



The Parks and Greenspaces All-Party Parliamentary Group

Levelling Up Access to Greenspace

1st March 2021, 10:00-11:00

Zoom

Audience Q&A

Question 1: Will you be covering issues around “Friends of Parks”?

Asked by Andrew Rainsford

In the session, Lilian Greenwood MP acknowledged that a number of questions had been asked by delegates regarding the role of Friends Groups. She emphasised the important role that volunteers and Friends groups play. She confirmed today’s APPG is the first step in getting us all working together. She encouraged everyone who is a part of volunteers and Friends groups to contact local MPs, make sure the MP is aware of the work that is being done locally and encourage the MP to join the Parks & Green Spaces APPG. Issues will be recognised by MPs and dealt with more effectively if MPs are aware of what’s happening in their local area.

Question 2: We represent the movement of hundreds of thousands of members of local Friends Groups throughout the UK who care passionately about their essential local green spaces. They publicise, protect, animate, help maintain, oversee, fundraise and generally champion these spaces. How will the APPG work with us to get the government to take its responsibilities just as seriously, and take effective action to ensure parks get the statutory recognition and funding our communities deserve?

Asked by Dave Morris of the National Federation of Parks & Greenspaces

Please refer to the answer to Question 1.

Question 3: There's a lot of accumulated evidence of the benefits of parks and open spaces on peoples' health and wellbeing. Are the government taking all this information seriously and planning to apply serious funding to support the development of green infrastructure throughout our cities?

Asked by Helen McNally

The APPG will be aiming to making the case for investment, but we need to develop a case for investment with an evidence base of what is needed, the investment required and the benefits that will accrue.

Question 4: How can this audience today better help the APPG influence Govt policy in favour of parks & greenspaces? (particularly in the context that p&g provision is not a statutory requirement)

Asked by Simon Odell

Please refer to the answer to Question 1.

Question 5: Should our focus be less on parks and more on creating liveable places much less dominated by the car- a la 'Urban playground' by Tim Gill?

Asked by Nigel Boldero

Hamira Sultan: I think the two go hand in hand – if we prioritise liveable spaces, then green spaces will automatically fall under that.

Question 6: How can government funding and policy come together across departments to deliver the health benefits, tackle inequality and retain/grow skills needed in the sector?

Asked by Ruth Holmes

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Question 7: Is there research to show the change in desire for gardens / greenspace since COVID - including segmentation by people groups?

Asked by Simon Odell

We are not currently aware of any.

Question 8: Encouraging more access to parks & greenspaces seems to bring more litter (as we saw last summer) and impact on nature. How do we tackle that? Thank you.

Asked by Simon Thorpe

We need to campaign nationally to develop a culture within the country that values its outdoor spaces and creates a 'norm' for anti-littering behaviour. But we also need manufacturers to take more responsibility and reduce the amount of packaging their put on the market in the first place. And crucially local authorities need to have the finance to put more staff into parks, to demonstrate that people care for their park and are willing to collect litter and empty bins, demonstrating and normalising the wider behaviour change we need to see.

Question 9: What can you do when a Local Authority won't support the Green Flag awards scheme because they are not prepared to invest the money required to reach that standard?

Asked by Roger Chapman

You should discuss with your local elected members. You can also contact Keep Britain Tidy's Green Flag Award scheme who would be more than happy to visit the local authority to explain the programme and its benefits to the management of parks and the benefits to the local community. We believe every park if managed properly should achieve Green Flag Award, it should therefore be considered like an "MOT" for a park.

Question 10: The Green Flag Award has the potential to be expanded into areas such as new housing developments. Are there any plans to expand the award into this area?

Asked by Lee Johnson

We are keen to work with new housing developments to ensure management and maintenance issues are considered at design stage. We already work with a number of social housing providers and would use this experience to extend our work into this area.

Question 11: Thomas Cantwell here from North Edgbaston Ward of Birmingham. Please could we have the full list of members attending as we may be able to link up and share ideas and help/support each other. Thank you.

Asked by Thomas Cantwell

Unfortunately, due to GDPR restrictions we are unable to distribute the personal information of all the delegates who attended the APPG.

Question 12: I've been a Green Flag Award judge for 10 years and think its made tangible improvements to the parks and spaces judged; spreading 'good ideas' between sites is one of the most important roles judges have. However, is the time now right to broaden it out or introduce a new award for a local authority as a whole to reward and acknowledge work done to improve the ratio and quality of green spaces generally?

Asked by Nigel Boldero

There are currently no plans to take the award wider than an individual site based Award, as we believe it is important for the public to associate the standard with an individual site and the Award remains focused on ensuring as many parks and green spaces reach the standard as possible.

Question 13: Is there any data on the providers of Green Flag - I would be interested to know how many are delivered by Town and Parish Council sector compared to principal authorities? In my opinion at these local level open spaces have a higher priority for funding compared to other authorities who have additional financial burdens e.g. social care.

Question asked by Linda Larter

In England we have a total of 283 councils making applications of which 38 are either a Parish or Town council.

Question 14: The issue of the neglect and degradation of green spaces (as a result of years of local council funding cuts) has gained very little political traction or media attention despite the strength of feeling by users of green spaces and issues becoming more obvious during covid. Why do panellists think this is?

Asked by Sam Taylor

We suspect it is because the decline in parks can often take years to become apparent to the public. While as professionals and engaged volunteers we are acutely aware of declining standards, often it takes a lot more for the public to notice. We suggest the public are now increasingly aware, particularly when equipment is removed or poorly maintained or when toilets and cafes are closed, or when the park becomes little more than a green desert with little more than occasional grass mowing.

Question 15: when we bought this house from new 20 years ago it had a covenant saying that we were required to keep two trees in the garden for 5 years, I think this should be standard for all new builds

Asked by Sara Messenger

We'd certainly like to see greater use of greenspace incorporated into new build housing developments and maintained under some form of covenant or other mechanism, so that people in flats and apartments had access to nature also

Question 16: Given all the evidence relating to health benefits of parks should some of the health services vast budget be directed to funding that valuable resource.

Asked by Peter Scholes

It is unlikely that the NHS would be able to use its own funds for general support to parks given the purpose for which Parliament funds the NHS. However, it is part of Government's role to allocate public funds across different Departments of state in the Spending Review. So, it is perfectly possible for parks and green spaces to be funded by Government in recognition of benefits to health. Also, the NHS can fund services for individual patients that make use of parks and so create an indirect funding stream.

Question 17: Part if this move would be for more participatory democracy in decision making around parks/greenspace/openspace? our parks panels/forums making decisions with or in partnership with local authorities?

Asked by Theresa Glasgow

Participatory democracy (as an addition to representative democracy) is a great way of engaging local people and instilling a sense of responsibility and ownership - if it's truly representative of the communities in question. Local authorities and Friends Groups do often work together and support each other - but there may be scope to expand the role played by volunteers in decision making on greenspaces

Question 18: How can we make the use of parks permissions easier and faster? Currently there is a 12 week lead time for Birmingham. Can BCC help with risk assessment templates for Covid safe return to activities?

Asked by Tahir Parvaz

The Future Parks Accelerator 'A Naturally Birmingham' programme are working on this as we speak. So, watch this space!

Question 19: So pleased to see that the APPG has been set up, what can we do to support this massive step forwards?

Asked by Kylie Ward

Please see the answer to Question 1.

Question 20: Public rights of way give fantastic access to greenspaces. How can the ROW network be more valued? Thanks.

Asked by Giles Nicholson

Obviously while County and Unitary Authorities have a duty to main ROW - they can fall into disrepair where landowners don't maintain them and they should be a component part of a national strategy to get people more active and in touch with nature. Additionally, we need to talk more about green spaces in addition to parks. That would allow so many more valuable assets to become part of the conversation, including public rights of way.

Question 21: Given all the evidence on the health and other benefits of access to quality parks, green spaces and nature, and the cost savings, what's the next step to turn that theoretical financial gain into real money?

Asked by Paul De Zylva

The APPG will be aiming to making the case for investment, but we need to develop a case for investment with an evidence base of what is needed, the investment required and the benefits that will accrue

Question 22: Can we look at how we start connecting green spaces together to encourage active travel?

Asked by Sam Parry

There may be potential through the proposals for connecting nature via the Nature Recovery Network could help here - but there is also potential for green infrastructure to be a focus for sustainable travel planning within local plans which could lead to less congestion and better health outcomes

Question 23: Does the panel support parks policy being enshrined into law in order to protect future generations?

Asked by Ian Byrne MP

During the session the panel all indicated support for this suggestion. Professor Newton also stated that parks strategy needs to be integrated within other policy strategies – a holistic approach is needed to improve the position of parks and public health in general. Furthermore, the strategy should also include not only parks but all greenspaces – along canals, rivers, cemeteries, beaches and other blue spaces.



Keep Britain Tidy provides the secretariat for the Parks & Greenspaces APPG