



The Parks and Green Spaces All-Party Parliamentary Group

Annual General Meeting and Equal Access to Quality Green Space

18th January 2023, 13:00-14:00
Room T, Portcullis House

Minutes

Speakers

Allison Ogden-Newton OBE, Chief Executive of Keep Britain Tidy

Richard Benwell, Chief Executive, Wildlife and Countryside Link

Paul Rabbitts, Chair, Parks Management Association

Paul Todd, Accreditation Manager, Keep Britain Tidy

Present

Liz Twist MP (Chair)

Afzal Khan MP (Vice Chair)

Theresa Villiers MP (Vice Chair)

Seema Malhotra MP (Vice Chair)

Kim Leadbeater MP

The Earl of Clancarty

Guests

Philippa Anderson, Deputy Chair, Keep Britain Tidy

Lynsey Atherton, Accreditation Officer, Keep Britain Tidy

Elizabeth Bircham, Parliamentary Assistant

Oliver Freeman, Parliamentary Assistant

Omar Sharif, Parliamentary Assistant

Sophie Jordan, Parliamentary Assistant

13:02	Welcome and introduction - AGM Liz Twist MP, Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms Twist MP welcomed members to the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves.• She confirmed that the purpose of the AGM was to elect officers and discuss the topic of equal access to quality green space.
13:05	Election of officers Liz Twist MP, Chair
	<p>The following officers were re-elected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liz Twist MP – Chair• Afzal Khan MP (Vice Chair)• The Rt Hon. Theresa Villiers MP (Vice Chair)• Seema Malhotra MP (Vice Chair)• Sir John Hayes MP (Vice Chair)• Fleur Anderson MP (Vice Chair)• Matt Western MP (Vice Chair)• Bob Blackman MP (Vice Chair)• Rosie Duffield MP (Vice Chair)• Helen Hayes MP (Vice Chair)• Ian Byrne MP (Vice Chair) <p>The following officers were newly elected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kim Leadbeater MP (Vice Chair)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Earl of Clancarty (Vice Chair)
13.08	<p>Parks and Green Spaces APPG in 2022 and overview of the year ahead Liz Twist MP, Chair</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Twist MP noted that due to personnel changes and national events, this meeting has been deferred twice. • She reminded members of a motion that took place in Parliament last year which recommended the partnership between Fields in Trust and Liverpool City Council to protect Liverpool’s parks and green spaces for good, ensuring the positive benefits they provide will always be available for the city’s residents.
13.10	<p>Overview of Keep Britain Tidy’s work and the APPG Allison Ogden-Newton, CEO, Keep Britain Tidy</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Ogden-Newton gave an overview of the work at Keep Britain Tidy in relation to the APPG and noted that suspended legislation and continued cuts on local authority spending presents challenges to achieving our goal of equal access to quality green space throughout the country. • Both the Great British Spring Clean and Love Parks Week illustrate how important quality outdoor space is to local communities. A recent YouGov survey revealed that visiting the park is the highlight of the day for 62% of dog owners, and 62% of parents agreed that it’s the highlight of their child’s day too. • However, the National Perceptions Survey in 2022 revealed that 42% of the public regard their local park as only average or poor with 3% saying the condition was terrible, with an increased number finding their park to be in decline compared to last year’s survey results. • Ms Ogden-Newton reminded members that the Green Flag acts as a bastion of high-standards for parks and green spaces throughout the globe, and that our work continues to mitigate the loss of quality green space. This encompasses cleanliness, user safety (including our campaign

	<p>to ban “disposable BBQs”, and other forms of antisocial behaviour within parks and green spaces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She added that the charity’s ‘Green Space Gap’ report which will be referenced later in the meeting has revealed that the North of England is poorly served in relative terms to other parts of the country, and that Keep Britain Tidy is seeking to address this divide through their work. • She concluded that this APPG is a fantastic space to explore that policy and raise awareness of the good work being done within this area.
<p>13:15</p>	<p>Opportunity for members to raise points of interest and make suggestions for future topics Liz Twist MP, Chair</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Earl of Clancarty added that the debate in the House of Lords around scrapping EU protection laws is timely and that a 40% cut to national parks funding is deeply concerning. • Philippa Anderson added that the health benefits of spending time in quality green space far outweigh the costs.
<p>13:18</p>	<p>Welcome and opening remarks – APPG Meeting Liz Twist MP, Chair</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Twist MP welcomed online members to the meeting, adding that the benefits of hybrid meetings allowed members to join remotely, in-keeping with the theme of improving equality and accessibility. • She introduced the speakers: Allison Ogden-Newton, CEO of Keep Britain Tidy; Richard Benwell, CEO of Wildlife and Countryside Link and Paul Rabbits, Chair of the Parks Management Association, adding that she was looking forward to their speeches and understanding what the Government can do to help in this area. • She added that she was looking forward to Keep Britain Tidy’s Great British Spring Clean event this year, and that she will be helping the Durham Wildlife Trust with their litter pick.

13:29

The Green Space Gap – analysing regional inequalities through disparities in Green Flag Awards

Allison Ogden-Newton, CEO, Keep Britain Tidy

- Ms Ogden-Newton thanked members for attending the meeting and for considering the serious impacts of the decline and loss of quality green space, particularly during the cost-of-living crisis.
- She concurred that the deregulation of EU laws was deeply concerning, particularly when little else has been set up to replace them but promises.
- She thanked Ms Twist MP for agreeing to stay on as Chair and for her continued support of the APPG.
- She introduced Keep Britain Tidy's research into the 'Green Space Gap' as part of the charity's work to achieve a clean and healthy environment for all, rich with biodiversity, championed by both the 'Love Parks' campaign and the Green Flag Award.
- Keep Britain Tidy's research shows that many parks are not adequately funded or staffed, thereby leaving them vulnerable to antisocial behaviour including littering, dog fouling and increased blind spots and broken equipment.
- A World Organisation report published in 2017 revealed that access to urban green space serves as superior public health intervention, ensuring improved physical and mental health, social and environmental outcomes for all, particularly for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Within Keep Britain Tidy's own 'Green Space Gap' research, focussing on people who live in urban areas within a 10-minute walk of a Green Flag accredited green space, it was revealed that 70% of people who lived in towns or cities across England do not have suitable access to good-quality green space, rising to 75.8% in most deprived areas.
- Comparatively, London has a good provision of quality green space, where 62% of the urban population live close to a Green Flag accredited park. The second highest is in the East Midlands, where just 29% have access

to a quality green space, illustrating the desperate need for levelling up these provisions across the country.

- The Heritage Lottery Fund's 2016 'State of UK Public Parks' 2016 report also found that London and the East Midlands were the two regions that had been least impacted by funding cuts to parks, highlighting further that the lack of green space maintenance is being felt most keenly by those living in the North of England.
- There has been a mass exodus of staff from the parks system owing to low wages and rather than managing new projects, new staff are brought in to oversee cuts and reductions in services, alongside monitoring increased antisocial behaviour in these spaces.
- Access to quality green space has never been more critical than during the current cost-of-living crisis, where people are forced to tighten their belts, abandon gym memberships and holidays abroad, and even cancel nursery places all of which make spending time in parks and safe green spaces an increasingly attractive prospect. In addition, it is people from low-income households and those who live in 'left behind' areas who are the ones more affected by poor investment in infrastructure.
- The provision of quality green space could not have come at a better time than during the current cost-of-living crisis, where people will be forced to tighten their belts and abandon gym memberships and holidays abroad, making spending time in parks and safe green spaces an increasingly attractive prospect. In addition, it is people from low-income households who live in 'left behind' areas, and are more affected by poor investment in infrastructure.
- Ms Ogden-Newton reiterated the wealth of benefits felt by people with easy access to quality green space during lockdowns throughout the pandemic, and that Government's promises of levelling could not come at a better time.

13:40

Nature for Everyone – putting a right to nature into law

Richard Benwell, CEO, Wildlife and Countryside Link

- Mr Benwell thanked Ms Twist MP and Ms Ogden-Newton for their introductions.
- He reflected on the UN General Assembly's recent agreement that access to a clean and healthy environment should be recognised as a universal human right. This has also been endorsed by the recent COP15 meeting in Montreal, where governments formally recognised the need to protect 30% of nature on Earth by 2030. The British government voted in favour of this motion, but also issued a statement that it is not legally binding.
- Mr Benwell stressed that improved green spaces and clean air, supported by enriched biodiversity, should be core to the Government's levelling-up agenda, particularly as around 40,000 premature deaths in the UK per year have been attributed to air pollution.
- He reminded members that geography should not define destiny, and that he hopes the Government will introduce an amendment to clause 1 of the levelling-up agenda as recommended by Baroness Lister of Burtersett, and pay attention to its own statutory advice, which will be revealed through Natural England's Green Infrastructure report due to be published next week.
- He reminded members of the core recommendations within Julian Glover's report, that landscapes that have been designated for natural beauty could be updated to promote biodiversity and access. Updating areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs) and national parks could deliver huge uplift, where wildlife and natural habitats are under great threat as only 3% of land is currently under nature protection laws within England.
- Mr Benwell stressed that if the Government pursues a deregulation agenda, it seriously risks undermining essential environmental and social protection laws and wastes Parliamentary time, whilst giving unfettered power to Ministers.

<p>13:50</p>	<p>Challenges within the parks system and the role of parks in providing free and local recreation</p> <p>Paul Rabbitts, Chair, Parks Management Association</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Rabbitts thanked Ms Twist MP for the introduction and commended Ms Ogden-Newton and Mr Benwell for their speeches. • He introduced himself as someone who has worked within the parks sector for 35 years as both a landscape architect and parks manager throughout England. • He revealed that out of the 27,000 parks and open spaces in England, 85% are managed by local authorities, which is found to be the most cost-effective method of maintaining these spaces. • He shared an anecdote of a park manager in Yorkshire, who in 35 years has been left 'broken' by the current lack of resources and funding and has never witnessed such paucity in these areas during their career. • Mr Rabbitts made the case for parks crossing all sectors of public welfare, including education, culture, the environment, health and wellbeing, climate mitigation and community cohesion, and sits across both the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLHUC) and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). • He observed that by creating more 'pocket parks', we cannot afford to maintain what we already have, and that we should focus on quality rather than quantity. He referred to the example of the Sir Joseph Paxton park in Halifax, which after receiving significant lottery funding has since become derelict and unsafe. He added that central Government funding is sporadic and insufficient for maintaining these spaces. • He asked members whether we make management of parks a statutory service? Or should there be an obligatory adopted strategy by local authorities which is linked to the central Government's climate strategy?
<p>14:01</p>	<p>The role of Green Flag assessments through the Levelling-Up Parks fund</p>

	Paul Todd, Accreditation Manager, Keep Britain Tidy
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Todd outlined the commission by DLHUC to the Green Flag award scheme to conduct a baseline assessment of parks in need of significant regeneration, which has been welcomed by the charity. • The metrics included horticultural management and adaptation to climate change within Green Flag accredited parks, in order to understand the needs of local communities and what is required to level a park up. • Research revealed that less than half of the people that were interviewed in England felt that their park was of a good standard, and that money spent on smaller parks was only thought to make significant improvements. • Mr Todd confirmed that ongoing maintenance and revenue budgets that have previously received lottery funding would also have received the Green Flag Award. He hopes that levelling-up funding apportioned by the Government will help to reinstate the Green Flag in these once accredited parks.
14:06	<p>Questions</p> <p>Liz Twist MP, Chair</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Twist MP took questions from people attending online. She proposed putting forward a 10-minute debate in Westminster Hall perhaps in March on equal access to quality green space. • Simon Smith (attending online) asked how are local authorities supposed to increase revenue funding? • Mr Rabbitts responded that in one case, money was ringfenced so that it was guaranteed to go back into the park funding rather than the council pot. • Ms Ogden-Newton added that lottery funding will only benefit areas that are already well-staffed and resourced.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M Rabbitts echoed Ms Ogden-Newton's observation, adding that the regeneration of Albert Park in Middlesborough received £14 Million in funding but unable to attract subsequent revenue funding, the facilities and landmarks made possible by the lottery investment, are now in decline. • Laurence (attending online) asked what will be the time scale of solving this funding crisis for parks? • Ms Twist MP responded that it depends on Government priorities as there is currently a competition amongst departments for many different issues. • Denise Hewlett (attending online) asked why are parks not statutory assets and why are they not overtly linked to health and wellbeing as with other public provisions? • Ms Ogden-Newton responded that it is unlikely that parks and green spaces will be regarded as the investment in health and wellbeing that they are, bearing in mind the current crisis in local authorities' social care funding. • Mr Rabbitts added that a focus on funding rather than becoming a statutory asset is likely to be more beneficial in this case.
14:18	<p>AOB and closing remarks</p> <p>Liz Twist MP, Chair</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was no AOB. • Ms Twist MP thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.