

# Written Evidence – The Gardens Trust (PTC0013)

## Introduction to the Gardens Trust

The Gardens Trust is the only UK national charity dedicated to protecting and conserving our heritage of designed landscapes. We campaign on their behalf, undertake research and conservation work, and encourage public appreciation and involvement. We work with communities across the country, particularly through the national network of County and Country Garden Trusts.

The Gardens Trust is a statutory consultee in the English planning system. This means that local authorities have to consult us on any planning applications that affect gardens and landscapes listed on Historic England's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of special historic interest. We are always happy to discuss proposals with owners, developers or local people in order to get the best outcome. The Gardens Trust is supported in this important conservation role by local County Garden Trusts.

We are passionate about sharing our love of landscapes with the wider community, through campaigns such as Sharing Repton: Historic Landscapes for All and our volunteer capacity building Historic Landscape Project.

We work closely with the Welsh Historic Parks and Gardens Trust and Scotland's Garden and Landscape Heritage, who fulfil a similar role in their countries.

## Our reason for submitting evidence

The Gardens Trust is committed to both the conservation of historic parks and gardens, and to ensuring that their benefits can be enjoyed by all communities. This of course includes urban green spaces. Lockdowns and restrictions on movement and social interaction have made these all the more valuable and appreciated. The impact of Covid-19 on green spaces and freedom of access to them has been of great concern to us. It has provided much of the material for our collaborative theme of 'Unforgettable Gardens', which focuses on the value of historic open space but also the threats to it - [Unforgettable Gardens - The Gardens Trust](#).

## **Submission of evidence on the long-term impact of the pandemic on 'housing and green spaces', specifically green spaces**

1. What is the long-term impact of the pandemic likely to be on housing and green spaces in towns and cities?
  - "Local urban parks, including historic parks, have acted as vital community resources amidst the COVID-19 pandemic". (*Heritage Counts 2020, p32*) The importance of access to green space has never been clearer to both the communities using it, and those responsible for its provision. Giving space for daily exercise and social meetings, these sites have been invaluable. The availability of green space for relaxation and exercise has also been appreciated by many who in the past would not have appreciated their value.
  - The increased habitual use and appreciation of green space is likely to last for at least a generation and it is now understood that this provision is essential for the wellbeing of our population. It is essential that this demand is met both in terms of protecting and maintaining the green space that already exists but also in terms of green space provision around new housing.
  - Yet, green space is facing increased pressures threatening its survival. In the short term, increase use means increased wear and tear in often fragile sites. Longer term, there are some even more serious threats:
    - Organisations with green space in their portfolio are looking to save costs at a financially challenging time by reducing maintenance expenditure.
    - Green space providers are losing the commercial income they have been encouraged to rely on to meet ongoing costs (eg events, secondary spend).
    - We expect to see increased development threat as organisations owning green space look to rebuild depleted funds with the sale or development of part of the land.
    - Many sites had growth, sustainability and resilience plans devised to secure their future in uncertain times that have been thrown into disarray and may now be either unviable or inadequate.
    - The answer lies in ensuring the safeguarding of green space and provision of adequate funding for its protection and survival.
2. How might this increase, or decrease, inequalities within towns and cities?
  - Pandemic lockdown restrictions shone a stark spotlight on the inequality of some enjoying the privilege of a private garden and others having to rely on public green space for exercise and fresh air. The deterioration or loss of green space due to financial threats resulting from the pandemic would impact more on those within towns and cities who do not have private gardens – often those from underprivileged backgrounds or areas of urban deprivation. We must work to make sure that those relying solely on public green space for health and wellbeing are not at a disadvantage compared to private garden owners or those with the mobility to access distanced open space such as the countryside in their leisure time. This consciousness of social welfare responsibilities was the inspiration behind the creation of public parks from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and is an exemplary part of Britain's history that we must uphold.
  - It is accepted that access to green space plays a key social role. The *Space to Thrive* report, 2020, records that:
    1. Physical health, mental wellbeing and life satisfaction are all enhanced through access to and use of parks and green spaces.

2. Parks create important opportunities for social integration.
3. Parks provide opportunities for community engagement and local residents value the chance to be involved in designing and improving their green spaces.
4. Parks and green spaces highlight inequalities in society.
5. Parks and green spaces enable people to connect with nature, which in turn brings benefits in terms of wellbeing.
6. There are economic benefits of parks and green spaces.

It is clear that reduced access to quality green space results in lower community wellbeing than those with better access.

- Space to Thrive reports that: 'There is evidence that the quality of parks and green spaces is worse in areas of lower income. Minorities are often marginalised in terms of access to green space in addition to the other areas of discrimination they face.' This is an inequality set to increase as the quality of parks and green space and access to it is threatened.
  - It is likely that local authorities will choose to prioritise funding for high-profile 'destination' parks rather than small local green space. This will disproportionately benefit those living in destination areas, likely to be affluent, or those who have the mobility to travel to them. Thus the inequality between these groups and others will grow. Indeed, such small local green space was largely created in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to mitigate the 19<sup>th</sup> century error of focussing efforts on large destination parks, as it was found that often those most in need of the green space lacked the resource to travel to it.
  - There is a vicious circle of inequality, in which those living in areas with successful green space provision are more likely to enjoy economic or educational privilege. Our experience is that these people are more likely to be active volunteers for their local green space and therefore able to care for and lobby for green space provision. So the inequality grows.
  - A commitment to social cohesion and a sense that we are all part of the same human team with the same human rights is essential if social inequalities are to be properly addressed by Government policy. At some stages of the pandemic lockdowns, everyone in urban areas uniformly relied on public green space for permitted socialising. This communal socialising is essential not only for individual mental health but also for community cohesion – we must make sure that access to quality green space is equal going forwards so that community cohesion and commitment to reducing inequality can be strong.
3. How might this increase, or decrease, inequalities between towns and cities?  
Different towns and cities have different financial situations, make different funding decisions, and have different green space to support. This will inevitably mean that green space access will vary from town to town, resulting in the communities of some towns having better access to quality green space and its associated benefits than others, in the way described in question 2. Government needs to 'level up' to ensure that the weakest are not disadvantaged.
  4. What action is needed from the UK Government, town and cities leaders, and others to mitigate the risk of any increasing inequalities?
    - There needs to be significant financial investment in green space maintenance so that the risk of neglect and consequent spiral of decline is mitigated.
    - There needs to be a commitment to financially support owners of green space (including local authorities, schools, charitable organisations and others) so that

they are not tempted to look at land sale or development as a way of saving money or meeting other costs.

- There needs to be support for those researching specific green space at a local level so that the value and needs of specific green space sites can be properly understood and reflected in local funding decisions rather than them being made from a position of ignorance.
  - There must be recognition of the value of a skilled professional workforce able to properly support green space at an appropriate level for this invaluable and incomparable national resource so that local authorities and others are not tempted to make redundancies in this area.
  - Building on the increased appreciation of green space, there must be increased support to improve volunteering opportunities and engagement across all communities. Our reference point is heritage volunteering, as described in Heritage Counts 2020: 'Heritage volunteering supports socialising, skills development and personal growth (BOP Consulting, 2011 for NLHF). People with a wider social circle of support are considered 50% less prone to physical health risks associated with loneliness (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Heritage volunteering leads to the development of key skills and confidence, thereby enabling volunteers to access quality jobs and working environments that are crucial for equalising opportunities for young people and those new to the job market. 32.7% of respondents to the NLHF survey agreed that the volunteering helped their career development while 33.2% associated the experience with skills upgrade and their wider self-esteem.' It is our experience that volunteering around green space is largely the preserve of the educated, white and affluent over-60s. Given the advantages of the volunteering experience set out in Heritage Counts, this is an unacceptable inequality.
5. How could the UK Government, town and cities leaders, and others use their response to the pandemic to reduce inequalities in housing and green spaces?
- Investment into public green space so that those without private gardens who rely on this space are not at a disadvantage to those with private gardens.
  - Ensure a consistent quality of provision of green space across and within towns and cities so that regardless of postcode everyone can enjoy equity in provision.
  - Investment to raise public awareness of issues around green space provision so it is understood across all communities that these are a shared communal resource in which everyone is an equal stakeholder.
  - Engagement in green space volunteering is a virtuous circle that both helps the sites at times of acute need such as now, and those volunteering, as set out in Heritage Counts (see Q4). There is currently an inequality in volunteering engagement across society but increase awareness that the value of green space brings an opportunity to rebalance this. There must now be adequate support and capacity building for local volunteer groups so that they are empowered to support their local green space. It is essential that this capacity building targets under-served communities and not just those traditionally involved in volunteering: we must make sure that all areas of community are empowered to use and care for their green space.

*1 July 2021*