

## National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces

Strategic Survey of Friends and Community Groups  
- Report, June 2020

# GREENSPACE COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

- Ensuring community voices are heard at every level
- Improving co-ordination and partnerships in local areas
- Improving support for parks at the national level



*“ Our report, in amplifying the voices of passionate and active local environmental volunteer groups acting on behalf of their communities, shows strong, clear messages to greenspace national bodies, Local Authorities, other landowners, and Government “*

# Executive Summary

## Context of the survey

The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces is the democratic volunteer-led organisation which represents and amplifies the voices of the movement of the thousands of local Friends Groups and greenspace community groups around the UK. Our key ambition is to raise the voices of grassroots groups at every level. We have been the only community-level organisation in the Government's Parks Action Group independent advisory and liaison body. In particular we have led the PAG's Community Empowerment Working Group, and undertook this survey alongside a series of PAG-supported 'Parks and People, Stronger Together' community empowerment conferences we helped organise in every region in England in 2019. [See Report – <https://natfedparks.org.uk/pagce-conferences-2019/>]. The survey's main aim was to ensure groups who were unable to attend could also make their opinions and experiences heard on strategic matters.

Note: This report was compiled before the current public health crisis. It seems appropriate to finalise and release it now due to the growing profile and recognition of the importance of our local greenspace for our communities during this crisis. Our society now faces the challenge of not only ensuring that our public green spaces get the resources and management they deserve, but also that our communities are better involved in greenspace decision-making at every level as we move into a new era.

## Survey response

380 groups and area forums responded to the survey, which asked three simple questions:

- What are the key benefits of groups coming together, networking and coordinating?
- What should the Parks Action Group (PAG) be doing to protect and enhance parks and how should they influence Government policy?
- What should the Government be doing to ensure parks and other green or blue spaces achieve their commitments from the 25-year Environment Plan?

## **Results and recommendations**

### ***Stronger and more effective together***

Broadly, groups' experience is that by coordinating their efforts by working together in area forums, they are able to build better and more effective relationships with land managers, often local authorities. Groups also found that by working together, they are better able to share their experiences and resources, develop good practices, to raise their voices on behalf of communities, whilst influencing local policies and ambitions for green spaces. However, the spread, strength, degree of independence of such forums, along with the quality and effectiveness of the relationships with parks management, can vary dramatically across the country. Over 30% of those groups in areas where there was no forum called for help setting one up. This reinforces the views from the regional community conferences in 2019 that the NFPGS needs to be properly resourced to fulfil this need as part of its core work.

### ***Calling for improved national policies and greater resources***

Whilst the PAG is recognised to be relatively young as an entity, groups responding to the survey had a clear focus that it needed to influence Government policy, particularly in relation to threats from lack of resources and inappropriate development. The PAG exists to *"take action to safeguard and enhance parks and green spaces for future generations and to inform and shape Government's future policy-making"* [PAG Terms of Reference]. The impact of austerity has been felt on both fronts, with many local authorities under pressure to dispose of land for development, plus widespread and severe reductions in parks services. In many cases volunteer groups feel under pressure to prop up parks' services, with very limited input in some places. This is detrimental in the long-run - volunteers mostly do not have the desire or capacity to maintain essential parks services but generally focus on adding value through their energy and commitment.

There was also strong support for the PAG's commitment to raising the profile of parks and promoting partnership-working, alongside efforts to ensure parks are properly protected and funded.

### ***The Government's vital role to protect and enhance the country's public green spaces***

Proper resourcing for parks and their adequate protection were also the key messages directly for the Government. This included a call for all Government departments to recognise the importance of greenspace for the achievement of a



wide range of strategic Government objectives. The Government needs to take action to achieve its commitment to *"pass on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future"* [The Government's '25 year Environment Plan']. The widespread neglect from lack of staffing and maintenance, and the loss of green space, can significantly undermine the efforts of volunteers or demoralise them. Friends groups often feel their sites are under perpetual threat from development in some places, regardless of the natural and social value that a site provides. Designations for nature do not protect sites enough and where trade-offs are assessed, for example by natural capital valuation, it is often that economic growth wins.

## Conclusions

Our report, in amplifying the voices of passionate and active local environmental volunteer groups acting on behalf of their communities, shows strong, clear messages to greenspace national bodies, Local Authorities, other landowners, the Parks Action Group and Government. Parks and green spaces (and blue spaces too) are much valued and provide an excellent, unique and essential public resource for all sections of our communities. Green spaces' benefits need to be understood by departments across Government and local authorities. Protection must be bolstered. Most importantly, more resources are needed so public landowners can maintain basic services, supporting and working alongside the country's amazing community volunteer army so they can continue with the wealth of inspirational activity they provide.

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[www.natfedparks.org.uk](http://www.natfedparks.org.uk) [www.parkscommunity.org.uk](http://www.parkscommunity.org.uk)

## Introduction

The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces (NFGPS) is the volunteer-led, democratic umbrella organisation that aims to amplify the voices of Friends Groups across the UK. The Federation works with and for the dynamic and inspirational grassroots movement of over 7,000 local Friends of Parks groups, which include tens of thousands of environmental volunteers who work in green or blue spaces. We support environmental volunteers, who act on behalf of the communities who love, use and care about our vital public green spaces of all kinds. We exist to represent their activities, issues and concerns and strengthen their passionate and knowledgeable voices.

We are the lead organisation of the Community Empowerment working group within the Government's Parks Action Group (PAG). During summer and autumn 2019, with PAG partners Groundwork and Locality, we held regional conferences across England to enable greenspace community groups to meet up and discuss their successes and challenges during their volunteering work. Representatives from over 200 active



*Image 1: Parks Action Group Community Empowerment conference - West Midlands (Birmingham, 03/08/2019)*

groups participated and shared amazing stories about the depth and breadth of work and projects undertaken in all corners of the country.

For those unable to make the conferences, NFPGS wanted to ensure that we could capture their views and opinions to feedback to the PAG and the associated organisations and government departments. We developed an online survey to mirror participants' engagement at the events, asking for views about strategic matters to do with their groups, parks, challenges and the Government's role. The survey questions are in full at Appendix 1.

## Survey scope

The survey was open for six months between 22<sup>nd</sup> May and 21<sup>st</sup> December 2019. It was emailed to the NFPGS existing Friends Groups network contacts throughout this time. Significant research was undertaken during this time to promote the PAG 'Parks and People, Stronger Together' regional community conferences, which involved contacting every council, large numbers of parish councils and any Friends



Figure 1: Map showing geographic spread of responding groups

or environmental volunteer groups, either via email or on social media. The contact included a link for the survey and, as the contact continued on a regular basis throughout the summer and autumn, we received a steady number of responses. The total number of group responses was 381, with all responders completing the survey.

There was a strong response from towns and cities where an area forum is in place (64% of responders were part of an area forum). In response to Question 4, 44 groups out of 140 groups (31%) who were not part of an area forum, said they would like active support to develop additional forums their area.

It is noticeable that in the eastern part of the country, with the exception of Norwich, there is a large gap in groups responding. These are generally quite rural areas and the groups which exist there are likely to be isolated from their peers. There is an



opportunity for the NFPGS to concentrate efforts in future, to find and help network groups in such areas; even if this is via loose social media networks.

The survey was not aimed at those in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. This was in line with the conferences that only covered England as part of the PAG funding.

## **Survey Analysis**

The survey was designed to be short and simple, taking less than seven minutes to complete on average. This helped ensure a high completion rate by those starting it – 100%! Groups were asked to prioritise key question options/objectives/answers using a 1-5 scale (1-3 for Q7), with 1 being their top priority. Options unticked were given a zero rating for that group. Overall, there was a spread of prioritisation across all the answers, showing that groups felt all objectives were important to a greater or lesser degree. We have ‘weighted’ the results to give a percentage of maximum possible relative priority, ie 100% would be if all 381 respondents had made that answer/option its top priority. However, as one group responded: *‘In fact it was hard to prioritise – they are all worthy aspirations in each of the three Questions’*.

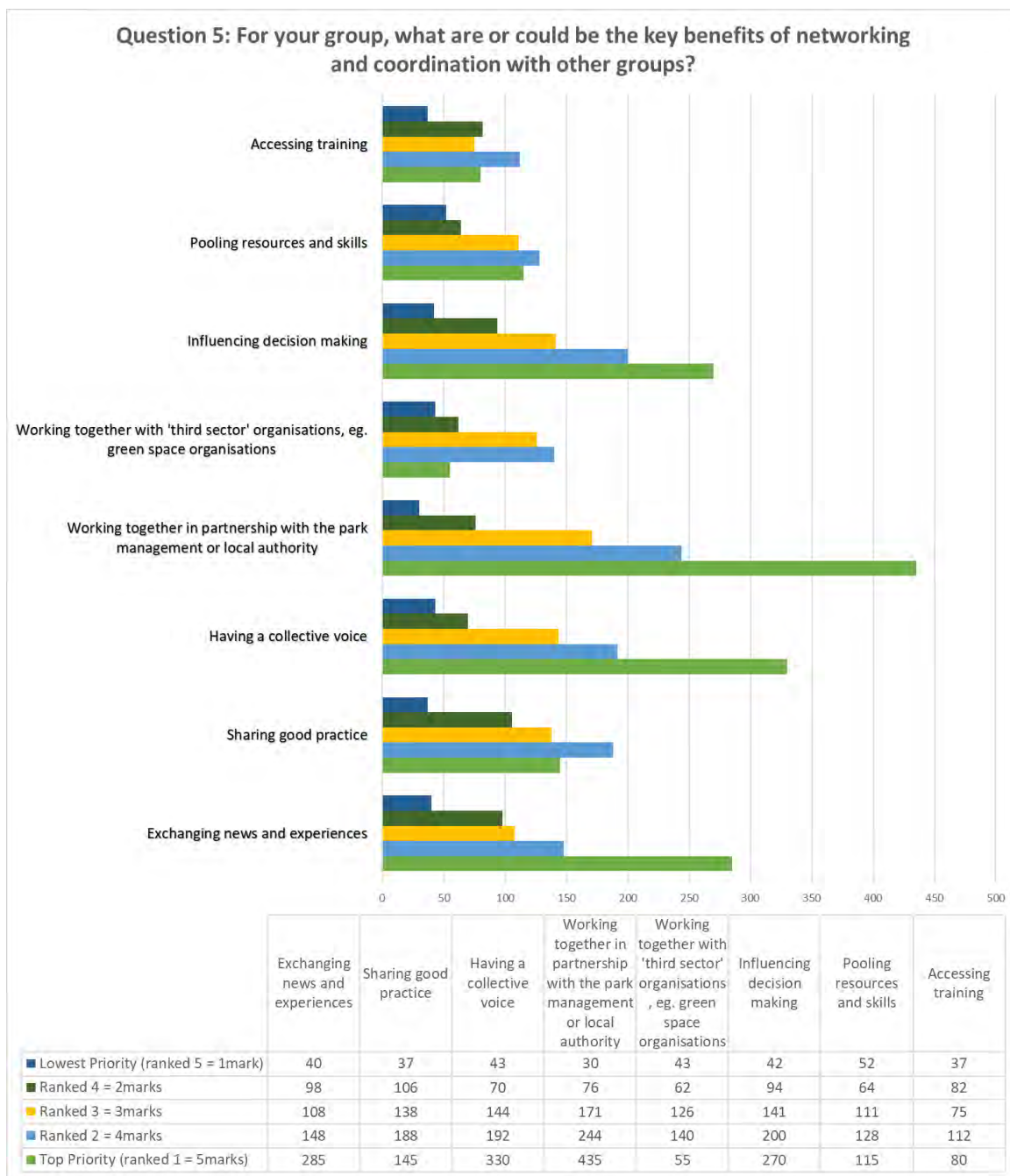
NFPGS welcome and have extracted below some of the informative and useful comments from groups. In many cases, these cut right to the heart of what Friends groups say to the NFPGS and each other regularly.

Please see the following pages for the detailed response to each of the three main questions...

## Question 5: For your group, what are or could be the key benefits of networking and coordination with other groups?

The question sought to understand why groups come together and what their 5 priorities and perceived benefits are or would be whilst networking. Overall, the priorities for groups [weighted as a percent of maximum relative priority] were:

1. [50.2%] Working together in partnership with the park management or local authority.
2. [40.9%] Having a collective voice.
3. [39.2%] Influencing decision making.
4. [35.6%] Exchanging news and experiences.
5. [32.2%] Sharing good practice.
6. [24.7%] Pooling resources
7. [22.4%] Working with 'third sector'
8. [20.3%] Accessing training





As the NFPGS, we encourage the development of area forums and have regular contact with those who are known to us. Area forums know that they are “*stronger together!*” and cite the benefits as important in their relationships with local authority landowners and each other.

*“While there is no formal Forum in Wandsworth, Friends groups work together on many issues of common interest. As Tooting Common is a very large open space, we very much value talking directly to the Council and contractors”*

*“As a group that is in the process of developing an inspirational green space, we value learning from other groups who have done the same. For us, practical guidance and inspiration is important.”*

However, relationships with councils vary dramatically, from both the positive:

*“We already have excellent relations with local authorities and local groups”*

.... and the negative:

*“local council does not support parks”.*

A consistent approach to empowering communities would be useful to promote across the country. This could be developed by ‘community-facing’ national greenspace organisations, and by ‘council-facing’ ones like the regional Park Managers’ Networks, the Local Government Association and the Association of Public Service Excellence.

*“Directive from Government to councils to strengthen relationships with volunteers working in green spaces and make provision for that support. Currently not happening - volunteers seen as a burden as no resources to ‘manage’.”*

One group shared a particularly sorry story about the handover of management to their Parish Council:

*“Unfortunately Cockleton Meadow has been taken back into the hands of Gurnard Parish Council which has disbanded the volunteer group, started regular mowing of the established wildflower meadow and re-named it Old School Meadow. The Council is a non elected group who make their own decisions without local consultation”*

Where councils do want to support groups, they are often limited in their capacity to achieve this. Some Councils have hired external third-sector support organisations to help, but after they have completed their funded contracts the ongoing authority/community relationship needs renewed commitment. One group stated that:

*“Groundwork used to coordinate a Friends of Friends [Parks] group which was useful. Due to cuts this ended and the Council's Parks team has now had that function added to its role - but without extra resources so there are no longer meetings”.*

Good work must be consistently supported. In many areas, Friends come together to work more effectively and efficiently with local authorities. There is a feeling across the country that volunteer support is now essential to maintain parks standards:

*“Local authorities are relying more and more on volunteers to manage and maintain green spaces.”*



*“Our parks and green spaces are basically being protected and cared for by volunteers. They should always be valued and never taken for granted.”*

*“Need more resources and maintenance for green space even bin emptying is helpful.”*

To ensure effective partnerships, volunteers need guidance and support, with mutual respect and trust. Without support, volunteer groups can feel adrift:

*“Volunteers can do a lot locally but without the guidance and leadership of 'Rangers' they will never work to a plan that will be sustainable”.*

*“Without professional support parks and green spaces will by and large die!!”*

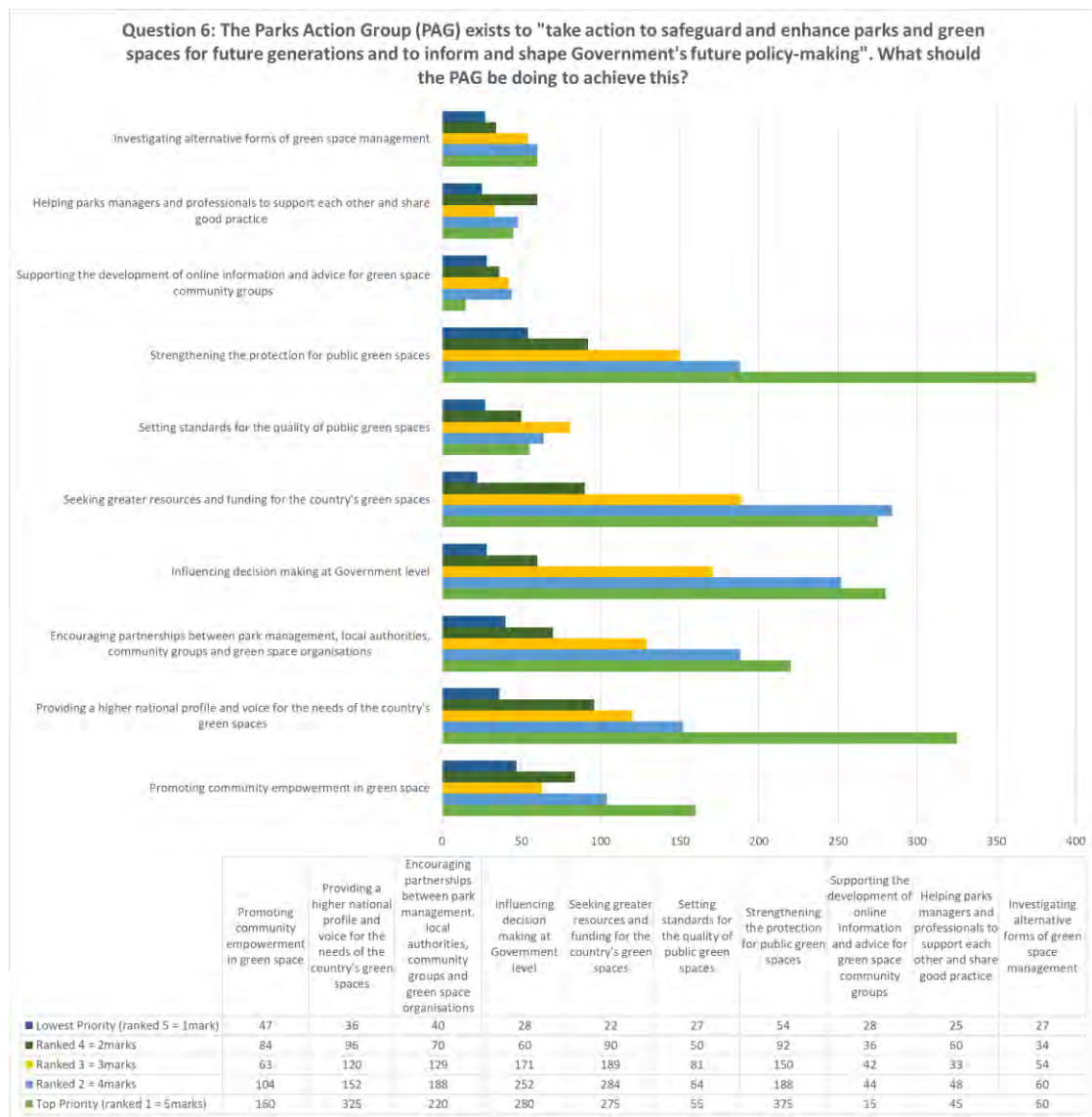
But of course by networking together, groups can support and strengthen each other:

*“Promulgating best practice on common issues is paramount”*

**Question 6: The Parks Action Group (PAG) exists to "take action to safeguard and enhance parks and green spaces for future generations and to inform and shape Government's future policy-making" \*. What should the PAG be doing to achieve this? (\*Extract from the terms of reference of the Parks Action Group)**

Groups were asked to list their top 5 priorities for the PAG. Groups weighted priorities were:

1. [45.1%] Seeking greater resources and funding for the country's green spaces.
2. [45.1%] Strengthening the protection for public green spaces.
3. [41.5%] Influencing decision making at Government level.
4. [38.3%] Providing higher national profile/voice for the needs of the country's green spaces.
5. [34.0%] Encouraging partnerships throughout the sector
6. [24.0%] Promoting community empowerment in green spaces.
7. [14.5%] Setting standards for the quality of public green spaces
8. [12.3%] Investigating alternative forms of greenspace management
9. [11.1%] Helping park managers and professionals support each other
10. [8.7%] Supporting the development of online info for greenspace community groups



Respondents to the survey wanted the PAG to ensure that green spaces were at the forefront of Government's policies. They are fully aware of the multiple benefits and agendas provided by quality green spaces.

*"I think cross department government support for local green spaces is vital, eg Department of Health linking with Sport Media and Culture plus Education as that would increase the profile and importance of local green spaces, besides releasing new funding."*

There was a general feeling that the PAG is still relatively early in its progress and that key objectives still need to be progressed.

*"It is too early to say what the Parks Action Group can achieve but there certainly a need for both high level lobbying that influences policies, encourages joined up thinking across departments and provides support for groups involved in protecting and promoting parks".*

*"PAG to promote the reality that green space provision fits into most of the Government/publics' priority agendas...health, education, well-being, inclusion, environment...and that green space is not just for humans to use, it's also for the protection of the natural environment and biodiversity, hence the need for a range of habitat and access."*

*"It seems to me the PAG needs to fight on 2 fronts - politically to ensure standards and protection of green spaces, but also to provide support to green space volunteers. The PAG cannot tackle both at the same time without one front suffering, unless the PAG can develop 2 separate, but connected, divisions of the organisation."*

*"The Parks Action Group could do more to draw public attention to the consequences of the years of drastic cuts to local authorities, which we have experienced, and the knock-on effects on communities of not having good green spaces, libraries etc."*

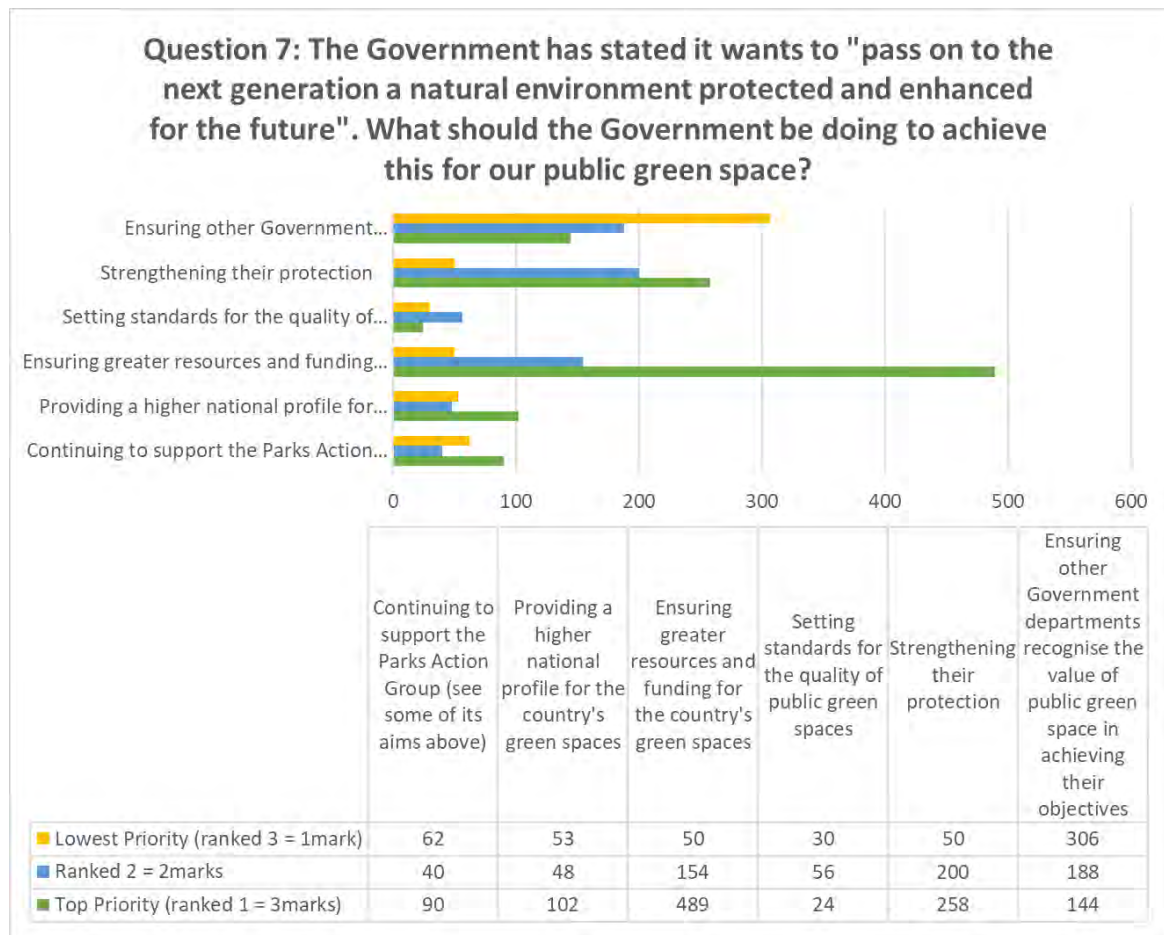
It was important to those surveyed that the PAG continues to build on the networks and partnerships developed during the course of their work.

*"The Parks Action Group through the conference and following it needs to build a coalition of like-minded Friends Groups AND local authorities to make the case for greater support and recognition of the economic, social and ecological value of public parks"*

**Question 7: The Government has stated it wants to "pass on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future"\*\*. What should the Government be doing to achieve this for our public green space? (\*\*Extract from Government's 25-Year Environment Plan, forward by PM Theresa May)**

Groups were asked to list what they thought should be the Government's top 3 priorities. Groups' priorities were:

1. [69.3%] Ensuring greater resources and funding for the country's green spaces.
2. [55.8%] Ensuring other Government depts recognise the value of public green space.
3. [44.4%] Strengthening greenspace protection.
4. [17.8%] Providing a higher national profile for the country's green spaces.
5. [16.8%] Continuing to support the Parks Action Group.
6. [9.6%] Setting standards for the quality of public green spaces.



Groups across the country thought the Government's key responsibilities were to ensure funding and protection for green spaces, and for all Govt Depts to recognise this. This reflects the discussions during the conferences and also in NFPGS contact with our network.

The funding issue cannot be downplayed; standards are falling, skills are being lost and local authorities either rely on or struggle to work effectively with volunteer groups.

*“The work of our volunteers for parks and open spaces is essential and we need the Government to understand that and have a realistic vision of what problems both the environment and volunteers face. The Government need to back up their statements made in the 25 Year Environment Plan and put their money and action where their mouth is!”*

*“Local Councils need to recognise the value and importance of urban green open spaces.; in terms of health and recreation, biodiversity and environmental education. They also need adequate funding from central Government to protect, manage and enhance existing facilities and create additional green open spaces around new housing development.”*

*“Local authorities are relying more and more on volunteers to manage and maintain green spaces. This leads to increased community empowerment and they need to collectively use it to direct government policy and resource allocation for green spaces.”*

*“Government has cut funding to Local Authorities which has had a big impact of their budgets. Our park is being transferred to the Parish Council which is local and will protect the park as a resource but lacks the funding. The Friends have enjoyed a good relationship with the local council and used their knowledge and expertise. Some concern that in our area the parks are becoming fragmented and not working together.”*

*“As a friends group we feel as if having to struggle against huge bureaucracy to improve the park. Eg we have no toilet/ refreshment facilities in the park yet we have a park lodge rotting away for last 20 years. Every time we get near to being able to use for the community, the goal posts get moved. We have no gardeners, minimal park keeper once/ two a week. Parks need more funding!”*

The protection of green spaces is a challenge across the country. NFPGS receive much correspondence from our network about the threats to their green spaces. We promote the work of our partner, Fields in Trust, in the creation of covenants to protect public spaces ‘in perpetuity’. As these need landowner permissions, in many cases that of the local authority, this can often lead to conflicting priorities between the pressure for development (and cash-strapped Councils’ view that assets can be sold off to fundraise) and the need for and protection of green spaces.

*“Protecting our current green spaces should be given high priority - proposed development is threatening our precious urban green spaces”*

*“as green spaces are under threat and many longstanding spaces aren't protected, then safeguarding the space in itself is very important. Once built on it can never be returned to the public”*

*“Protect parks like Tangshutt Fields which is under threat of being built on as part of the GMSF. Building on and adding traffic to a traffic-free park should not even be happening. It's the last free to use playing field in Romiley. Parks should not be for sale.”*

People also want and expect the Government to ensure that green spaces are properly valued. When developing policy or making infrastructure decisions, comprehensive economic assessment of sites should be undertaken.

*“Natural capital accounting has taken place in London, Birmingham and Sheffield. The true monetary value should be assessed universally of all green spaces and trees. Green spaces should be seen as on a par with the built environment”*

*“The value of green spaces both in terms of health and wellbeing and of carbon absorption should be given proper value in planning and funding decisions. Whilst HM Treasury Green Book specifies this should be the case many ongoing projects are based on analysis that pre-dates this requirement and so ignores it.”*

*“Luton want to expand the airport onto our park which was given to the people of Wigmore. A county wildlife site and known for its four varieties of wild orchids amongst other attractions. It needs protection that the council who own the airport don't see as a wildlife asset.”*

Climate change was also a strong concern for groups, with their main proposed solution relevant to this survey being the enhancement and protection of our environment.

*“PLEASE help us to retain all our green spaces throughout the UK. We can't be more in need of them right now - with the pressing and speedy changes Climate Change is bringing upon us. These places represent our future. If we lose them, the consequences for us ALL are dire.”*

*“Why no mention of the Climate Emergency??! We need to prioritise protecting our Green Spaces, connecting them to enhance habitats and planting as many trees as possible!!”*

*“Climate Emergency - NFPGS and Government should research (learn from local groups and specialists) and provide information to the local Authorities and Green Space volunteers on the best way to manage our green spaces to combat Climate Change.”*

*“With dwindling parks budgets, the potential benefits of strong partnership between parks team and local volunteers are not being fully exploited. Good quality green space underpins multiple Government ambitions, of any stripes, and should form a key part of public health policy, ensuring fair funding and necessitating investment. These benefits, when factored across all areas (social, environmental and economic aims), provide excellent value in ROI and will be increasingly necessary in a changing climate.”*

*“The protection of greenspaces is vital to addressing the climate emergency. Building houses on open land will destroy habitats, cause flooding, etc. Many people are empowered to protect and work within greenspaces, finding a way to empower them, make links, share resources and communicate effectively is vital”*

The opportunities for green spaces and park settings to protect, enhance and improve as sites for wildlife were also discussed by groups.

*“As we are becoming more built up and losing even more of our small green spaces, wildlife corridors should be further protected. Parks can't be green deserts and isolated.”*

*“Green spaces provide a healthier and friendlier community. All green spaces should be protected by the government to provide places of peace for the people and protect all the wildlife, plants animals, insects, amphibians and should be respected by everyone.”*

*“We must prevent local authorities from selling off green space assets for private development and must always take into account wildlife and the natural environment.”*

*“Develop information sheets for good maintenance practices and habitat enhancements. Stress that planting 'replacement' trees for removed copses that aid developments, does not provide an equivalent habitat.”*

*“It is time to take party politics out of this. It is not a political issue. Everybody needs to work together to protect and manage our green spaces properly. This is for our benefit and for the protection of biodiversity and urban wildlife corridors.”*

*“It's not all about parks, sports etc. It's about space for wildlife where it's not disturbed by music festivals in bird nesting season which is a growing problem. Wild spaces and wildlife should have a*

*higher priority than it has currently. And don't forget cemeteries - can be wonderful green spaces for peaceful communing with nature and restoring good mental health.”*

*“I think that there should be more emphasis on promoting park and open space management which restores nature and sequesters carbon (no chemicals, no fossil fuels, more structure). This may require more, and more skilled, labour for grounds maintenance.”*

## **Additional comments from groups**

In addition to the views above, there were some other areas of comments worth highlighting including:

Crime issues within parks was a concern for several groups:

*“Criminal activity enforcement needs strengthening”*

*“Local authority departments, environment agencies, police, etc, should all work together with community groups to make existing green spaces safe and able to maintain the countryside that causes visitors to come to the area they (the authorities) say they value so much.”*

*“Currently, we have antisocial behaviour vandalism, parkee been threatened with knife drug dealers in the park and surrounding the park. Would be good to hear/investigate how wide how widespread this problem is UK wide. Also, see if any joined-up thinking eg parks working with other agencies PCSO, social housing, police, health and welfare organisations to combat this problem.”*

Groups also wanted to ensure that the wider communities are enthused and engaged in their local green spaces.

*“Engaging the wider community in preserving and developing our green spaces is the biggest challenge facing our group.”*

*“More on involving the local community would be good.”*

*“Need to promote idea and proof that well supported open spaces bring financial benefits through better mental and physical health. Plus encourage community involvement from all parts of community.”*

*“Help on community engagement while people are happy with the park”*

*“Local authorities should loosen their vice like grip on what the community can do within their own local parks. All we hear is you can't plant that flower there because it's not in our long term planting plan, or we can't cut those weeds and brambles back because they could provide a habitat for some insect or another. Parks should be used for community cohesion projects such as community gardens. Years ago it was the rich that stole the land from beneath our feet, now the local authorities want to micro manage what little is left in public ownership. There is a lot of talk about community empowerment these days, but very little action.”*



## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The survey provided an excellent opportunity to capture the picture and opinions of volunteer groups across England. There are clear patterns to their strategic concerns and challenges. There are also clear asks directed towards the NFPGS, greenspace partners, Local Authorities, the Parks Action Group and the Government. These provide opportunities for greenspace national organisations, the PAG and government departments to shape their efforts in improving the country's green spaces. NFPGS call on all to support the following recommendations.

### **Stronger and more effective together**

Broadly, groups' experience is that by coordinating their efforts by working together in area forums, they are able to build better and more effective relationships with land managers, often local authorities. Groups also found that by working together, they are better able to share their experiences and resources, develop good practices, to raise their voices on behalf of communities, whilst influencing local policies and ambitions for green spaces. However, the spread, strength, degree of independence of such forums, along with the quality and effectiveness of the relationships with parks management, can vary dramatically across the country. Over 30% of those groups in areas where there was no forum called for help setting one up. This reinforces the views from the regional community conferences in 2019 that the NFPGS needs to be properly resourced to fulfil this need as part of its core work.

### **Recognising and promoting Friends groups**

Active local groups, as shown by their thoughtful and informed comments in this survey, hold a wealth of knowledge about their communities, local needs and the wider policy landscape. Furthermore, this knowledge and energy is increasingly important in helping with the delivery of parks services - by running events, developing vision and projects, helping with maintenance, being the 'eyes and ears' for their green space, promotional work, and bringing in funding etc. There is a perception from many groups that ongoing cuts to parks services, translated often into the loss of skilled staff or ranger services, is and will be increasingly unsustainable. Furthermore, many groups feel at the capacity of their freely provided time. These sentiments were reflected in the PAG Community Empowerment conferences.

### **Building mutually beneficial relationships between Friends and landowners**

Where relationships between landowners and community groups and their area forums are fostered and maintained, the outcomes are mutually beneficial and are good for wider communities. Friends groups are seen as both important and

valuable. The volunteers themselves enjoy their efforts and do not feel burdened or unsupported – and are able to work with the authorities and others in the sector as strategic partners. There is a strong argument to develop better relationships and communication between existing groups/Forums and landowners.

We recommend that the Government and national greenspace organisations, and particularly local authority facing organisations, provide encouragement, guidance and training to their members and networks about how to best engage, support and collaborate with Friends Groups and their area forums. Such relationships should be developed at multiple levels of the organisations, eg from maintenance crews and rangers to senior parks managers and planners.

### **Calling for improved national policies and greater resources**

Whilst the PAG is recognised to be relatively young as an entity, groups responding to the survey had a clear focus that it needed to influence Government policy, particularly in relation to threats from lack of resources and inappropriate development. The PAG exists to *"take action to safeguard and enhance parks and green spaces for future generations and to inform and shape Government's future policy-making"* [PAG Terms of Reference].

The impact of austerity has been felt on both fronts, with many local authorities under pressure to dispose of land for development, plus widespread and severe reductions in parks services. In many cases volunteer groups feel under pressure to prop up parks' services, with very limited input in some places. This is detrimental in the long-run - volunteers mostly do not have the desire or capacity to maintain essential parks services but generally focus on adding value through their energy and commitment.

There was also strong support for the PAG's commitment to raising the profile of parks and promoting partnership-working, alongside efforts to ensure parks are properly protected and funded.

### **The Government's vital role to protect and enhance the country's public green spaces**

Proper resourcing for parks and their adequate protection were also the key messages directly for the Government. This included a call for all Government departments to recognise the importance of greenspace for the achievement of a wide range of strategic Government objectives. The Government needs to take action to achieve its commitment to *"pass on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future"* [The Government's '25 year Environment Plan'].

The widespread neglect from lack of staffing and maintenance, and the loss of green space, can significantly undermine the efforts of volunteers or demoralise them. Friends groups often feel their sites are under perpetual threat from development in some places, regardless of the natural and social value that a site provides. Designations for nature do not protect sites enough and where trade-offs are assessed, for example by natural capital valuation, it is often that economic growth wins.

### **Ensuring funding to provide parks services**

Most local parks services have suffered for a number of years from widespread budget, staff and maintenance cuts and the effects of this are being felt keenly by community groups working in their green space. Where relationships with management are difficult or poor, this can lead to conflict, particularly when the efforts of green space groups are undone by a necessity for minimal maintenance. Groups and their green spaces, when supported by functioning parks services can achieve many things. This in turn leads to multiple benefits for communities, through health and wellbeing, events and engagement or diversity of wildlife habitats.

NFPGS strongly recommend that the PAG pursue their plans to put a Business Case for Parks to the Treasury, other Government Depts and to other tiers of government. The Government has an urgent and essential responsibility to review parks funding to ensure adequate and long-term public resources are made available throughout the country. We accept that in some places, new but often unproven models for funding might be able to deliver the same standards of parks management. However for most sites, especially those not in well-off areas, or for non-destination sites or sites without specific building assets that can generate funding, the quality of parks will continue to suffer unless this is addressed. This has knock-on implications for the communities living nearby, which are often those who have most need for freely available good quality green spaces.

### **Strengthening the protection of green spaces**

Protection of green spaces is also a considerable issue, development often put above other considerations and community opinions. There is conflict between the Government's 25-year Environment Plan, national or local planning policies, and various Government Department imperatives. Communities too often have to fight to protect their green spaces. Our wildlife is in a critical state and there is considerable scope for improving existing green infrastructure to improve connectivity and habitats. Functioning green infrastructure provides multiple benefits – flood attenuation, urban cooling, wildlife connectivity, mental and physical health and wellbeing for all, attractive travel routes, social cohesion, food provision and cultural benefits. As the effects of climate change take hold, green infrastructure throughout our urban fabric will be needed even more.

NFPGS recommend that both the PAG and Government align policy and good practice to protect all our precious green spaces, and expand and improve access wherever possible. Any new development should be prioritised for brown-field sites and should include well designed and well-managed green spaces encouraged to account for the natural capital produced.

## **Conclusions**

Our report, in amplifying the voices of passionate and active local environmental volunteer groups acting on behalf of their communities, shows strong, clear messages to greenspace national bodies, Local Authorities, other landowners, the Parks Action Group and Government. Parks and green spaces (and blue spaces too) are much valued and provide an excellent, unique and essential public resource for all sections of our communities. Green spaces' benefits need to be understood by departments across Government and local authorities. Protection must be bolstered. Most importantly, more resources are needed so public landowners can maintain basic services, supporting and working alongside the country's amazing community volunteer army so they can continue with the wealth of inspirational activity they provide.

## Appendix 1 – The Survey as circulated

### National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces – survey for community groups

The NFPGS, Locality and Groundwork are holding a series of regionally-based community conferences around England. These are aimed at inspiring, connecting, skilling and empowering green space Friends and volunteer groups across England. This survey is gathering information to feed into those events. The conferences have been funded by the Parks Action Group (PAG), a Government and green space Sector liaison body, as part of its Community Empowerment project work.

We want to find out from green space Friends and volunteer groups:

- Whether you network with other groups in your area, and if not would you like to?
- What are or could be the benefits of such networking for your group?
- What should the Parks Action Group be doing to support green spaces generally?
- What should the Government be doing?

We are collecting these responses across summer 2019 and feeding them into our live conferences, as well as reporting on them back to the PAG and Government. Your contribution will be greatly appreciated!

1. Name of your group

2. What county are you in?

3. Is your group already part of a Forum of groups in your area? Yes/No  
If so, please provide the name of the Forum.

4. If not, would you like support to help set one up? Yes/No  
If yes, please provide an email contact.

5. For your group, what are or could be the key benefits of networking and coordination with other groups? (Please rank your top five, with one being your main priority)

- Exchanging news and experiences
- Sharing good practice
- Having a collective voice
- Working together in partnership with the park management or local authority
- Working together with 'third sector' bodies, eg. greenspace organisations
- Influencing decision-making
- Pooling resources and skills
- Accessing training

6. The Parks Action Group (PAG) exists to *"take action to safeguard and enhance parks and green spaces for future generations and to inform and shape Government's future policy-making"*\*. What should the PAG be doing to achieve this? (Please rank your top five, with one being your top priority)

- Promoting community empowerment in green space
- Providing a higher national profile and voice for the needs of the country's green spaces

- Encouraging partnerships between park management, local authorities, community groups and green space organisations
- Influencing decision-making at Government level
- Seeking greater resources and funding for the country's green spaces
- Setting standards for the quality of public green spaces
- Strengthening the protection for public green spaces
- Supporting the development of online information and advice for green space community groups
- Helping parks managers and professionals to support each other and share good practice
- Investigating alternative forms of green space management

7. The Government has stated it wants to *"pass on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future"*\*\*. What should the Government be doing to achieve this for our public green spaces? (Please rank your top three, with one being your main priority)

- Continuing to support the Parks Action Group (see some of its aims above)
- Providing a higher national profile for the country's green spaces
- Ensuring greater resources and funding for the country's green spaces
- Setting standards for the quality of public green spaces
- Strengthening their protection
- Ensuring other Government departments recognise the value of public green space in achieving their objectives

8. Do you have any other comments you'd like to make? (Open response)

9. If you would like to receive NFPGS updates and news, please add your email address below

Many thanks for your time. The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces will be collecting these responses and reporting them back to the Parks Action Group and Government. For more information about this survey, contact Michelle, Networks Coordinator at [networks@natfedparks.org.uk](mailto:networks@natfedparks.org.uk) - or information about the work of the NFPGS, visit our website at [www.natfedparks.org.uk](http://www.natfedparks.org.uk)

\* Extract of terms of reference for Parks Action Group

\*\* Extract from the Government's 25-Year Environment Plan, forward by PM Theresa May

## Appendix 2 – Comments from responders

Below are comments in full, from those completing the survey. Spelling mistakes have been corrected for ease of reading but no other alterations were implemented.

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I appreciate the time and voluntary effort that will be needed to increase awareness locally of the benefits of green spaces and need of supported management and also aim to have a national voice.

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Protect parks like Tangshutt Fields which is under threat of being built on as part of the GMSF. Building on and adding traffic to a traffic-free park should not even be happening. It's the last free to use playing field in Romiley. Parks should not be for sale.

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It would be good if we have a base to have meetings and get together with young people

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We must prevent local authorities from selling off green space assets for private development and must always take into account wildlife and the natural environment.

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Our group and other groups in South Gloucestershire are having problems the council's Licensing of Community events. The restriction will limit our events and limit the amount of funding we can put back into our park

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We are concerned about the potential loss of green spaces due to the demand for house building

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The protection of greenspaces is vital to addressing the climate emergency. Building houses on open land will destroy habitats, cause flooding, etc. Many people are empowered to protect and work within greenspaces, finding a way to empower them, make links, share resources and communicate effectively is vital

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Have a register for parks and green spaces which once a park is registered it can't be sold

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Councils should be given greater powers to stop or limit building on green spaces and if necessary, purchase the land for the benefit of all.

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Government has cut funding to Local Authorities which has had a big impact of their budgets. Our park is being transferred to the Parish Council which is local and will protect the park as a resource but lacks the funding. The Friends have enjoyed a good relationship with the local council and used their knowledge and expertise. Some concern that in our area the parks are becoming fragmented and not working together.

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The value of green spaces both in terms of health and well being and of carbon absorption should be given proper value in planning and funding decisions. Whilst HM Treasury Green Book specifies this should be the case many ongoing projects are based on analysis that pre-dates this requirement and so ignores it.

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Without professional support parks and green spaces will by and large die!!

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Pleased to support your valuable organisation

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Need to recognise that funding of green spaces is unlikely to return to previous levels, encourage and empower communities to participate in green space management, look for novel approaches.

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Need more resources and maintenance for green space even bin emptying is helpful

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Criminal activity enforcement needs strengthening

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Ensure that all parks are saved for the community

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Engaging the wider community in preserving and developing our green spaces is the biggest challenge facing our group.

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Friends of Saltwell Park already work with the council and other groups to help the Park, so that

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is why we haven't made that our own high priority. However, it is probably more important than it might look on this survey. Thank you for all you are doing. We are stronger together!

Continue your good work

Stop the cuts to council's resources looking after parks and green space - cuts are still being planned in Stockport.

As a friends group we feel as if having to struggle against huge bureaucracy to improve the park. Eg we have no toilet/ refreshment facilities in the park, yet we have a park lodge rotting away for last 20 years. Every time we get near to being able to use for the community, the goal posts get moved. We have no gardeners, minimal park keeper once/ twice a week. Parks need more funding!

Fundamental is to provide ongoing financial support for greenspace professionals to work with the community. As things stand, funding often has to be chased on a continuous basis. This is totally inefficient and too often, means that good practice and good projects are lost. It also means that people who volunteer and who are helped by access to green space are let down.

No - just 'thanks' for taking the initiative on behalf of all us volunteers!

Ensure that "Friends" group are included in any conversation regarding green spaces

I think that there should be more emphasis on promoting park and open space management which restores nature and sequesters carbon (no chemicals, no fossil fuels, more structure). This may require more, and more skilled, labour for grounds maintenance.

Develop information sheets for good maintenance practices and habitat enhancements. Stress that planting 'replacement' trees for removed copses that aid developments, does not provide an equivalent habitat.

Volunteers require more support

If Friends of Havelock Rec made a previous entry then please disregard this one :-)

It is time to take party politics out of this. It is not a political issue. Everybody needs to work together to protect and manage our green spaces properly. This is for our benefit and for the protection of biodiversity and urban wildlife corridors.

Thank you for all you do keep up the good work nationally, we do as much as we can locally.

Free access to public greenspaces that have the facilities that met the needs of the local community are essential for the mental and physical wellbeing of all our communities regardless of socio-economic wealth of the community. For this to happen, protection and funding to maintain the greenspaces is needed from the government and legislation is key to ensure the spaces are protected from other interests e.g. building. Equally important is local infrastructure and support to voluntary community groups working and looking after these public greenspaces for the benefit of their local community and users of the space. This needs involvement and communication and support of the landowners; the local authorities and other third sector organisations such as Community Voluntary Services and other charities which have the skills and knowledge to be able to support the growth and development of often grass roots community groups.

In fact it was hard to prioritise - they are all worthy aspirations in each of the last three questions.

Our green space, a woodland owned by the local authority, has just been granted Local Nature Reserve status by Natural England due to the work done by the Friends Group.

These are my personal opinions as there is not time to consult with the others on the committee. However, I hope that they would be in broad agreement with me. Our group already works closely with the park management, so I have not rated this particularly highly. The great issue is funding, and it is important that this is discussed.

Why no mention of the Climate Emergency??! We need to prioritize protecting our Green Spaces, connecting them to enhance habitats and planting as many trees as possible!!



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There is growing evidence showing the HEALTH benefits, mental, emotional and physical of being in NATURE. Not everyone can benefit from their own garden so GREEN SPACES, parks, communal gardens, woods, river banks to walk along, canal paths, even STATION gardens can contribute to the wellbeing of our communities. It is also ESSENTIAL for CHILDREN to experience growing their own produce, caring for trees and nature to help ensure a caring population for the future of our planet. Allotments are often under threat and THEY too play a vital role in the greening of urban areas and should be protected.

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Not sure your form is working correctly as it kept deleting my answers to the above questions!

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Unable to meet in London for the time being - may be able to resume in due course.

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Ensuring that commerce respects green spaces as a priority in its agendas

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I'm a volunteer and some volunteers on social media are so keen to plant trees etc but they/we lack knowledge to do things which are right for their area. Enthusiasm is great, but needs informed guidance, and that would include government agencies. Why build homes on flood plains for example?

---

By 2023 the Parish of Newark will have lost over 7 hectares of parks and playing fields, 50% of the loss will be in one of the most disadvantaged wards in the District and there are no plans to mitigate the loss.

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Existing public spaces are under pressure from austerity budgets and inadequate stewardship by government and local authorities. Equally important is the protection of non-public greenspace; recent changes to planning law have resulted in London in a big shift away from balancing built environment and greenspace.

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The survey boxes offered 5 options to support more than 5 options. It fails to recognise local priorities

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We need to get the government of the day to commit to building only on brownfield sites and, where possible, restoring brownfield sites back to nature.

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Promulgating best practice on common issues is paramount

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Action needed urgently as our parks are becoming "No-go" areas - the green space needs protecting and so do the people that use it

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More funding from central for local councils to promote and protect green spaces so there isn't an over-reliance on voluntary park user groups.

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Spreading best practice to increase wild habitat and protect biodiversity must be one of Federation's aims?

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While there is no formal Forum in Wandsworth, Friends groups work together on many issues of common interest. As Tooting Common is a very large open space, we very much value talking directly to the Council and contractors and would not want to see this diluted by a Forum dominated numerically by parks' groups.

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Protection for Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land, Tree Preservation Orders and planning consents are all worthless pieces of paper easily avoided by land swaps, illegal development and permitted development. There is a crisis that no one is discussing.

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Funding for Local Authorities must be increased before parks can hope to be properly maintained.

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Why was I only able to tick one choice in each of the above survey questions?

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Most of the other aims are also very worthwhile and important and it is hard to rank and prioritise!

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This survey is biased in some of the questions forcing you to provide an answer.

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More on involving the local community would be good.

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See covering email

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[INSERTED FROM EMAIL AS REQUESTED]

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We are a small and new Friends Group on the outskirts of Taunton, set up 12 months ago due to the community disappointment with the services provided by our local council. Not a criticism of the council but a recognition of the pressures they are under to be able to provide a service to all of the parks and green spaces within their area. As such the council have been very supportive of the local community initiative to take over the management of a small community woodland.

What are we managing and what might be our contribution to your discussions?

The woodland and total area is about 5 hectares but we also work with the neighbouring area owned by Somerset Wildlife Trust which approximately doubles the size of the overall site to about 24 acres in total.

Volunteer work using only hand tools was never going to be fit for purpose, despite valiant efforts by the volunteer groups.

Trees planted 16 years ago, subject to the Forestry Commission planting guidelines (2m centres), means the overall site (7,000+ trees) needs a plan to thin the trees and allow the remaining trees to develop.

We are on the edge of the urban area/countryside and as such some local community members have power tools for their own land management e.g. flails and toppers for grass cutting.

Volunteers have powered tools for strimming, cutting wood (chainsaws) and small vehicles for transporting heavy loads.

My personal view is that any form of central funding is going to be limited and always challenging going forward. Small grants for specific projects appear to be available. Local communities need to be able to get on to manage their own green spaces within an overall plan that will guide the local activity.

We have raised the following with our local council;

The Silver Foxes (the retired element of the community, but can also include shift workers) are relatively time rich but asset poor (lacking the necessary tools, maintenance, storage) in respect of the power tools to do the work required to keep the parks and green spaces up to Green Flag standards.

Insurance premiums are prohibitive.

Local councils are asset rich (tools, maintenance, storage, training) but time and money resource poor i.e. they are flat out doing what they can with the manpower resource available.

How can these two issues be brought together to the benefit of all? If volunteer resource can be provided with the correct tools for the job we move away from work orientated tasks (heavy manual etc) to time effective use of resource.

I have attached an example of how footpaths in this locality are managed (the Somerset Strimmer Scheme) so the basic principles are there, how can they be extended to cover other essential tools for park/green space maintenance?

I hope the above makes some sense and, if you feel appropriate, could be added to your discussions.]

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Informal ongoing contacts between council parks and neighbourhood management staff with

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community groups are vital, and seem what has been the greatest loss from the squeeze on resources

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Yes, green spaces should be seen as valuable for healthy living and community, not just a cost in a non-statutory council service. It is essential that organisations like PlayTorbay remain funded since our park group would not take on the task of organising fun days on our own. It would be even better if they were funded enough such that we didn't have to pay them for each fun day.

---

Government is not sufficiently committed to ensuring the proper maintenance of our parks and public spaces and doesn't ensure that local authorities have sufficient funds to do so. These spaces are vital to the maintenance of health and wellbeing in our cities.

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The natural environment are crucial to the future of our world and our personal wellbeing

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Stop or discourage councils from attempting to sell off their parks and green spaces.

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Parks have been stripped of funding; buildings left to deteriorate. Government need to ensure adequate funding to ensure green spaces are funded adequately to ensure spaces are safe, beautiful and accessible to the general public.

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We as volunteers can only do so much, we would like more resources to local authorities, so they are adequately funded to manage local Green spaces

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I am increasingly perturbed that whenever the National or Local Authority decides to build new housing, offices, HS2 for example suddenly the green space can be ripped up, ancient Woodland destroyed forever and the local amenities for scenic outlook, fresh air and walking space is shoved to one side. Powerful groups such as Banks can "persuade" planners to rip up golf courses, allow coal and mineral development on beauty spots in the name of development and progress despite any objections that the public might raise. The public doesn't matter, the authorities are arrogant, and we need a stronger voice to protect spaces for future generations

---

Sadly, Parks are being given preference over urban nature reserves, as they are easier to attract funding (lottery), hands on community helpers, by Local Councils as cuts in their budget meant smaller departments. In Darlington we went from 12 or so rangers dealing with groups and green spaces to one who was moved into Street Scene that had itself had a 50% cut in staff. We now have 2 rangers doing their best; it needs to change with full support behind funding bids and employment training.

---

The green spaces we look after are under siege by developers. There have been 4 public inquiries appeals against planning refusal in the last 18 months. We have objected to the development as it impacts the green spaces and we have won three of them. We already have excellent relations with local authorities and local groups hence why this is a lower priority for our group.

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Budgets for any green space woefully inadequate. Government needs to support Natural England and others with a decent budget. Nature Reserves in danger of overrun by no money.

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Our parks and green spaces are basically being protected and cared for by volunteers. They should always be valued and never taken for granted.

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Climate Emergency - NFPGS and Government should research (learn from local groups and specialists) and provide information to the local Authorities and Green Space volunteers on the best way to manage our green spaces to combat Climate Change.

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Our Friends group has good communications/relationships with the district council and the county council (through Countryside Management Service division). I feel that we work well as a team supporting each other. I am not sure that other counties have the same structure which may give rise to different types of problems for other Friends groups.

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Important to protect our rural green spaces from urbanisation eg limit hard surfaces across these areas

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I feel that this Group is targeting larger municipal parks. as such, I do not believe it is of much relevance to our local village parks, where we already have a good working relationship with our Parish Council. As such, I do not anticipate much involvement in this group.

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PLEASE help us to retain all our green spaces throughout the UK. We can't be more in need of them right now - with the pressing and speedy changes Climate Change is bringing upon us. These places represent our future. If we lose them, the consequences for us ALL are dire.

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Local council does not support parks

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Treat all groups equally and fairly.

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Groundwork used to coordinate a Friends of Friends group which was useful. Due to cuts this ended & the Council's Parks team has now had that function added to its role - but without extra resources so there are no longer meetings. In the meantime, there have been huge cuts to the parks team which means parks are less well kept & respected - for example used as public conveniences. Another threat is the number of paid events now being staged in parks locally, effectively closing whole parks or large areas of the park to local residents & the public. This raises income for the local authority but there's no evidence that any of that money is reinvested in parks & green spaces. This is a serious issue in Southampton where the inner-city population has doubled in 10 years & where more people including children live in flats. There is plenty of evidence now showing that access to green open space is vital to people's sense of health & wellbeing so parks should be better protected to ensure they are there for the local population not for commercial events.

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We need to double our tree canopy, and are planting trees, but we need to address the needless felling of trees otherwise we are not increasing tree canopy.

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Need to promote idea and proof that well supported open spaces bring financial benefits through better mental and physical health. Plus encourage community involvement from all parts of community.

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To protect and extend the natural environment, it is really important that all infrastructure planning takes into account protecting and extending access to green spaces

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Local authority departments, environment agencies, police, etc, should all work together with community groups to make existing green spaces safe and able to maintain the countryside that causes visitors to come to the area they (the authorities) say they value so much.

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The Parks Action Group could do more to draw public attention to the consequences of the years of drastic cuts to local authorities, which we have experienced, and the knock-on effects on communities of not having good green spaces, libraries etc.

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We have informal contact with other groups locally

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I recently attended a celebratory event at the local Community and Volunteer centre and there was no mention of NFPGS - you need to publicise this organisation.

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All points in Q7 are important

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I would like recognition for the importance of green spaces. Nidd Gorge, which we are fighting to protect is used by more people on a daily basis than local swimming pools, which are given massive funding!

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Many Victorian Parks, by definition, serve socially deprived areas, so the social geography of parks is an important factor.

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As a group that is in the process of developing an inspirational green space, we value learning from other groups who have done the same. For us, practical guidance and inspiration is important.

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We are targeting the health issues affecting our community effectively in our community, we need support to release more government funds to support long term projects that continue to develop a holistic support for our community to target key issues in health and education.

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Natural capital accounting has taken place in London, Birmingham and Sheffield. The true monetary value should be assessed universally of all green spaces and trees. Green spaces should be seen as on a par with the built environment

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Protecting our current green spaces should be given high priority - proposed development is threatening our precious urban green spaces

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Keep the public informed.

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We need to do everything possible to protect and improve our green spaces.

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Local authorities are relying more and more on volunteers to manage and maintain green spaces. This leads to increased community empowerment and they need to collectively use it to direct government policy and resource allocation for green spaces.

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Volunteers can do a lot locally but without the guidance and leadership of 'Rangers' they will never work to a plan that will be sustainable as individuals have individual ideas!

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Local councils need to recognise the value and importance of green urban spaces in terms of biodiversity, health, environmental education, and recreation. However, they also need to be adequately funded by central government to protect, manage and enhance existing facilities and create additional urban spaces wherever there are new housing developments.

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It's not all about parks, sports etc. It's about space for wildlife where it's not disturbed by music festivals in bird nesting season which is a growing problem. Wild spaces and wildlife should have a higher priority than it has currently. And don't forget cemeteries - can be wonderful green spaces for peaceful communing with nature and restoring good mental health.

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More funding is needed for all green spaces not just the main parks - please come and visit us, we fund raise through a centre we hire out

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Local Councils need to recognise the value and importance of urban green open spaces.; in terms of health and recreation, biodiversity and environmental education. They also need adequate funding from central Government to protect, manage and enhance existing facilities and create additional green open spaces around new housing development.

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Decisions not communicated or opinions sought from local residents, not emptying rubbish bins, enforcing dog fines

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Thank you for helping us fight to protect our green spaces. It's soooo important.

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The Parks Action Group through the conference and following it needs to build a coalition of like-minded Friends Groups AND local authorities to make the case for greater support and recognition of the economic, social and ecological value of public parks

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All the objectives are important as they represent a multi-faceted approach.

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I think cross department government support for local green spaces is vital, eg Department of Health linking with Sport Media and Culture plus Education as that would increase the profile and importance of local green spaces, besides releasing new funding.

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Unfortunately, Cockleton Meadow has been taken back into the hands of Gurnard Parish Council which has disbanded the volunteer group, started regular mowing of the established wildflower meadow and re-named it Old School Meadow. The Council is a non-elected group who make their own decisions without local consultation

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Keeping simple OPEN spaces, "Breathing Spaces" which allow City dwellers a place to escape the pressures of modern life, be it commercialism of wind turbines (which I do not think appropriate for City Parks). These green spaces must not be filled with 'stuff' like 3G fenced off with high fences, spotlights, locked gates, pay to play football/sports. Keep GRASS to be used occasionally for sports/public recreation.

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Local authorities / management organisations should have to publish accounts for individual green spaces to aid most efficient use of limited funds.

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I work for a mental health charity and feel the need for public green space is important for the wellbeing of peoples mental health not to mention the wild life and birds many of which I feel will disappear with the continuing building of new homes on green space areas. there are many derelict or empty buildings around the city - surely money would be better spent on either improving them or rebuilding on those sites. I think also people with gardens should be encouraged to plant more trees and maybe given saplings from the council to plant in their gardens more community use should be made of our parks by holding free family/ community fun days this would encourage more people to use the parks and green spaces around them. We

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need to keep these green spaces for the future generations.

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Directive from Government to councils to strengthen relationships with volunteers working in green spaces and make provision for that support. Currently not happening - volunteers seen as a burden as no resources to 'manage'.

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1. If Parks were properly protected and funded, then PAG could concentrate on supporting development and networking, sharing ideas and best practice. But as green spaces are under threat and many longstanding spaces aren't protected, then safeguarding the space in itself is very important. Once built on it can never be returned to the public.

2. There is a chronic lack of designers involved in parks to safeguard their beauty. Sharing best practise between councils? Our council folk are all men who have very fixed ideas about what a park should be like. They use terms like 'corporate image'. They don't see the poetry and beauty of long grass, they do things like insist on putting in ugly tropical hard wood benches, litter bins in odd locations and crap play equipment (the KFC model) etc. So, I imagine if you facilitate best practise, they are so sure in their 'rightness' and their 'knowledge' that we might not see improvements in the parks. Our best and most improving parks are those with active friends' groups, who in the past have been able to get changes agreed with a now retired and on the same wavelength senior officer. They often have designers, landscape architects and horticultural specialists involved. The natural enhanced environment isn't in the contract that they wrote! The volunteer groups are trying to 're-wild' the parks, not the paid managers.

3. It isn't just about a higher profile; we need a high profile "environmentalist" to be part of a changing movement to say why mown short grass isn't what parks are all about. We need the government to support councils when they are sued for allowing free natural play, tree swings, logs to clamber on.

[CONT]

4. Not sure what you mean by setting the standard for quality of greenspaces. There should be more awareness that parks are all different and don't need the same approach. They don't all need the signage and seating, some are small remnants of landscape, some a sports recreational ground, some suit native trees some an arboretum. Maybe a borough standard would need to show that they have a variety of parks and open spaces with different offers.

5. Development should be led by the landscape and the greenspaces. PAG could promote this.

6. As we are becoming more built up and losing even more of our small green spaces, wildlife corridors should be further protected. Parks can't be green deserts and isolated. The railway corridors are a fantastic resource for creating a national nature reserve stretching the length and breadth of the whole country. This is the green space that really needs a higher national profile, with national protection. The value of the parks will be enhanced if part of a national network of green spaces. Even areas under-served with parks, often has railways cutting through, and the rail track land should be given a national park protection for its vital role in linking the whole country with a truly green network. The land needs to become more public and shared as an educational resource, as a great opportunity to create linear walking routes, and make us aware of our own wildlife.

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It wasn't clear how in the previous ranking questions 1-5 or 1-3, whether 1 or 5/3 was the highest ranked. In my answers 5 or 3 were the highest ranked and 1 the lowest

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I would like to see forage trails, orchards and growing spaces in Public parks

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Luton want to expand the airport onto our park which was given to the people of Wigmore. A county wildlife site and known for its four varieties of wild orchids amongst other attractions. It needs protection that the council who own the airport don't see as a wildlife asset.

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Policing support for groups to stop asb in parks is terrible... there is none.

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Currently, we have antisocial behaviour vandalism, parkee been threatened with knife drug dealers in the park and surrounding the park. Would be good to hear/investigate how wide how widespread this problem is UK wide. Also, see if any joined-up thinking eg parks working with other agencies, PCSO, social housing, police, health and welfare organisations to combat this problem.

The work of our volunteers for parks and open spaces is essential and we need the Government to understand that and have a realistic vision of what problems both the environment and volunteers face. The Government need to back up their statements made in the 25 Year Environment Plan and put their money and action where their mouth is!

Despite GLC policy to enhance London's green spaces, we are facing continuous negative feedback and action from the company responsible for running our local park - to the extent that it is now very run down. Volunteers have offered to help with the maintenance...but this has been rejected. What can we do?

The Benefits to those with Mental Health problems is immense, even with our very small garden, within a larger BANES park. I Actively think about & plan for those benefits. Also, people with dementia or wheelchair bound folk are brought to see our little patch, so I try to ensure there are 'memory lane' plants there. Hollyhocks, a wigwam of runner beans, a little veg. patch. good old nasturtiums, etc etc

These are tricky (though important) questions, a lot is entwined - I have answered with my overall optimism, of course, these forums and groups are even more important is policy/governments don't follow their commitments etc.

It is too early to say what the Parks Action Group can achieve but there certainly a need for both high level lobbying that influences policies, encourages joined up thinking across departments and provides support for groups involved in protecting and promoting parks

Make it a statutory duty of local authorities to provide and maintain green spaces

I could not get 5 preferences for the form to work, as soon as I pressed the second choice, the previous one cancelled!

To be honest I've looked at the NFPGS website and there isn't a forum in my area and I'm not keen to start one myself as were new to developing our local green space. I'm still unclear on the benefits of joining NFPGS and where I should go first to look at what others have done and how they have done it.

We are not very active as a Friends Group (too busy doing other things), and are not involved in our local Forum, but I am filling in the survey anyway to make it statistically more valid. My preferred strategy is: TV and radio and newspaper interviews/articles/letters --> politicians' perception of public opinion --> votes --> more money available for parks. PS. Just realised the PAG is government-funded, so their unstated objective must be to find ways to reduce costs ("improve efficiency"). I just get fed up with the park maintenance people cutting the flower buds off the rhododendrons every year because, I assume, trained gardeners are more expensive!

Help on community engagement while people are happy with the park

Persuade LA staff that 'no cut' grass areas create better habitats than relentless mowing.

Play areas should be designed to meet the Fieldsin Trust 'Planning and Design for Outdoor, Sportand Play standardand approvedby the DistrictCouncil'sLandscapeOfficer /Parksand OpenSpacesManager

Nottingham City Council has become desperate for any way to make cash, including selling off open space, due to government cuts, and ignoring the 'money saved' and value of work done and grants gained by Friends of groups maintaining parks and the considerable mental health and other values of open space. Gaining recognition for these 'non-immediate-cash' benefits of open space is key here. A decline in maintenance, access and attractiveness to the public leads to increased costs of social care, NHS costs, mental health support etc etc and we are at the point

where further cuts cost more than they save.

Funding for parks. Greater protection against pressures on Councils for their green spaces to be developed to raise funds.

Green spaces provide a healthier and friendlier community. All green spaces should be protected by the government to provide places of peace for the people and protect all the wildlife, plants animals, insects' amphibians and should be respected by everyone.

We share our newsletters with the local Parks Group Forum and vice versa. We work closely with the Local Authority Parks Department.

Our charity is already organising a conference for friends' groups in Ealing, Hounslow, Richmond and Wandsworth and Kingston Boroughs.

Better co-ordination of parks groups, meetings at times members can attend etc

National government should enable local authorities to spend more on parks and green spaces

Help getting and keeping volunteers, some green spaces are huge and need a dedicated team to support them. people are scared off by the perception of the size of the task.

We hope that PAG has a good PR person(s) to make sure that any success stories for parks get national coverage - especially those in which the community/Friends of Parks have played a major role.

I don't understand this survey. Every time I clicked on another question and ranked a number 1 the previous question's number 1 answer disappeared! ??

Above all else, we need to ensure that the protection and management of parks and open spaces becomes a statutory responsibility for local councils. Given the background of savage cuts to local government funding, all non-statutory services are being cut back to the bare minimum.

PAG to promote the reality that green space provision fits into most of the Government/publics' priority agendas...health, education, well-being, inclusion, environment...and that green space is not just for humans to use, it's also for the protection of the natural environment and biodiversity, hence the need for a range of habitat and access.

It seems to me the PGA needs to fight on 2 fronts - politically to ensure standards and protection of green spaces, but also to provide support to green space volunteers. The PGA cannot tackle both at the same time without one front suffering, unless the PGA can develop 2 separate, but connected, divisions of the organisation.

Brent had opted out of the green flag scheme which has lowered standards for parks. Any funding from charitable sources for improved planting and infrastructure is not backed up with maintenance by the council.

Parks should be considered part of the NHS - they offer safe places to play, be active, to enhance mood and a sense of well-being - we need more paid supervisors whom could help set up / support volunteers groups - a little amount from the contractors budgets could support this - a volunteer per park or green space would greatly enhance the parks

It's great to see NFPGS keeping the momentum going at national level as well as regionally & locally

The Royal Parks are managed very differently to local authority parks and my comments are therefore rather limited.

We need better support, better funding and more support

Development is the single biggest threat to green open spaces. The government must make a commitment to protect green open spaces from all development.

Looking forward to seeing the output of this survey. Hope it will give weight to the cases being taken to government.

Local authorities should loosen their vice like grip on what the community can do within their own local parks. All we hear is you can't plant that flower there because it's not in our long-term planting plan, or we can't cut those weeds and brambles back because they could provide a



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habitat for some insect or another. Parks should be used for community cohesion projects such as community gardens. Years ago, it was the rich that stole the land from beneath our feet, now the local authorities want to micro manage what little is left in public ownership. There is a lot of talk about community empowerment these days, but very little action.

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Support with developers and accessing the community infrastructure levy

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England's Millennium Greens have been forgotten. An initiative to connect, support and protect them would be good, especially a celebration of 20 YEARS

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Government allocated funding should be ring fenced and spent where it's intended, not syphoned off by local authorities

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It's difficult to spend time at forums when you are busy doing voluntary work for our park locally.

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The whole green space issue should not have to rely so heavily on volunteers. Every town should have someone directly responsible for all the green spaces as a full-time job.

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The health of the nation depends on green spaces

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With dwindling parks budgets, the potential benefits of strong partnership between parks team and local volunteers are not being fully exploited. Good quality green space underpins multiple Government ambitions, of any stripes, and should form a key part of public health policy, ensuring fair funding and necessitating investment. These benefits, when factored across all areas (social, environmental and economic aims), provide excellent value in ROI and will be increasingly necessary in a changing climate.

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