

Committee(s)	Dated:
Open Spaces Committee - For Information	10th October 2016
Subject: State of UK Public Parks 2016 – Heritage Lottery Fund report	Public
Report of: Director of Open Spaces	For Discussion
Report author: Sue Ireland, Open Spaces	

Summary

The recently published Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) report 'The State of UK Public Parks 2016' provides important insight into the current state of UK parks. This report focusses on the issues and challenges set by HLF and summarises the City of London Corporation's response to date. Members are invited to consider whether further action is required.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:-

- Note the report.
- Consider whether any further action is required.

Main Report

Background

1. Two years ago the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) warned that UK parks were “on the brink” of serious decline after suffering year after year of funding cuts. Their report 'The State of UK Public Parks 2014- Renaissance to Risk?' was reported to your committee on 21st July 2014.

Current Position

2. In a second report, 'State of UK Public Parks 2016' published on 7th September, HLF has again highlighted the growing crisis. While it has found that park use and volunteering have continued to increase; parks and green spaces are experiencing heavier cuts in revenue and capital funding, staff and skills. The number of friends and user groups has increased by 1,100 to 5,900 and fundraising is up from £20m to £50m. However, 92% of park managers report cuts to their budget in the last 3 years an increase of 6% from the last report and 95% expect further cuts over the next 3 years.

3. The average revenue budget for parks and green spaces for a local authority has fallen from £3.1m to £2.6m over the survey period 2013-5.

4. This report includes parks trusts for the first time (including the City of London Corporation) and the results demonstrate that trusts are doing better, with 37% showing an increase in their budgets, 12.5% no change and 18.8% have lost more than 20% of their budget; a mixed outcome. The Corporation's own open spaces funding is in line with this trend; for the 5 years from 2013/14 to 2017/18 efficiency reductions in the order of 15% have been achieved or are planned.

5. An important finding of the report is how well used parks have been, with originally 54% of adults surveyed using them at least monthly increasing to 57% and with families now 90% of households with children under 5 visit monthly. Only 12% of adults don't use parks and the most regular user's being 16-17 yr. olds (44% visit a park weekly) and 25-34yr. olds (32%).

6. On average 22.5% of parks budgets come from external sources. The report shows this is likely to increase to 29% in next three years. Of concern, is that only 54% of local authority parks income is ring-fenced for parks and 79% are considering selling or transferring all or parts of parks.

7. There has been a clearly identified skills drain, with loss of management and operational staff and the trend appears to be likely to increase in the next 3 years. Remaining managers recognise that financial skills are essential to the future of parks services.

8. The timing of this report is helpful in providing evidence to the Communities and Local Government Committee, which has launched an inquiry into the future of parks and how to fund them.

9. For our public parks and green spaces to remain in good heart to serve both current and future generations, HLF recommend five key themes for collaborative working:-

- *Continuing local authority leadership*; with parks/ green space strategies, elected champions and financial information to demonstrate value for money and aid business planning.
- *Promoting active partnerships*; support local networks (this is referring to the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum), research on the benefits of Trusts, diversity of responsibility makes delivering large scale strategic environmental objectives more difficult.
- *Supporting communities to play a more active role*; skills and training for volunteers, information about organisational structures and processes should be widely available to support community groups and sharing responsibilities with local authorities retaining responsibility and funding for aspects such as insurance, health and safety and financial administration to help community groups.

- *Developing new models of management and funding*; research on alternative management models is required, more opportunities to test income generating and management opportunities and support for endowments.
- *Compiling, coordinating and updating data*; a new national green space map is to be published in 2016, the need to develop a robust and regular collection of benchmark data, similar to the US-style 'City Park Facts' and valuation of parks by a natural capital account process.

Way Forward

10. The City of London Corporation has sought to support previous HLF reports including:-

- the introduction of Park Champions,
- engaged with the Greater London Authority in the preparation and production of 'Natural Capital –investing in a Green Infrastructure for Future London',
- has promoted and supported volunteering and learning
- reviewing and updating the green space strategy for the City

11. There may be further opportunities to support London's parks and green spaces as new policy develops and your Committee is responding to the Select Committee Inquiry.

12. Members may wish to consider the HLF recommendations and opportunities further.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

13. The HLF report alerts to issues for the future management of parks and green spaces. The Corporate vision and values recognises the need to maintain high quality, accessible services at the right price and KPP3 recognises the importance of engaging with London and national government on key concerns to our communities. The department's vision is to preserve and protect our world class green spaces for the benefit of local communities and the environment. This report helps to focus attention nationally on the key components of successful funding and management.

Implications

14. There are no direct financial, legal, property or HR implications in considering or responding to this HLF report.

Conclusion

The recently published Heritage Lottery Fund report 'The State of UK Public Parks 2016' provides important insight into the current state of UK parks. This report focuses on the issues and challenges set by HLF and summarises the City of London Corporation's response to date. Members are invited to consider further challenge.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – State of Public Parks 2016 Heritage Lottery Fund

Background Papers

The State of UK Public Parks 2014 Renaissance to Risk? - Open Spaces Committee
21st July 2014

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