



The Parks and Greenspaces All-Party Parliamentary Group

Levelling Up Access to Greenspace

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

Zoom
Minutes

Speakers

Lilian Greenwood MP (Chair)
Professor John Newton (Public Health England)
Hamira Sultan (Birmingham City Council)
Allison Ogden-Newton OBE (Keep Britain Tidy)

Present

Lilian Greenwood MP (Chair)
Ian Byrne MP (Vice Chair)
Liz Twist MP (Vice Chair)
Mark Logan MP
Alex Sobel MP
Darren Henry MP

10:00	Welcome and introduction Lilian Greenwood MP, Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Lilian Greenwood MP welcomed the attendees to the first meeting of the newly formed Parks and Green Spaces APPG and introduced Keep Britain Tidy, who provide the Secretariat for the APPG and manage the government's Green Flag Award scheme for parks and greenspaces.Ms Greenwood gave an introduction outlining the issues associated with an inequality of access to good quality greenspaces.

10:05	Panel presentations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professor John Newton – Director of Health Improvement at Public Health England – provided an overview of the Public Health England report “Improving Access to Greenspace: A New Review for 2020” and summarised the compelling body of evidence demonstrating that access to greenspace is crucial to our health and to reducing health inequalities. • Professor Newton explained the concept of “access” to greenspace as covering the availability of greenspace – in terms of the quantity and how far away it is, the nature of the greenspace – in terms of whether it is attractive and easy to use, public or private, and the level of engagement of the greenspace. • Professor Newton discussed the four mechanisms through which greenspaces can influence health: (1) by promoting healthy behaviours, such as physical activity and active travel; (2) by supporting the development of skills and capabilities, including academic performance, concentration and memory; (3) by mediating harms posed by the environment, including air pollution, the urban heat island effect, excessive noise and flood risk; and (4) by improving social contacts and giving people a sense of belonging. • Professor Newton summarised the outcomes of research into linkages between greenspace and physical health outcomes (including improved cholesterol, reduced mortality, reduced stress hormones, healthier weight, lower heart rates and blood pressure and healthier immune systems). • He also discussed the strong body of evidence linking greenspace with mental health outcomes (such as improved resilience, reduced levels of stress, depression, anxiety, fatigue, hyperactivity, and inattention) in both children and adults. He pointed to a University of Exeter study which found a significant difference in self-reported health and wellbeing for those spending at least 120 minutes per week out in greenspace. • Professor Newton discussed the findings of the Marmot Review 10 Years On, published by the Institute for Health Equity, which demonstrated that socioeconomic related inequalities in health tend to be lower in communities with most access to greenspaces. In groups with the most access to greenspace the incidence of mortality from circulatory disease was lower, and strikingly, the disparity or inequality between different social-economic groups was significantly reduced. This research indicates that while all demographic groups benefit from living in greener communities, deprived groups gain the most benefit and inequalities are lower in greener communities. • Professor Newton touched on how access to greenspace can be an indicator of inequality. Studies (including a Natural England report and a Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment report) have shown that for black or ethnic

minorities, access to greenspace (both private and public) is impacted. This means that people who benefit most from access to greenspace may be least likely to get it.

- Professor Newton discussed the way the pandemic has impacted people's perception of greenspace. The People and Nature Survey for England, led by Natural England, has demonstrated that two-thirds of people have accessed greenspace in the last fortnight.
- Professor Newton touched on 4 key recommendations from the PHE report. We need to (1) design and manage local green (and blue) space as critical assets for maintaining and supporting health and wellbeing in local communities; (2) prioritise improving access to greenspace and creating greener communities especially in areas of deprivation; (3) support meaningful engagement across local government functions and the community to understand the actual and potential local benefits of greenspace and reveal the complex and diverse ways greenspace is thought about and used; and (4) identify and factor in resilient funding arrangements for the maintenance of greenspace as early as possible, so that it can continue to provide benefits in the long term.
- Professor Newton concluded by affirming that money and investment from government is crucial for the future of parks and greenspaces.
- **Hamira Sultan** – Consultant in Public Health and Future Parks Accelerator Director at Birmingham City Council – provided a local perspective on access to greenspaces from Birmingham.
- Hamira gave an overview of the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project, which aims to embed the value of greenspace across 4 sectors: Jobs & Skills, Housing, Children and Health & Wellbeing. A further aim is to maximise the legacy benefits from hosting the 2022 Commonwealth Games.
- Hamira discussed the issues facing Birmingham with reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), which ranks the most deprived areas in the UK according to a range of factors including quality of housing, air quality and road traffic accidents. Hamira expressed that environmental justice (access to greenspace, urban heat island effect and flood risk) needs to be incorporated into the IMD assessment.
- Hamira made reference to IMD maps which demonstrate that areas with greater access to greenspace in Birmingham are less deprived.
- Hamira described the Bordesley and Highgate Ward, one of the most deprived in Birmingham and indeed in the country, which has tree cover of less than 10% (25% is usually the baseline target).
- Hamira discussed some of the specific learnings from the project, including diversity learnings (people need to feel that they belong in order to engage in greenspaces), learnings around children (a nature trail in Dawberry Fields park has encouraged more families to spend more time in the park), learnings around employment

(the need to encourage more diversity- including for volunteers – so that the parks sector reflects the diversity within the community), learnings around health and wellbeing (people can be scared to leave their houses and may require support in order to access greenspaces), and learnings around housing (greenspaces don't have to be parks – helping people create communal gardens can have a similar impact).

- Hamira discussed the vision for Birmingham as a city of nature. This will require the value of nature to be embedded and resourced within all key Council departments; and ensuring that nature is a key consideration in decision making.
- Hamira emphasised that greenspace is not just about equality but about justice. Justice means fixing the system to allow everyone to have access to the things they need.
- Hamira concluded by summarising the key asks from Naturally Birmingham: a change to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (to include access to greenspace); more maintenance for greenspaces; and more investment in greenspaces (and not just to the parks service, but to other areas such as housing, employment, education and the health sector, to ensure a holistic approach).

- **Allison Ogden-Newton** – Chief Executive of Keep Britain Tidy – provided an overview of the critical role that the Green Flag Award (GFA) scheme plays in creating good quality, safe and accessible parks that serve the needs of their local community.

- Allison provided an overview the GFA - formed in 1996 in response to years of underfunding that had left parks derelict, it was adopted by the government as England's parks standard in 2003, and is now increasingly being used as the parks quality standard internationally, with the flag flying in 14 different countries. Allison confirmed that the development of the GFA standard, together with the injection of circa £900m of capital funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, were both instrumental in helping lift the parks sector off its knees.
- Allison emphasised that there is still much to be done to restore our parks. Standards have again declined due to cuts in local authority budgets: skilled jobs have been lost, and the public is noticing visible decline.
- Allison made reference to crowds flowing to parks in the summer of 2020. This demonstrated what a precious asset parks are. It also spotlighted multiple problems associated with under-investment – parks have been replaced by “green deserts”, with lack of toilets, cafes, bins, site bases for park staff, and lack of ongoing maintenance. This caused unprecedented scenes of anti-social behaviour, human fouling, dog fouling and littering in 2020.
- Allison acknowledged the heroic efforts of park staff but highlighted the need for further investment. Parks could make much more of a contribution to health and wellbeing if they were

	<p>valued in the same way the Victorians valued them, in that, . they placed a real emphasis on the of public space and public works.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allison expressed the view that parks are not an asset that can be delivered on the cheap: they require investment from government and a framework of standards – which can be provided by the GFA scheme. • Allison discussed the benefits provided by the GFA –flood risk management, improved biodiversity, aided adaptation to climate change, and crucially, the focus on the community. Investment and maintenance are useless if a park is only serving part of society – it must be asked whether the space serves a mixed community of age, wealth, ethnicity and disability. Every local authority should have a greenspace strategy, mapping what they have against the needs of the local community. • Allison explained that assessing all parks against the Green Flag Award standard, would help create local authority wide management and investment plans and serve as evidence to inform parliament on what the sector needs. • Allison detailed Keep Britain Tidy’s vision for the future of the parks sector. Referencing the backdrop of 2020, which saw masses of people enjoying our parks, she emphasised that we have the basis to create a vision where those scenes are repeated year on year, but without the shocking environmental damage. If people see a country and a sector that values and respects parks – with every greenspace managed to a plan and standard that brings people together, keeps us fit, healthy and happy and provides vital harbours for wildlife - they will feel inclined to do the same. The issue isn’t overuse of parks - it’s underinvestment. • Allison concluded by affirming that the Green Flag Award can play a critical role in driving us towards that compelling vision over the next 25 years.
<p>15:35</p>	<p>Open discussion Lilian Greenwood MP, Chair</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Greenwood MP opened the floor up to questions. • Ian Byrne MP asked if the panel supported parks policy being enshrined in law in order to protect future generations. The panel all indicated support for this suggestion. Professor Newton also stated that a park’s 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. • In response to questions by local Friends groups about how the APPG will work with Friends groups and governments to make sure that parks get the funding that communities deserve, Ms Greenwood acknowledged the important role that volunteers and Friends groups play, and confirmed today’s APPG is the first step in getting us all working together. She encouraged everyone who

	<p>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 APPG. Issues will be recognised by MPs and dealt with more effectively if MPs are aware of what's happening in their local area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In response to a question about whether the focus of the APPG should be on parks or on more liveable spaces, Hamira said that the focus should be about not one but both. A holistic approach is needed. If the conversation is about liveable spaces – rather than about building houses – green spaces will naturally become part of the discussion.
15:35	<p>AOB and close</p> <p>Lilian Greenwood MP, Chair</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Greenwood MP thanked all panellists and attendees and acknowledged the lively chat that took place on Zoom during the APPG. She confirmed that there was not enough time to answer all the questions posed during the session but that these will be answered separately and published online for delegates to view.



Keep Britain Tidy provides the secretariat for the Parks and Green Spaces APPG