The PARKS Alliance

MAKING PARKS COUNT
THE CASE FOR PARKS

Parks: The Smart Investment
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Introduction

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

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

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

It’s time to make parks count.

Matthew Bradbury,
Chair of the Parks Alliance
June 2020.
THE CASE FOR PARKS

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

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

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

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

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

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

Natural Capital Values for Parks in England

- Annual economic value £6.6 billion
- Asset value of over £200 billion
- Every £1 spent provides between £7 and £10 of quantified benefit
- As towns compete to attract investment, the presence of parks, squares and gardens becomes a vital
- Urban green spaces raise nearby house prices by an average of £2,500.

Mental ill health costs the UK £106bn pa

- London's parks alone help avoid an estimated £37bn of mental health related costs each year.
- Nearly half of all people say that parks are the most important public space.
- They create opportunities for social interaction in ways that enhance health and wellbeing.

Active visits to Parks in England result in £2bn in avoided health costs.

- Every year physical inactivity costs the UK around £1bn.
- A third of people are disconnected from the places where they live.
- There is a social return of £8.50 for every £1 invested in nature conservation volunteering.

Parks provide a range of benefits:

- The value of carbon sequestration by trees in public parks in England is estimated at £9m per year.
- The benefits of air pollution reduction from trees in urban areas in the UK is estimated at £680m per year.
- Air pollution is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK, causing up to 36,000 deaths.
- The proportion of impervious hard surfaces in town and cities has risen by 22% since 1961.

Parks in England provide an urban cooling benefit of £1.8bn pa.

- An urban heat island effect is created in cities by solar radiation trapped within the built environment.
- Parks in England provide an urban cooling benefit of £1.8bn pa.
- High streets are struggling. The focus of high streets is shifting from retail to food and leisure services.
- Parks are one of the top priorities when addressing the factors of vitality and viability of high streets.

Urban green spaces in towns and cities help reduce the risk of flooding and improving water quality.
Why parks matter
Figure 7 Parks help address the big policy issues of the day

- Good for business and the local economy
  - Attract inward investment
  - Activate town centres
  - Increase property values

- Improving individuals’ health and well-being
  - Enable physical health
  - Promote good mental health

- Tackling climate change and protecting the environment
  - Reduce urban heat
  - Capture carbon
  - Reduce pollution

- Supporting social connections and cohesion
  - People’s favourite public space
  - Volunteering opportunities
  - Empower communities

How to make parks count
Figure 8 Making Parks Count Framework

- Leadership
  - Building strong partnerships
    - Deciding with your partners
    - Creating a bold vision
    - Tackling inequality

- Valuing
  - Creating a value proposition
    - Understanding the benefits and the value of parks
    - Key part of Green Infrastructure plans

- Investment
  - Investing to maintain the assets
    - Diversifying income streams
    - Increasing capital investment
    - Sharing the benefits/burdens

- Management
  - Managing to secure the benefits
    - Building operational capacity
    - Empowering communities
    - Parks as natural assets
    - Planning and setting standards
WHY PARKS MATTER

People, places and parks

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

Good quality parks are proven to improve people’s mental and physical health.1 More than half of the UK population visit their local parks at least once a month.2 Gardens, parks and woodlands are used more than just about any other facility for recreation3 with urban parks alone generating over 1.5 billion visits in 2019.4 No wonder over two thirds of people think parks are the most important public space in their community where they can meet and mix creating stronger communities.5

Parks are also incredibly important to places. They form part of a place’s essential physical infrastructure alongside roads, homes, schools and railways. Here they function as important natural assets to local places providing a range of natural services and environmental benefits including flood alleviation, tackling climate change and improving air quality.6 Good quality parks are also cultural assets making places more attractive and desirable bringing in visitors, workers and businesses boosting the local economy and providing jobs.7

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

The government is committed to ‘levelling up’ across the country, addressing inequalities in health and wellbeing, for people living in the most disadvantaged places in England. This is beginning to be reflected in policy terms with place based programmes such as the Towns Fund, the Future High Streets Fund and the Cultural Investment Fund being launched. Health and social care continues to focus on prevention moving from dealing with the consequences of poor health to promoting the conditions for good health and wellbeing. These are examples of place and people based programmes that offer opportunities for future investment into local parks.

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

The estimated 27,000 parks and green spaces in England² represent a stock of natural capital. (See fig 2). They provide a flow of natural benefits directly to local people and the places they live. Taking a natural capital approach these benefits are estimated to be worth over £200bn in society over the next 60 years. The annual economic value of these benefits is estimated to be over £6.6 billion or seven times the current spending on parks meaning they are worth £119 a year to every single resident of England.8 This represents a significant return on investment. Parks are a smart investment and this is why parks matter.

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

Natural capital accounting is increasingly being used to provide an overall assessment of the value of a stock of parks in an area. It provides a snapshot of the value of parks expressed in annual flow terms (parks provide £7 million services per year) or as capital asset value (the lifetime value of parks is £7 million).9
Parks are good for people’s health and reduce the burden on local health services

Natural environments have been shown to influence health in a variety of ways and there is clear evidence to suggest an association between living in greener environments and a range of physical, mental and other health outcomes.\textsuperscript{11} Increasing the use of good quality green space for all social groups is likely to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities.\textsuperscript{11} Every £1 spent on parks creates over £2 in additional value in physical health benefits.\textsuperscript{12}

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What’s the Problem</th>
<th>Why Parks Matter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical inactivity is responsible for 1 in 6 deaths</td>
<td>Good quality parks get people active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Physical activity helps prevent and manage over 20 chronic health conditions, while physical inactivity costs the NHS in the UK around £1 billion per year (including costs to wider society £7.4 billion a year).\textsuperscript{13}</td>
<td>- Accessing and using natural environments is associated with higher rates of physical activity and activity in natural environments is more beneficial to health than that undertaken in other environments.\textsuperscript{14}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The additional cost to the healthcare system of the people most likely to reduce their exercise levels as a result of a decline in greenspace is estimated to be £23.6 million per year.\textsuperscript{15}</td>
<td>- The welfare value of parks visits is estimated at £4.6 billion per year with an asset value of £118 billion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One in four adults and one in 10 children experience mental illness</td>
<td>Parks connect people to nature improving mental well being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mental ill health is the single largest cause of disability in the UK.\textsuperscript{16}</td>
<td>- Parks can provide a natural environment to support mental wellbeing directly through the restorative effect of nature.\textsuperscript{17}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mental ill health has an estimated annual cost of £105.2 billion as well as £34.9 billion in lost working hours.\textsuperscript{18}</td>
<td>- London’s parks avoid an estimated £370 million of mental health related costs each year.\textsuperscript{19}</td>
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<td>- Birmingham’s parks and green spaces provide an estimated £10 million in annual mental health benefits.\textsuperscript{20}</td>
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**Figure 3 Boosting physical health outcome - Active Parks Birmingham**

Active Parks uses local city parks and greenspaces to create opportunities for Birmingham’s residents to participate in a wide range of fun physical activities to improve their health and wellbeing. The informal flexible nature of the sessions mean they are attractive to some groups that traditionally have lower rates of participation in sport and physical activity.\textsuperscript{21} The societal value placed on the Be Active programme was greater than the operation cost therefore the Be Active physical activity intervention results in a net benefit to society.\textsuperscript{22}

**Figure 4 Boosting mental health outcomes – Myplace**

Myplace is an exciting and innovative ecotherapy project delivered by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust in partnership with the Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust. Myplace empowers young people, adults and their communities to connect with local environments in order to learn new skills, build resilience and improve their physical health and mental wellbeing. Research has shown that such activities can reduce stress, anxiety and many low level mental health conditions whilst also improving physical fitness, health and wellbeing.\textsuperscript{23}
Parks help tackle climate change and protect the environment

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

The impacts are concentrated on the most vulnerable, contributing to health inequalities. In recognition of this, the vast majority of councils have declared a ‘climate emergency’ and many have ambitions to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

The Committee on Climate Change recommends the introduction of an urban greenspace target to ensure towns and cities are adapted to more frequent heatwaves in the future and that the 25-Year Environment Plan goals are met.

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

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

Many councils have developed Climate Change plans and strategies that include developing and investing in more parks to help mitigate carbon emissions and rising temperatures.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What’s the Problem</th>
<th>Why Parks Matter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban heat is a risk to lives and the economy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parks reduce urban heat</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅ An ‘urban heat island’ effect is created in our towns and cities by loss of vegetation, waste heat from buildings and vehicles, and solar radiation trapped within the built environment.⁵⁴⁶</td>
<td>✅ Greenspace is an important mitigation measure for managing overheating as it can provide shading and reduce the Urban Heat Island effect.⁵⁴⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅ Parks in England provide an urban cooling benefit estimated at £48m per year, with a 60 year asset value of £3.4 billion.⁵⁴⁶</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Urban areas are major contributors to greenhouse gas emissions.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parks help capture carbon</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅ Increases in greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide trap heat, warm the globe and drive climate change. The effects of increased urbanisation, such as increased temperatures and flooding, are exaggerated by the impacts of climate change.⁵⁴⁶</td>
<td>✅ Parks and greenspaces are the main urban land use type that contribute to carbon storage in cities.⁵⁴⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅ The value of carbon sequestration by trees in public parks in England is estimated at £9m per year, with a present value of £523m over 60 years.⁵⁴⁶</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Declining biodiversity threatens our economy and environment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parks promote biodiversity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>✅ The number of species worldwide is in sustained mass decline,⁵⁴⁶ threatening the environment as well as the economy. For example, the UK’s 1,500 species of pollinators deliver an estimated £680 million annual value to our economy.⁵⁴⁶</td>
<td>✅ Urban parks are among the most species rich types of urban green spaces for all species groups.⁵⁴⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Air pollution has high health risks and costs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parks can remove air pollutants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅ Air pollution is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK, causing up to 36,000 deaths each year and risks to children’s respiratory health,¹⁹ and estimated health and social care costs of at least £42.88 million.⁵⁴⁶</td>
<td>✅ Parks and urban vegetation, if carefully designed, can successfully remove air pollutants at a local scale. The benefits of air pollutant removal by trees in public parks in England is estimated at £60 million per year, with an asset value of £2.4 billion over 60 years.⁵⁴⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban greenspace is declining increasing flood risk</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parks can mitigate flood risk and improve water quality</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅ Urban greenspace reduces flood risk but continues to decline, from 63% in 2001 to 55% in 2018. The proportion of impermeable surfacing in towns and cities, which increases flood risk, has risen by 22% since 2001.⁵⁴⁶</td>
<td>✅ Urban green spaces store and filter water, reducing the risk of flooding and improving water quality in streams, lakes and rivers.⁵⁴⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✅ Urban green space can provide essential benefits to flood management and co-benefits to society. Investment in landscape conservation for example is cost-efficient and provides improved infrastructure solutions.⁵⁴⁶</td>
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### Improving Wellbeing through Urban Nature (IWUN)

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

- Green infrastructure is social infrastructure as well as physical. It is a vital part of how people experience urban life.
- A city's network of parks and open spaces supports mental wellbeing and social inclusion as well as supporting biodiversity, cleaner air, flood relief and urban cooling.
- The ecological and the social are interrelated. Habitats should be planned to support both human and non-human wellbeing, paying attention to the ways people connect with nature.
- The richer the experience of 'nature' that people have, the more likely it is to enhance their mental health.
- Wildlife, especially a wide variety of bird life, and planting that provides interest throughout the year, increases the wellbeing benefits of natural spaces.

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

### Parks support social connections and promote community cohesion

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

Parks and green spaces that provide the opportunity for local people to participate in activities or gatherings can improve social interactions and increase social networks.

### What's the Problem | Why Parks Matter

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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>What’s the Problem</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cities and towns have to compete for investment</td>
<td>Good quality parks and public realm attracts businesses and investment into cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As towns increasingly compete with one another to attract investment, the presence of good parks, squares, gardens and other public spaces becomes a vital business and marketing tool.</td>
<td>Increasing the attractiveness of an area through investment in high-quality parks, increases inward investment and increases the number of visitors attracted to, and spending in, the local area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many city centres and high streets are struggling. The focus of high streets in successful city centres is gradually shifting away from retail to a greater emphasis on food and leisure services.</td>
<td>Good quality parks bring people into town centres, increasing footfall</td>
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<td>Recreational space including parks is one of the top priorities when addressing the factors that influence vitality and viability of High Streets.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Good quality parks bring people into town centres, increasing footfall</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Good quality parks make places attractive to live and work. Urban green spaces raise nearby house prices by an average of £2,500.</td>
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Winckley Square’s historic gardens were sympathetically restored in October 2016. The restoration was sensitive to the square’s heritage taking into account the trees and biodiversity, archaeology, drainage, community involvement, recreation, volunteering and education. The £1.2million project was funded through lottery grants and smaller grants and contributions from partners. The project was led by Winckley Square Community Interest Company a CIC created by a group of Preston business people local to Winckley. The CIC was created to support the regeneration of the area and now manages the square with a range of partners. The restoration project involved Groundwork, Preston City Council, Lancashire County Council, Preston BID and Preston Historical Society. The square is now recognised as an important asset in encouraging inward investment. Invest in Central Lancashire (created by the Central Lancashire City Deal) describes the square as an established and highly sought-after location for high value professional, legal and accountancy businesses, with new creative and digital companies recently choosing it as their preferred location and the wider area as buoyant following the transformation of the historic gardens.
Parks help address the big policy issues of the day

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

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

These benefits are worth £140 a year to every single urban resident of England. Investing in parks not only returns a substantial economic benefit and significant public value it also helps places address a range of public policy objectives.

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

The NHS Plan aims to provide exercise programmes to tens of thousands more patients with heart problems, preventing up to 14,000 premature deaths and help 380,000 more people get therapy for depression and anxiety by 2023/24.

Public Health England aim to deliver healthier weights amongst people, cleaner air and better mental health. The 25 Year Environment Plan aims for environmental net gain over the next 25 years and the government has set a target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The environmental protection is at the heart of the UK’s Industrial Strategy priority for ‘Clean Growth’ and increasing productivity. These targets simply won’t be achieved without good quality parks accessible to all. Good quality parks won’t be achieved unless local action is taken to make parks count.
MAKING PARKS COUNT

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

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

Changing the way parks are perceived is critical to unlocking their potential. Parks should be seen as natural capital - key natural assets and essential infrastructure that supports a place’s economic, social and environmental priorities. Estimating the value of parks using a Natural Capital approach enables decision makers to understand their contribution to places and people as well as the impact of changes in resourcing of the parks service. It also helps bring the right decision makers together, creating better and stronger partnerships, opportunities for investment and for more efficient use of public resources and enhanced public value.

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

Realising the potential of parks

To make parks count and maximise the opportunities they afford local places must do four things. They must recognise and demonstrate the true value of parks; provide the leadership and partnerships capable of creating a shared vision and plan for parks, equitably sharing the costs and benefits parks create; secure the investment needed to maintain good quality parks as part of essential green infrastructure; and finally manage their parks in a way that secures the benefits identified.

Figure 8 Making Parks Count Framework
Creating a clear value proposition for parks

Understanding the benefits and the value of parks

Investigating and understanding the natural (and other) benefits a system of parks and green spaces delivers for local communities is critical. A solid evidence base not only helps make better policy but provides useful data for future investment. Understanding the economic value of parks helps make better decisions and importantly brings partners to the table. A local natural capital account can help to clarify and measure the existing state of assets and the services that are provided and is a valuable approach for estimating the value of parks in a local authority area.\textsuperscript{154} Importantly it can highlight the major benefits parks bring to local communities and how they help address the key policy priorities of elected members.

Parks area key features of Green Infrastructure

Parks are an important element of the wider Green Infrastructure (GI) in a place. This means when infrastructure investment plans are drawn up the benefits of green infrastructure (GI), such as parks and green spaces, should be considered alongside the economic returns flowing from better roads and enhanced public realms. Embedding natural capital into Local Industrial Strategies at the outset will help demonstrate the value of parks and ensure major infrastructure development decisions maximise these opportunities. It will also help improve wider strategic planning and decision-making by ensuring the contribution parks make to local social and environmental priorities is recognised.\textsuperscript{155}

Providing leadership and partnerships for parks

Deciding with your partners

Parks deliver benefits for a wide range of public sector partners seeking to improve the health and wellbeing of local communities and the prosperity of the places they live and work. Building the right partnerships with key stakeholders, such as Health and Wellbeing Boards and Town Investment Partnerships is critical. Successful places achieve this through strong political leadership for parks with a Cabinet position acting as a champion. Equally important is senior managerial leadership for parks that enables those who work in planning, public health and greenspace to work closely together to deliver the desired outcomes.

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

Creating a bold vision

Every place should have an overarching and bold vision for its parks, created through partnership, and based on the benefits and value its parks create and the overall priorities for the local area. This means every place must be clear on what it want to achieve with its system of parks and green spaces.

Tackling inequality in accessing the benefits of parks

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

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

Investing in parks to maintain the assets

Sharing the burdens as well as the benefits of parks

Local parks budgets have come under financial pressure in recent times as they have had to compete with other service priorities. The burden of paying for parks falls largely on local councils, but the benefits that flow from parks to local communities have an indirect financial benefit for other partners such as reduced health and environmental costs or increases in property values. For most places the share of the financial burdens and benefits of parks is not equitable. The shared responsibility for the delivery of health outcomes is a good example of where greater equity can be achieved.
Diversifying income streams to help pay for parks

The capacity to deliver additional on-going revenue streams to support the maintenance of parks has become increasingly important. For both the future capital and revenue requirements of parks a more "blended" approach may be required in the future with funds from a mix of sources including local tax payers, commercial income and contributions from the private and community sectors.

Increasing capital investment into parks

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

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

Enhancing biodiversity is a new condition of planning policy introduced by the 25 Year Environment Plan and may also provide future investment opportunities for parks. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requires a 10% increase in biodiversity after development, compared to the level of biodiversity prior to the development taking place. BNG will require developers to work with local authorities and local stakeholders to support their priorities for nature conservation. In many situations delivering BNG within the original development will not be possible meaning local offsite habitat creation may be more viable. In such cases developers will work with the local authority to identify local land best placed for biodiversity recovery and enhancement providing the opportunity for investment into local parks.

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

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

Investing in capacity

Parks sector professionals need new skills to make sure their parks thrive in the 21st Century. This new context demands new skill sets, and parks staff need to be empowered with skills in critical areas including commercial entrepreneurship, income generation, marketing and promotion, ‘influencing decision making’ and the ability to demonstrate the value of parks to a wider range of services and priorities. Park managers believe the most important skills for the future of the service will include financial and partnership skills that focus on funding and resources.

Involving and empowering communities

Local parks have never been more important for local citizens and more precious for local communities. Understanding how citizens value their parks by asking the right questions and surveying periodically is essential. Volunteering remains hugely popular in parks with thousands of Friends Groups up and down the country. Increasingly volunteers getting more involved in the day to day management and stewardship of their local park resulting in multiple benefits for the local authority, local communities and the volunteer groups themselves.
The Building Better Parks Strategy is intended to be used as a framework for decision making. It recognises the need to invest further in the cities’ parks to enhance the quality of life of people living and working within the city. Sheffield natural capital account identified a cost/benefit return of £34:1 on parks and that its parks have a combined asset value of around £1.2 billion. The city intends to use its assets to enable positive social and economic outcomes whilst delivering a better service.

In delivering the Building Better Parks Strategy, the council will be applying asset management principles, in recognising that each land and property asset within the Parks Portfolio is potentially unique, diverse and the city is putting in place a robust assessment criteria for each proposal. The city’s parks will need to maximise investment and optimise income to help navigate the council’s continuing budget pressures. The overall approach to investment in parks will be based on the following income streams to generate new investment:

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

Managing parks as ‘natural assets’

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

Decision makers can more easily consider how investment in environmental assets such as parks contributes to wider societal aims and trade-offs which affect the quality or quality of assets. Using Natural Capital Accounting to value a local authority’s parks provides a snapshot of their value expressed in annual flow terms or as capital asset value.

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

Planning for parks and setting standards

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

The government’s 25 Year Environment Plan aims to connect more people with the environment to improve their health and wellbeing. The plan aims to create more Green Infrastructure (GI) in towns and cities, especially in areas where there is not enough accessible green space or where it is of poor quality. It intends to do this by drawing up a National Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards and encourage places to assess GI provision, including parks, against these new standards.

The standards will cover partnership, funding, stewardship, planning, functions and benefits and will incorporate natural capital into the expectations of good stewardship. Measuring the enhancement of GI, including parks, over time and monitoring progress at a national scale will be achieved through the outcome indicator framework for the 25 Year Environment Plan. When places plan their parks it will be important to include locally determined standards that reflect the national standards to drive improvement and enhancement in their provision.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
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| The National Trust and National Heritage Lottery Fund Future Parks | Eight urban areas are part of a pioneering programme designed to find ways to manage and fund parks and open spaces across entire towns and cities. | https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/our-vision-for-the-future-of-parks  
https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/our-work/landscapes-parks-nature/future-parks |
| Nesta Rethinking Parks | Rethinking Parks is funding and supporting organisations to develop innovative ways of managing and financing the UK’s public parks. The projects aim to make sure our parks and greenspaces are financially sustainable for the future and that they are run more impactfully for their local communities. | https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/rethinking-parks/ |
| Local Government Association (LGA) Culture and sport improvement toolkit | Developed to help the culture, sport, green space and tourism sectors continually improve performance based on self-assessment and external challenge through validation and peer supported improvement. | https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/our-improvement-offer/culture-and-sport-improvement/culture-and-sport-improvement |
| Local Government Association (LGA) Leadership essentials | “Leadership Essentials” is a series of events designed as themed learning opportunities for councillors. There are specific programmes for Cultural Services Leaders and Climate Change and events concentrating on Health and Wellbeing and Sports. | https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership/leadership-essentials |
| Fields In Trust Green Space Index | The Green Space Index is Fields in Trust’s barometer of publicly accessible park and green space provision. It maps and analyses publicly accessible local park and green space provision as mapped by Ordnance Survey. | http://www.fieldsintrust.org/green-space-index |
| Land, Environment, Economics and Policy (LEEP) Institute Business School University of Exeter Outdoor Recreation Valuation (ORVal) | ORVal is map-based and allows users to explore the distribution of greenspace across England and Wales, plotting out the locations of recreation sites, be those beaches, recreation areas like parks and nature reserves, paths through the countryside or along river banks. | https://www.leep.exeter.ac.uk/orval/ |
# Understanding the benefits and value of parks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parks Alliance</td>
<td>National surveys and reports on the benefits of parks. Key research documents that support the economic, environmental and social arguments in support of investing in parks.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.theparksalliance.org/why-parks-matter-evidence-base/">https://www.theparksalliance.org/why-parks-matter-evidence-base/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Eco-systems Knowledge Network</td>
<td>Resources to help people manage the environment as an asset for the benefit of everyone. Includes a wide range of published guidance, reports, tools, case studies and much more.</td>
<td><a href="https://ecosystemsknowledge.net/resources">https://ecosystemsknowledge.net/resources</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEFRA</td>
<td>A natural capital approach to policy and decision making considers the value of the natural environment for people and the economy. Enabling a Natural Capital Approach (ENCA) resources are data, guidance and tools to help you understand natural capital and know how to take it into account.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.gov.uk/guidance/enabling-a-natural-capital-approach-enca">https://www.gov.uk/guidance/enabling-a-natural-capital-approach-enca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural England</td>
<td>Catalogue providing access to evidence used by Natural England. It shows the information used to reach decisions and inform advice. Includes details about studies and site-specific information.</td>
<td><a href="http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/">http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/</a></td>
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<td>Fields In Trust</td>
<td>The Green Space Index is Fields in Trust’s barometer of publicly accessible park and green space provision. It maps and analyses publicly accessible local park and green space provision as mapped by Ordnance Survey.</td>
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## Managing Parks

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

i Health and the natural environment: A review of evidence, policy, practice and opportunities for the future. European Centre for Environment and Human Health University of Exeter Medical School. 2018
iii Making contracts work for wildlife: how to encourage biodiversity in urban parks. CABI Space 2010.
vi The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature. HMG. 2011.
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ix Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee Inquiry into Public Parks 2017.
xi Health and the natural environment: A review of evidence, policy, practice and opportunities for the future. European Centre for Environment and Human Health University of Exeter Medical School. 2018
xii Local action on health inequalities: Improving access to green spaces. PHE 2014.
xiv Physical activity and the environment NICE guideline [NG90] Published date: March 2018.
 xv Investigating the potential increase in health costs due to a decline in access to greenspace: an exploratory study. Natural England. 2017.
xvi Health and the natural environment: A review of evidence, policy, practice and opportunities for the future. European Centre for Environment and Human Health University of Exeter Medical School. 2018
xviii No health without mental health: A cross Government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages. DoH.
xix No health without mental health: A cross Government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages. DoH.
xx IWUN, (Improving Wellbeing through Urban Nature) was a large 3-year research project exploring if and how urban nature helps people with their mental health and wellbeing. 2019.
xxiii Active design case study active parks birmingham: let’s take this outside. Sport England. 2017.
xxiv Cost-effectiveness of a community-based physical activity programme for adults (Be Active) in the UK: an economic analysis within a natural experiment. 2012.
xxvii Progress in preparing for climate change | Committee on Climate Change. 2019.
xxviii A global economic assessment of city policies to reduce climate change impacts. 2017.
xxix The benefits of green infrastructure for heat mitigation and emissions reductions in cities. 2016.
xxx Debate on tackling climate change, protecting the environment and securing global development House of Commons LGA 10 July 2019
The PARKS Alliance

Making Parks Count was produced by The Parks Alliance in conjunction with the Parks Action Group and funded by MHCLG.