunteers to create green spaces across Greater Manchester. The Anson Estate Community Garden has turned a construction yard in the middle of a housing estate into a landscaped garden for local residents; in Salford a community growing project is planned for the site of two demolished tower blocks in Lower Broughton. In Hulme Groundwork is working with social landlord Places for People to create a roof garden on top of a housing block.

None of this happens by itself, though. As in East Manchester, local residents need support to put their ideas into practice; and the professionals can’t achieve lasting good if local people aren’t interested.

Rachael Stoney, senior project officer in Groundwork Manchester’s sustainable communities team, says you don’t need many people to make a big difference. ‘You have got to have a good core group of residents who are prepared to take on the work. People say “it’s just us” but ten people in a community group is fine.

‘If the project idea doesn’t come from the residents you may struggle. You get these budgets and people say you need to improve the area but you can’t expect to just force someone’s idea on to people.’

In some cases the people with ideas are still battling to get hold of the spaces they need. Simon Garrett is vice chair of Waytarg (The Way Tenants and Residents Group) in Beswick, East Manchester.

He and his partner Sharon live on Kylemore Way, a new estate built to replace homes demolished to make way for a school and library. One of their main concerns is that there is nowhere for children to play.

'We've got enclosed areas at the rear of the properties but they're for secure parking, it's not particularly safe for children to play. There was access to Bradford Park through a small path but the building company closed that off, which now means my kids haven't got access to the park unless they walk all the way round.'

Simon would like to create a pocket park on the estate and areas for vegetable growing. 'Nowadays when people are out of work it's expensive to buy food,' he says. 'We're looking into different grants that may be available because we're on a shoestring as a residents' association, but it's all going to come down to consultation with the building company and the council who own the land.'

If the experience of the community environment programme and subsequent initiatives is anything to go by, this is just the sort of scheme local residents could run successfully.

'There are very good stories to be told about enclosed spaces completely managed by the community that work brilliantly,' says Lindy Kelly. 'It's about how it makes people feel – ownership feels stronger in an enclosed space than in an open space.'

PART 6:

BUILDING A PEOPLE POWERED GREEN NETWORK

> *"Only in the very recent part of human history has the delusion arisen that people can flourish apart from the rest of the living world."*
>
> Cecily Maller, Healthy Parks, Healthy People

For all the hundreds of thousands of words of research and argument produced in the last decade and a half, we still face the real prospect of the decline and neglect of our green spaces. The fact that we can produce so much evidence and yet still fail to act on much of it speaks volumes about the disjuncture between what we say we want and what we actually do.

We need to see current policy and practice in the context of this fault line. Whether you read the National Planning Policy Framework or the Localism Act as threats or opportunities, the fact remains that improvements in recent years have only come after central government or powerful agencies like the Lottery have put their money where their mouth is.

This poses a risk and a challenge in an era of austerity. The danger is that under the cover of localism, a laissez-faire approach will dominate, and that delegation of responsibility will turn into abdication of responsibility. If we wake up in ten years' time to run-down urban parks, littered and unsafe open spaces, the loss of biodiversity and weakened resistance to climate change, will we simply shrug our shoulders and say, 'well, that's localism for you'?

Localism can be a powerful tool to enable communities to set the agenda, protecting and improving the green spaces they love, and the Localism Act includes important new rights for communities to influence council services, planning, housebuilding and the transfer of assets to community ownership. But it needs leadership, clout and connections: leadership to avoid drift and decline, clout to turn policies into actions, and connections to link up action in different places in a coherent and intelligent way.

Ten years after the Urban Green Spaces Task Force and three decades after Groundwork's birth, we need to redouble that commitment to our green spaces – and to do so in the knowledge that our whole society and economy suffers if we fail.

The recommendations below apply particularly to the governance arrangements in force in England, but the overarching themes will be relevant to the other nations of the UK.

Six principles for the future

An effective vision for the future needs to inspire action rather than endless policy debates. Here are six working principles we should adopt.

Future readiness. A changing and unpredictable future climate and the continuing loss of wildlife and biodiversity have underlined the vital role our green infrastructure plays. We have to be far-sighted. Green spaces are not merely civic amenities: they are part of the fabric of ecosystem services that support human life, wellbeing and economic activity. To view parts of this fabric as expendable is like saying we can do without bits of our central nervous system. For a healthy future, we must invest in the health of our green spaces now.

Equity: Our parks and green spaces are a shared resource. Even those that are in private ownership contribute to the common good. We need to invest in and manage them in ways that enhance these shared benefits. We must protect and increase public access, especially for those who face disadvantages, and reward owners who contribute to the common good through their land management.

Multifunctionality: As we have stressed throughout this report, green spaces serve a wide variety of functions which cannot be divorced from each other. It is not just the green infrastructure that matters – it is the huge range of social goods that come with it, from a place to sit and enjoy the company of friends to opportunities to exercise, the provision of habitats, the creation of quality environments that attract investment, places for food growing and energy generation, learning and training, work and relaxation. While green spaces can serve all these functions, they need to be balanced in ways that minimise and resolve conflicts, recognising that different people value green space for different reasons.

Buck sharing: The biggest risk in a localist policy climate is that nobody takes responsibility. All – central government, local authorities, communities, and businesses – have a stake in the quality of our green spaces. A core principle of equity is that all who benefit should contribute in line with their resources, skills and abilities. Individuals as well as organisations need to recognise their role as stewards of our environment.

Enabling: The role of government, central or local, should be to encourage and reward responsible stewardship. This requires facilitation and catalytic investment, sharing knowledge and linking people with resources, and removing barriers to local action and involvement. Government should be the curator of public green space, not just the janitor.

Involving: A defining principle of localism is that decisions should, as far as possible, be taken by the people they most affect. Green spaces are both a local and a shared resource. Decision-making should encourage local involvement, design and management in ways that complement an overarching understanding of the function they fulfil in the whole of our green infrastructure. Because all benefit, nobody should be excluded. In particular, existing models and partnerships that work effectively should be supported and strengthened In ways that value the experience and connections of their members.

Reducing the risks

Our green spaces face three severe risks, now and ahead of us. First is climate change: the danger is that our green infrastructure will not be robust enough to help us adapt to a changing climate or mitigate its effects, and this in turn will degrade our natural environment, leading to a spiral of decline.

Second is that short-term spending decisions will lead to active disinvestment. This is already starting to happen. Such disinvestment is not cost-neutral: it stores up problems for the future, but there is scant evidence that this is being factored into financial planning.

Third is that even if there is a collective will to improve our green spaces, reorganisation will become a substitute for action. There are risks both in leaving things as they are and in trying to remodel our approach on the fly; on the one hand, policymakers twiddle their thumbs as decline sets in, and on the other they imagine that a rearrangement of deckchairs will prevent the Titanic from sinking.

All these risks are real and must be addressed. The best way is by exercising leadership, in line with the principles outlined above. Leadership demands an understanding of the problem and awareness of the solutions, coupled with the will to take action and follow it through, and the ability to motivate and mobilise others.

But it also demands an openness and a willingness to delegate and devolve. The problems of our green spaces cannot be solved by central dictates; they require actions at every level, freedom for innovation and ingenuity, and a readiness to respond to new evidence and information.

For organisations and funders, this necessitates what has been described as ‘magnanimous leadership’. Magnanimous leadership [79] invests in benefits that appear to accrue to other people or organisations in the knowledge that these contribute to the health of the whole. As one participant in the Total Place programme put it:

‘Magnanimous leadership is about saying that if you stood back and asked the question of yourselves “What benefit are we getting out of this?”, at certain points quite frankly there would be absolutely nothing... The magnanimous leadership response is saying, do you know what, I’m going to give resource to that, I’m going to support it 110% despite the fact I know there is not a tangible financial reward to me, there’s not a great organisational reward to me.’

Magnanimous leadership poses short-term risks to individuals and organisations: risks to reputation, budgets, position in an organisational pecking order. The gamesmanship that dominates many organisations seeks to minimise these short-term risks because individuals pay the price, whereas long-term failure can be acceptable since no individual carries the can.

To reverse this approach to risk and reflect long-term values and common interests in our approach to green spaces, which build on the principles of localism and see local residents as positive partners and co-producers of spaces, we have to build cultures of trust and collaboration. In the language of social network analysis, we have to see the network as more important than the nodes.

This raises particular issues for central government and public agencies. Notwithstanding its drive to reduce public spending, it needs to lead from the front in setting the overall direction of thinking about our green infrastructure and in demonstrating the value of a co-ordinated approach. If government cannot speak with one voice, it can hardly blame others for fragmented and disjointed approaches.

‘Magnanimous leadership is about saying that if you stood back and asked the question of yourselves “What benefit are we getting out of this?”, at certain points quite frankly there would be absolutely nothing... The magnanimous leadership response is saying, do you know what, I’m going to give resource to that, I’m going to support it 110% despite the fact I know there is not a tangible financial reward to me, there’s not a great organisational reward to me.’

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Linking up incentives

Much of the investment in green spaces comes not from the public purse but from local communities (often in the form of time, skills and labour) and from private individuals and businesses who either own or manage land or who support community activities. While central or local government cannot tell individuals or businesses how to direct their efforts, they are in a position to coordinate, inspire action, connect different initiatives, inform and amplify.

Many businesses support action to improve green spaces by working with trusted partners or in line with their own priorities, but this can sometimes produce unintended results. An investment by a private company can be used by a public body as an excuse to do less (and vice versa). Action by local residents can sometimes encourage public services to walk away rather than join in.

One organisation or group's money, time, skills or enthusiasm should be a catalyst for action by others, not a substitute. To enable that to happen there should be rewards for collaboration and cooperation. This requires co-ordination at a local level, either by a trust responsible for green spaces or by the local authority. The aim should be to encourage connected networks with many participants, rather than an accumulation of control in the hands of one body.

Just as community budgets seek to reward cooperation between different public services, and city deals seek to reward economic growth (recommendations 4 and 5), there should also be rewards for collaboration at a community level. Businesses can have a greater impact by working together than within their corporate social responsibility silos; individual volunteers are more motivated when they know their work is valued and others are involved. All should aspire to a model of coproduction in which users, owners and managers work together, reflecting the principles of the commons (recommendation 11) and prioritising community access, involvement and partnership in ownership and management.

Such approaches have been described as the 'civic economy'. [80] They recognise that value can be multiplied, not just added, when different people's and organisations' expertise and resources come together. Time banks, for example, enable people to trade an hour of their work for an hour of someone else's, or can offer rewards and incentives for voluntary activity. [81] In Wigan, the local authority is exploring with WiganPlus how a points system can be created using smartcard technology to reward people who volunteer in community centres or care for elderly or disabled people. [82] PledgeBank enables people to sign an 'I will if you will' commitment as a way of raising funds or recruiting

volunteers for community projects. [83] Community share issues have been used to fund renewable energy schemes or community-owned buildings, and could also be used for creating and improving green spaces where a revenue stream can be identified. [84]

By working together alongside local residents, businesses, central government, housing providers and local authorities could scale such ideas up to create significant impacts. Instead of (or as well as) investing in short-term projects, businesses could pool corporate social responsibility funds into a national green spaces endowment that could be used as match funding for local action. Local authorities could incentivise voluntary action by offering council tax discounts or free access to facilities.

Recommendation 1: Government, businesses and local authorities should work together to identify the most promising incentive schemes and test them as models for generating financial investment and volunteering in green spaces. This is an area where businesses may be well placed to take a lead.

Recommendation 2: An independently-run national endowment fund should be created, financed by business and philanthropic contributions, to pool business contributions in order to match fund community-led initiatives and community share issues to create new green spaces or upgrade existing ones. In this way business and philanthropic contributions directly reward and encourage local action, rather than producing short-term impacts that may not be sustainable.

Recommendation 3: The Treas
housing providers and local au
alongside government and the
(see recommendation 13) to de
bonds as a model for investing
Social impact bonds work on t
actions that reduce the long-te
purse, but require a consistent
for social value and assessing
different interventions. Once such values are agreed, delivery agents can approach investors to raise funds to finance their work at a specified rate of return. A ‘green impact bond’ could repay to investors a portion of the costs averted by providing, for example, a sustainable urban drainage system to reduce flood risk, or the welfare costs avoided by training an unemployed person in horticultural skills. Social impact bonds are currently being trialled by the Ministry of Justice to fund actions to prevent reoffending, and the learning from this scheme needs to be examined closely. [85]

Linking up locally

Local authorities are important owners of green spaces and through the planning system have significant influence over what happens in spaces they do not own. But they are hobbled by funding regimes that encourage them to prioritise spending on statutory services, and by relationships with central government that continue to limit local freedom.

There have been some positive developments in recent years that could give councils more flexibility to act as effective stewards of green spaces. Community budgets seek to tackle complex issues and encourage innovation by pooling funds to enable different public services to work together. The scheme, which has grown out of the Total Place project, seeks to deliver more responsive and accountable services.

While the initial pilot programme has focused on families with complex problems, Lincolnshire Council is already working on a 'total environment' programme to manage environmental challenges, and the government is keen to develop community budgets at neighbourhood level. [86]

England's largest cities are also being given extra freedom through 'city deals' in which they receive a tax rebate from central government if they can create local economic growth. [87] The first such deal was agreed with Greater Manchester in March 2012, enabling the city to invest £1.2bn in transport and other infrastructure. Since investment in green infrastructure helps create the conditions for prosperity and can lead to direct job creation and training opportunities as well as building resilience against climate change, government should encourage local authorities to submit plans for 'green city deals'.

Business improvement districts have demonstrated in recent years how local partnerships, often led by the private sector, can revive the fortunes of flagging town centres or retail areas. Such targeted partnerships could also be established to turn around neglected or underfunded green spaces, bringing together local residents, businesses and public services. The idea of 'neighbourhood improvement districts' is already being explored and 'green improvement districts' could help to mobilise community action as well as demonstrating a local authority's commitment.

Recommendation 4: The community budgets programme should be expanded to pilot 'total place' approaches to the natural environment, green spaces and climate change adaptation and mitigation. These pilots should also explore the scope for joining with health services to create 'community wellbeing budgets', bringing together green space management, health promotion and the treatment of conditions such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

Recommendation 5: England's core cities should draw up plans for 'green city deals' to fund investment in green infrastructure and link this directly with training and employment opportunities. Such deals should include the management of public green spaces, carbon reduction and enterprise creation. The process of extending the city deals scheme to smaller cities should be accelerated.

Recommendation 6: Where city deals or community budgets are not available, local authorities (or Local Nature Partnerships) should draw up community green space charters to generate a shared local vision with other public services, landowners, businesses and community organisations. Such charters should seek to encourage sound stewardship at a local level and reflect on a voluntary basis the more formal arrangements of city deals or community budgets.

Recommendation 7: Local authorities should be encouraged to pilot 'green improvement districts', bringing together partnerships of local stakeholders and residents to take concerted action where green spaces are neglected or failing. Where councils appear unwilling or unable to prevent decline and deterioration, a neighbourhood forum should have the right to instigate action.

Recommendation 8: Councils should set out and regularly update a strategic approach to green spaces in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure. Councils should ensure the value of green space as an appreciating asset is fully reflected in their accounting and financial planning. As in Scotland, English councils should place carbon reduction and adaptation to climate change at the heart of their planning.

Recommendation 9: Local government funding should be targeted to support staffing and maintenance rather than capital spending. Councils should use their resources to build networks of mutual support and work with them to overcome hurdles and blockages. As in Lambeth, they should use their resources of staff time and expertise to facilitate community action.

Recommendation 10: Commissioners of services should add value through procurement. Local authorities and other owners of public green spaces need to commission services that retain the multifunctional value of their assets rather than simply opting for the lowest cost – an approach partly responsible for the decline seen from the 1970s to the 1990s. Commissioners should actively seek social benefits as part of their approach to cost-effectiveness. This could include, for example, specifying social outcomes to be obtained through maintenance contracts, such as numbers of apprentices taken on or 'NEETS' (young people not in education, employment or training) employed. Authorities should seek long-term social partnerships with suppliers that encourage them to invest in their staff and skills.

Linking up nationally

The preservation and adaptability of our natural environment is the biggest challenge facing us because the natural environment underpins everything else. At a UK level, we need a shared narrative about the value and functions of our environment that informs and stimulates action across government and locally.

National leadership is needed to hold multiple parties to account in maintaining and improving green space as a public good. This demands far better co-ordination between government departments and public bodies than currently exists, and recognition by all of the economic importance of green infrastructure.

National co-ordination should also involve major funders like the Heritage Lottery Fund, which has been a major investor in park improvements in recent years, and the Big Lottery Fund, which is currently reconsidering its approach to green spaces. It is important to avoid the gaps that continue to be created when different funders fail to talk to each other and assume someone else will pick up the tab.

This overarching framework should be accompanied by a set of responsibilities that are powerful enough to drive decision-making but flexible enough to relate to the multifunctional character of green spaces and the multiple public, private and voluntary stakeholders involved. The idea of the 'commons' provides an approach that has deep legal and cultural roots within the UK and internationally and can be readily adapted to our urban green spaces, public parks and accessible open space.

The Commons Act 2006 strengthens legislation relating to common land, which historically had been governed by scores of individual acts of Parliament as well as by national laws. The commons balance a range of private, public and charitable stakeholders; public access and enjoyment; and statutory responsibilities and funding. The aim of the legislation is to ensure public access and protect the land from sale and development. Comparable arrangements exist in other countries: in Sweden, for example, natural areas are publicly accessible, irrespective of ownership.

Evidence from other countries shows that statutory responsibilities can prevent the neglect and decline of green spaces, and in the absence of such responsibilities it is too easy for owners or managers to opt out of sustainable stewardship. It is worth quoting the second conclusion of *Is the Grass Greener?* in full:

A long-term commitment went hand-in-hand with a political commitment as a pre-requisite for not only delivering high quality green space, but for ensuring that it remains high quality thereafter. This commitment was exemplified by Minneapolis, whose experience demonstrated the value of foresight, long-range planning and fostering civic commitment to urban green spaces. In Aarhus also, the public interest in green space issues has in turn sustained political interest in green spaces for over 50 years, in the process inspiring the work of the municipal administration. The direct benefits in sustaining high quality green space in both these cities, and in other cities which have exhibited such a long-term commitment, such as Paris and Curitiba, are clear to see. In different ways, in all these cities, the management of public space is a statutory responsibility of the city authorities, something that more often than not was not the case elsewhere.

'The result is that, whereas in Minneapolis, Aarhus, Paris and Curitiba, the need to invest in the management of urban green space is non-negotiable, elsewhere, wavering political commitment could, and did, have a much more direct and profound effect. Thus, although local political commitment seems more important than any statutory duty for delivering both high quality green space provision and an exemplary commitment to its management, a carefully constructed set of statutory green space roles and responsibilities could create the incentive required to raise the quality of existing green space management practice in England to at least a minimum acceptable level across the board.'

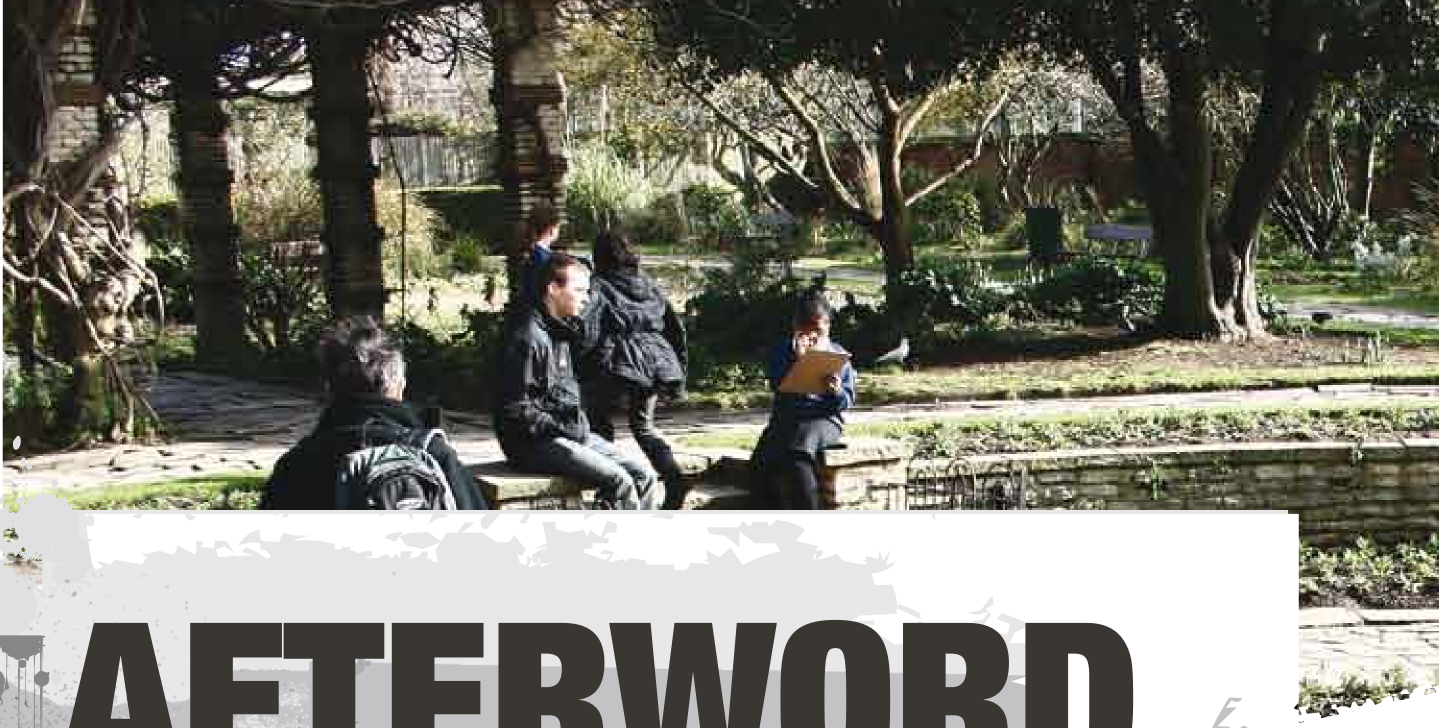
Recommendation 11: A Parks and Green Spaces Act, based on the principles of the commons, should enshrine in law the responsibility of stewardship for all green spaces currently open to the public, whether or not they are publicly owned. This should include, as a minimum:

A duty on government to recognise the functions and value of green spaces within its policies on climate change, planning, health and wellbeing and local government, and to ensure policy is informed by up-to-date and robust research and information, including an open-access national database of green spaces;

- An inalienable right of public access and enjoyment;
- The responsibility of owners and those entrusted with management to preserve and care for green spaces, and their right to enact local byelaws to ensure users share this responsibility of stewardship;
- The right to establish locally accountable trusts or parks boards to preserve green spaces in perpetuity, with the right to raise funds through levies on local properties and businesses, subject to a local referendum;
- The duty to prevent encroachment or development without the provision of alternative green space of equivalent or greater value and functionality;
- The duty to work with private landowners, business owners and community groups to encourage and facilitate the sustainable stewardship of private green spaces that are not accessible to the public.

Recommendation 12: Central government departments and public agencies should ensure the value of ecosystem services and green infrastructure is reflected in planning and accounting, using and building on Green Book guidance issued by HM Treasury. This applies in particular to departments with responsibilities for green spaces or that benefit from them (such as the Department of Health), and to agencies that are major landholders, such as the Defence Infrastructure Organisation. Defra's pioneering work in this field needs to be taken forward at a pan-government level and linked with the Office for National Statistics' work on national accounts of wellbeing.

Recommendation 13: As well as valuing the 'natural capital' of ecosystem services and green infrastructure, it is essential that the social capital generated through our green spaces is adequately valued. Central government has made some positive moves, particularly in adopting the Public Services (Social Value) Bill, but does not yet factor social value into its own decision-making. Alongside recommendation 12, we recommend that government works with the ONS and the accounting profession to develop robust indicators of social value that can be readily used by commissioners of services (see recommendations 3 and 10).



AFTERWORD

IMAGINE YOUR CITY

Imagine you're about to move to a sizeable town or city anywhere in the UK. What would you expect to find in a good place to live? Good jobs and schools, obviously. You'd want to be able to get around easily so you'd look for an efficient public transport and road network. You'd expect all the local infrastructure to be in place: public services, healthcare, broadband, sports facilities, theatres and music venues.

You would also expect to find well maintained parks, relaxing open spaces and places where you can take children to play, go for a run or just sit in the sun. You would assume that a city which takes care of itself also takes care of its green spaces.

Imagine the thinking behind this report is put into practice. Instead of relying on lobbying, largesse or luck, every town or city would have a clear responsibility to look after its green spaces. All owners would have a duty of stewardship, requiring them to understand the environmental and social value of the places under their care, and to look after them in ways that maintain and enhance that value.

But not every green space would be owned or managed in the same way. Each locality would decide which approach best fulfilled its duties and met its needs. In some places independent, directly elected parks boards would invest in green spaces through local taxation, just as the police and fire services raise revenue through a local precept. In others, local councils would take responsibility in order to better integrate local green infrastructure with the planning system. Some would delegate management to community-owned charitable trusts, paying them an agreed fee for their services. All could raise revenue by contracting with local healthcare organisations to provide a 'natural health service' to reduce the incidence of obesity and cardiovascular diseases.

All publicly accessible green spaces would be managed using the principles of the commons: the public would enjoy rights of access and use in perpetuity, subject to locally agreed restrictions. Residents would know that the park or woodland was theirs, but they might not be able to ride motorbikes or light barbecues if it interfered with others' enjoyment.

So imagine you have just moved to your imaginary city. It has decided to set up a local trust, the City Commons, to look after its green spaces. Check out your local park and you'll see notices directing you to the City Commons website and the Creative Commons logo will signal to you that you have a 'share-alike' right to use the space: it is yours to enjoy, but not only yours. And you will be encouraged to put something back into the space you use, by joining a local Friends group or volunteering organisation.

As you walk through the park you'll see a children's play area, where parents agree to clear up litter when they leave and get together from time to time to discuss with City Commons staff what play equipment is needed. There's a community growing area, where you can join in and learn the principles of permaculture, find out what you can grow in your own garden or how you can get an allotment. Alongside the main path through the park some are using outdoor gym equipment, while others stroll at a more leisurely pace. Further on there's a small apple orchard, with a notice encouraging users to help harvest the trees (and help themselves to fruit) in the autumn.

At the café you'll discover how you can join in community work days where you not only help to keep the park in good condition, but have your say on what kind of place you want it to be. You'll also be able to find out what kind of flora and fauna the park supports and how it helps your city adapt to climate change. You might discover that the café is franchised out to a social enterprise that supports local food producers and provides jobs and training for unemployed people, and that this is part of a local food network operating across the city, supporting independent growers and community projects.

Back at home, you'll go online and discover a social network of green projects, a bit like Project Dirt. As you browse it you'll find out who else in your city is interested in beekeeping or growing their own food, which clubs and organisations use green spaces for sport and recreation, and who's organising events and social activities. Explore further and you'll see that this network is supported by and linked to the City Commons, who hold regular events to make sure everyone who wants to can have a say in the future of local green spaces.

A few hours later, you're off to the GP surgery to register with your new doctor. On arrival you'll find herb and vegetable beds planted with medicinal herbs and demonstrating which foods are good for you. Inside you'll find a map of local parks and green spaces showing health walks, running routes and fitness trails. There will be information about 'green prescriptions', telling you how outdoor activities can help you deal with stress or depression, or help you recover from surgery.

When your children go to school you'll discover that the schools, too, are working with the City Commons to provide growing spaces in playgrounds and grow healthy food for school canteens. Senior schools are teaching beekeeping and horticultural skills alongside traditional academic subjects.

Explore the city further and you'll find businesses and public bodies are getting in on the act, creating roof gardens and 'green walls' to provide wildlife habitats, providing pocket parks and play areas in the high street and putting planters by the bus station. Vacant plots and development sites, instead of being neglected or used for dumping, are temporary urban agriculture projects or wildflower meadows.

The thing that strikes you is that it doesn't seem to matter who owns which bit of green space. Everyone is involved, because they all know that making the city greener makes it a better place to live, go to school, shop and do business. And without really noticing it, you decide this is where you want to stay.

This is a description of an imaginary city, but not utopia. All the elements described, in one form or another, exist in different parts of the UK or elsewhere in the world.

APPENDIX

THE BENEFITS OF GREEN SPACE: EVIDENCE AND FURTHER READING

This appendix lists some of the benefits of green space, but can only scratch the surface of the extensive material now available. Some suggestions for further reading are included at the end of each section, and for more detailed research we would recommend perusing the archive of material researched and produced by Cabe Space, available online at the National Archives. [88] **Except where specifically referenced, full references for all the material cited below is included in the endnotes.**

Ecosystem services

The ecosystem services sustained by our green spaces and natural environment fall into four categories:

- Provisioning services relating to food and materials;
- Regulating services such as the removal of air pollution, and drainage;
- Cultural services relating to human wellbeing;
- Supporting services including pollination and soil formation

As the UN report, *Making Payments for Ecosystem Services Work,* comments: ‘Many ecosystem services are poorly understood or simply taken for granted by people who cannot see the relation between, for example, milk cartons or medicines and the services of nutrient cycling and biodiversity conservation that make their production possible.’

These services are particularly important in the context of climate change, as well as being highly sensitive to its effects.

In *Green Infrastructure to Combat Climate Change,* Northwest Climate Change Partnership sets out eleven ways in which our green infrastructure can help us respond to climate change. These include reducing flood risks from surface water; providing cooling during heat waves and reducing the ‘urban heat island’ effect created by concentrations of buildings; storing carbon within woodlands and peatlands; managing river flooding; sensitively managed food production; the substitution of materials (such as replacing concrete with timber); providing low carbon fuels such as biomass and biogas; reducing the need to travel by car; providing environments where species can adapt to change; and providing alternatives to the most-visited tourist sites.

The Stern review of the economics of climate change sets out the scale of the risks climate change poses, and concludes that 'the benefits of strong, early action considerably outweigh the costs'. The risks include threats to food and water supplies, flooding and storms, the loss of biodiversity and in the long-term, rising sea levels.

If these risks are to be avoided, the world must curtail its greenhouse gas emissions, which means reducing reliance on fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas. Green infrastructure provides both alternative sources of energy (from biomass to hydro and sites for wind energy) and, in the form of woodlands and wetlands, a tool for carbon capture and storage.

Academic studies increasingly emphasise the importance of green space in meeting the challenges of climate change. Young (2010) suggests urban forestry could play a role in cities' carbon management plans in future, [89] while Gill et al (2007) argue that urban green spaces can help to 'climate proof' cities. [90] In their study of Leipzig, Germany, Strohbach, Arnold and Haase, conclude that urban green spaces have the potential to act as 'carbon sinks' but may need to be managed differently to maximise this potential, with greater emphasis on woodland and tree planting. [91]

Green infrastructure can also play a direct role in helping to reduce energy use, mitigating the impacts of climate change. Green roofs, for example can help to insulate buildings, cutting the costs of heating and air-conditioning. [92] Green transport routes encourage walking and cycling as an alternative to car travel.

The national blueprint for sustainable development, *Securing the Future,* places great importance on the quality of green spaces, not only for their biodiversity and ecosystem benefits but also for health, wellbeing and stronger communities.

Further reading:

An introductory guide to valuing ecosystem services. Defra, 2007

Accounting for environmental impacts: Supplementary Green Book guidance. HM Treasury and Defra, 2012

No charge: Valuing the natural environment. Natural England, 2009 [93]

Making payments for ecosystem services work. UNEP, 2009

Green infrastructure to combat climate change. Community Forests Northwest, 2011

Economic benefits

The multiple economic benefits of green space have been thoroughly researched through the Natural Economy Northwest programme, which divided them into eleven categories:

- Economic growth and investment
- Land and property values
- Labour productivity
- Tourism
- Products from the land
- Health and wellbeing
- Recreation and leisure
- Quality of place
- Land management and biodiversity
- Flood alleviation and management
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation

Green infrastructure can underpin the success of other economic sectors. It creates opportunities for an improved environment, jobs, sustainable business, and social benefits. It can help reduce the need for healthcare and enable employees to be more productive.

Figures from Cabe Space (*Does Money Grow on Trees?* 2005) show that green spaces have a positive effect on property values. Houses close to parks are on average 8 per cent more expensive than similar properties further away. Greener cities attract more visitors, whose spending on shopping and leisure generates job opportunities.

Commercial developers see green spaces as a selling point in a high quality environment. The developers of Canary Wharf spent £6m on Jubilee Park to help attract financial workers to London's docklands. Arlington's out-of-town business parks are deliberately set within natural landscapes, an investment in green space that enables Arlington Securities to command the equivalent of city centre rent levels. New York's Central Park Conservancy has raised more than $100m from businesses, charitable foundations and individuals, who are now the park's main funders (*Paying for Parks*, 2008).

Green space creates jobs and builds skills. One of the greatest concerns emerging from reports published over the last decade is that horticultural and green space management training has been eroded through the previous quarter-century of cost-cutting. Looking after green space well and in ways that enhance and protect biodiversity is a skilled role, as important to society as entrepreneurship or technology. Yet these abilities continue to be undervalued and regarded as dispensable. [94]

Learning outside the classroom can boost educational attainment, or provide opportunities to gain qualifications for people who may not have succeeded within the traditional academic system. The Land Apprentices scheme at Wolverhampton Environment Centre, for example, enables youngsters who have left school without qualifications to gain NVQ certificates in horticulture, offering routes to work in gardening businesses or with local authority parks departments. Working in green spaces can also support social inclusion and community wellbeing.[95]

The voluntary activities associated with green space also have an economic value: if they were not done many of them would have to be paid for, or alternative activities found to create the social value that would be lost. Half a million people a year volunteer in green spaces in the UK, creating an estimated £30m of value. [96]

City & Guilds has found that community food growing and urban agriculture projects teach aptitudes that can help volunteers find work. They build transferable skills such as confidence, communication and teamwork, literacy and numeracy, as well as technical proficiencies in horticulture and landscaping. They can also provide important support networks for people who might struggle to stay in work. [97]

In *Making the Invisible Visible*, Cabe Space suggests parks could be valued in the same way as the 'brand value' of a commercial enterprise. 'The reputation of a park and people's willingness to visit it can be compared to the reputation of a brand and people's willingness to purchase it,' it argues.

A well known park, like the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris or Regent's Park in London, is a magnet for tourists as well as local people. A neglected park can become a deterrent, as New York's Central Park once was. And the evidence shows that parks and green spaces have impressive brand loyalty – the town or city where they are situated or the organisation responsible for them benefits from this reputational boost. Place Survey results from 2009, analysed in *Urban Green Nation*, showed that 87 per cent of people had used their local green space in the previous year, and 79 per cent in the previous six months, compared with 36 per cent who visit concert halls and 27 per cent who visit galleries.

These economic benefits are felt at the very local level too. Greenspace Scotland (*Greenspace is good – and we've proved it!*) found that community involvement in creating and improving green spaces consistently generated social value worth several times the original investment. Bridgend Growing Communities, for example, found that every pound invested in a food growing training programme reaped £17 of benefits in terms of building trainees' skills, aptitudes and work-readiness; Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust found that every pound spent on a summer bike club at Hailes Quarry Park would generate £6 of benefits.

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Does money grow on trees? Cabe Space, 2005

How much value does the City of Philadelphia receive from its parks and recreation system? Trust for Public Land, 2008

The economic value of green infrastructure. Natural Economy Northwest, 2008

Microeconomic evidence for the benefits of investment in the environment – review. Natural England, 2012 [98]

Health and wellbeing

Comprehensive literature reviews on the health benefits of green space have been undertaken by The Faculty of Public Health and by Greenspace Scotland and findings are consistent. Greenspace Scotland, which examined 87 separate studies, found that better health was linked to green space regardless of socioeconomic status: rich or poor, your health is better. [99]

It found that people who use green spaces are more likely to take exercise than those who don't, and that the attractiveness or quality of the green space is important: people don't want to use neglected parks or open spaces. Access, scale and nearness to housing were all important factors.

The more time people spend outdoors the less stressed they feel – an important consideration given the cost to the UK economy of depression and mental illness, which has been calculated at £26.1bn. [100] Greenspace Scotland concluded: 'The opportunities offered by green spaces to be in contact with nature, to have fresh air, to be outdoors, to be close to plants and animals, are generally seen to have a profound effect on wellness and wellbeing.'

A study of 345,143 GP records in the Netherlands, quoted by the Faculty of Public Health, indicated that the annual prevalence rates for 15 of 24 chosen disease clusters was lower where there was more green space within 1km. This correlation was strongest for anxiety and depression, and among children. [101]

The Faculty of Public Health and Natural England, drawing on extensive research, list the health benefits of green space as follows:

- Improved mental health and wellbeing for children, young people and adults
- Increased likelihood of physical activity across all age groups
- Reduced violence and aggression: a reduction in antisocial behaviour and incidence of crime in urban areas with green spaces
- Reduced health inequalities: significant reductions in mortality and morbidity from all causes and circulatory disease associated with areas of greater green space. This result takes into account effects of income deprivation.
- Improvement in air and noise quality
- Economic benefits

They argue that local authorities and health professionals should do more, not less, to provide green spaces and enable people to use them. In particular the study recommends 'green prescriptions' as an alternative to medication for mental illness, and support for programmes of health walks and exercise.

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Social and cultural benefits

Research by Deakin University, Melbourne (*Healthy Parks, Healthy People*) suggests that even though more than half of humanity now lives in cities, the natural world and its landscapes are core to our sense of self. 'Research indicates that contrary to popular thinking, humans may be dependent on nature for psychological, emotional and spiritual needs that are difficult to satisfy by other means. Findings so far demonstrate that access to nature plays a vital role in human health, wellbeing and development that has not been fully recognised,' it argues.

The authors argue that 'the belief that contact with nature fosters psychological wellbeing and reduces the stress of urban living seems to be as old as urbanisation itself', quoting several studies by architecture and healthcare expert R S Ulrich. Ulrich, who is professor of architecture at the Centre for Healthcare Building Research at Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden, has shown how views of nature from windows and gardens in hospitals can aid recovery from stress and surgery. [105]

Play is one of the most important social benefits of green spaces. [106] Open spaces enable children to develop imagination and creativity, building dens and interacting with the natural environment. Play enables children to socialise and meet others from different backgrounds, bridging cultural and class divides.

There is extensive evidence that projects to improve the local environment build friendships and a sense of community, from formal projects such as Britain in Bloom and Groundwork's Greener Living Spaces programme, to more informal networks and groups like the Transition Towns movement or Incredible Edible Todmorden.

The popularity of green spaces speaks for itself as an indicator of community benefit, whether these are signature parks such as Bradford's Lister Park or London's Richmond Park, or the micro-installations in roadside potholes created by the Pothole Gardener, a London artist who now has a worldwide following. [107]

Academic studies tend to support the relationship between well maintained local green spaces and people's feelings of belonging. People who live near green spaces in cities are more likely to feel a sense of attachment to their neighbourhoods, a study in Vienna found; [108] in Zurich, researchers found youths were more likely to meet and make friends with people from non-Swiss backgrounds in the city's parks. [109]

But environmental impacts on communities work both ways. They are adversely affected when the local environment seems neglected or uncared-for, as Keep Britain Tidy has found: 'Small actions undertaken at a local level can really make a big difference to our perceptions of place and to our shared experiences of the places we are in touch with everyday'. [110]

Overgrown or neglected green spaces with damaged or dilapidated facilities affect older people and children in particular: parents are less likely to allow or encourage their children to play outdoors and may perceive such places as risky and associated with antisocial behaviour. Demos (*A Child's Place,* 2004) points out: 'The worse a local environment looks, the less able children are to play freely, and develop the habits and commitments that will enable them to address environmental problems in the future.' [111]

Cabe Space, too, found that maintenance and tackling antisocial behaviour were vital if parks were to benefit local communities. Community involvement in design and upkeep, embracing cultural diversity, and the employment of park rangers can all help ensure parks do not become 'green deserts'. [112]

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It goes without saying that all errors and omissions are my own.

Julian Dobson

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Grey places need green spaces: The case for investing in our nation's natural assets

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