



## Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee

**The Rt Hon Simon Clarke MP**  
**Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities**  
**Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities**  
**4th Floor, Fry Building**  
**2 Marsham Street**  
**London SW1P 4DF**

18 October 2022

Dear Simon,

### **Public Parks**

In July the Committee was updated by stakeholders from the parks sector on developments since our predecessor Committee's inquiry into public parks in 2016-17. Our session sparked considerable interest from the public and we continue to receive emails raising further points since. The transcript of the evidence session is [available on the Committee's website](#).

After a promising Government response to the Committee's recommendations in 2017, we were disappointed to hear resources for parks remain incredibly stretched and continue to decline, with some describing a 'crisis' in local authority parks. Recent research suggests local authorities are spending £330m less per year on parks than in 2010, with the most deprived areas receiving the largest cuts and that parks staff expecting this to continue to decline.

Given the recent changes in the Department, we understand that it has not been possible to provide a response to our earlier letter of [13 June](#). However, we would appreciate a response as soon as convenient, as our questions remain unanswered and the challenges in the parks sector remain acute. We would also appreciate a response to further issues raised below, that have become apparent during and after our session.

### **Commitment to regular updates and data**

One of the points raised in our previous letter was the lack of clarity on who holds responsibility for parks, as well as the lack of updates regarding progress on the accepted recommendations of the previous Committee. There also seems to be a lack of clarity on the amount being spent on parks, with various figures being buried in subsections of local government spending.

- 1. We would appreciate if you could confirm which Minister in the department holds responsibility for parks and green spaces?*
- 2. The data on parks spending remains unclear and difficult to access. Will you commit to providing a yearly provision of data on how much is spent on parks?*
- 3. As per the commitment to provide regular updates to the House on progress towards implementing the recommendations of the Committee's report of 2017, please could you confirm when we can expect*



## Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee

*the next update? We hope this will include an update on monitoring of accessibility to green spaces and the work of the cross-departmental group.*

### Levelling Up Parks Fund

The Committee welcomes the additional funding from the Levelling Up Parks Fund and the information on 1 August regarding its launch, following its announcement as part of the Autumn Spending Review last year. Much of the written evidence we received in relation to our evidence session highlighted a desire for further information as to how the Parks Fund will be allocated. Evidence also suggested that many local authorities struggle to access grant-style funding when they have little resource to put together costly, time-consuming bids, with some local authorities being considerably more skilled at putting bids together than others. We therefore welcome the removal of the competitive bidding process in this case.

*4. In addition to the £9m Levelling Up Parks Fund that was announced in Autumn 2021, an additional £30m was announced as part of the Levelling Up White Paper in February 2022. We would be grateful for a breakdown of how Government plans to spend the £30m. Could you confirm when and how this funding will be allocated and distributed, in addition to the £9m?*

*5. Some witnesses suggested Government funding should be used more creatively to help with systemic change, rather than "just putting plasters on things". Will there be discussion with key stakeholders in the sector about how best to invest this funding?*

*6. Oral and written evidence we have received has praised the Future Parks Accelerator Programme for using funding innovatively to support local authorities to invest in their parks. Does the Government plan to engage further with the Future Parks Accelerator Initiative, and provide further funding for the programme to allow them to reach more local authorities?*

|

### Long-term sustainability

Many witnesses pointed out how small the scale of investment has been, and that the Levelling Up Parks Fund was not a substantial amount. They raised concerns about 'sporadic' grants focusing mostly on creation or refurbishment of parks. We heard that local authorities require security in their funding if they are going to plan ahead. The LGA emphasised the need for sustainable, long-term revenue funding to keep parks running year in, year out, to help with maintenance costs. We also heard the need to place the parks funding challenge within the broader context of sustainable development and greening our towns and cities, such as the move to net zero, climate resilience, focus on pride of place and the levelling-up agenda. We were told that the Government should consider parks as essential infrastructure, viewing them as essential for the public's mental and physical wellbeing, and therefore funding them as such. We welcome the Department for Transport's recent announcement on trials for GPs prescribing activities such as walking and cycling.

*7. In addition to capital funding, such as the Levelling Up Parks Fund, what plans do Government have to support local authorities who cannot afford to provide the regular, revenue funding needed for the maintenance and day-to-day management of their green spaces? Will the support be reliable and continuous, so parks are not left to decline further and previous levels of funding can be restored?*



## Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee

*8. The evidence we received emphasised the need for quality green space. Some have suggested there should be a legal duty to manage public green space to a green flag award standard across the UK, backed up by funding to local authorities. Is this something you would consider?*

*9. We understand that the pocket parks scheme has now been discontinued. Will a formal evaluation of this scheme be published, so that lessons learned can be shared?*

### **Parks Action Group**

Stakeholders informed us that their experience of the Parks Action Group was one of frustration and minimal lasting impact, as many felt it did not have a strong set of objectives and lacked timely publication or visibility for any work that was done. The LGA described a lack of engagement from the Department for Health and Social Care, which they felt was essential for parks to be considered through the lens of their health and wellbeing impact. Evidence also widely suggested there was an exclusion of local authority representation, particularly of parks managers as experts in the field, who could offer invaluable insight into where investment could be directed for most impact and sustainability. Some stakeholders suggested that a cross-departmental funding mechanism be created to encourage local authorities to view parks as assets to invest in.

*10. Are there any plans to create a similar sector group to allow people on the ground to regularly provide the Department with their expertise and views?*

*11. Stakeholders suggested there is a lack of cross-departmental or cross-policy action, as well as a lack of clarity on who is leading on issues of urban parks and green spaces. Can the sector expect stronger cross-departmental leadership from DLUHC?*

*12. How will you ensure the voices of local authorities and their parks managers are adequately represented in future discussions with the Department on how best to invest in parks and green infrastructure?*

### **Planning**

We received evidence pointing out the benefits that would arise from green spaces having a national policy – allowing green infrastructure to be better connected to wider Government objectives, and in turn promoting green travel routes, nature recovery networks and better ecosystem services.

*13. Can we expect a national development management policy for parks and green spaces?*

*14. The LGA would like to see public open space protected in planning guidance, to ensure green space in publicly owned areas is not subject to development. Are there plans to update the national planning practise guidance, last updated in 2014? If so, what changes are envisaged?*

Many stakeholders have referred to parks as “lifelines” during the pandemic. We cannot overemphasise the importance of public parks and it is integral that the role they can play in wider Government agendas not only be recognised, but be supported with action. The Committee would welcome your response to each issue raised above by Tuesday 15 November.



**Levelling Up, Housing  
and Communities  
Committee**

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clive Betts'.

**Clive Betts MP**  
**Chair, Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee**