



People's Parks

Roundtable

New Model Thinking for Park Futures

Draft roundtable paper

People's Parks



**Mountsfield
Park**

© living space project

Preface

This paper is the first step in the People's Parks debate by the Living Space Project, on the solutions for shaping the future of parks

● **Parks and green spaces** are central to feeling good about a place, our well being, and health. But, central and local authorities are biting hard on parks and green spaces. Putting them at risk of being lost to the public and local neighbourhoods.

● **The paper presents** the findings of People's Parks first roundtable discussion to consider new model thinking for the future parks and green spaces: from policy, economic modelling through to the collaborative governance and ownership.

● **Many thanks** to the people who took part in the roundtable, taking time out of busy days, to support our joint thinking on the future of parks.

● **This paper will be followed** by research, projects, and cross sector collaboration.

● **We really welcome comments** on the 'consideration questions' set out in this paper. Are they the right ones? What are your thoughts on the answers?

● **Comments, insights, or case studies, are also welcome** on the opportunities, and potential economic models, for inclusive co governance and co collaboration of parks, and greens spaces.

Please send your input to Emma Herbert, at:

Emma@livingspaceproject.com

Maria Adebowale

Director, Living Space Project February 2015

About Living Space Project

Living Space Project is a consultancy and project hub, for inclusive and collaborative urban place making. We focus on collaborative place making in diverse urban neighbourhoods.

If you would like to see how we could help, drop us a line at:

hello@livingspaceproject.com

We are always happy to help.

Our partners and clients are developers, architects, designers, charitable trusts, universities, artists, local authorities, and central government.

We offer a three programme service: research, co-design, and real community outreach. The programmes anchor our practice on creating places and spaces people want to live, work and play in.

Our expertise on collaborative urban place making and urban design, means that we are regularly asked to speak at local, national and international gatherings, act as advisors on panels, judge awards, and join large scale project partnerships teams.

You can also find more about our work, the team, and our projects on our website

<http://www.livingspaceproject.com>

1 The Roundtable Brief

The roundtable event was designed to curate ideas, encourage conversations, and support knowledge transfer around exploring the development of models, for resilient, and vibrant parks and green spaces, now and in the future.

The Living Space Project hosted the event with, People's Parks co-partner Xtend Ltd.

The aim of the Roundtable was to develop the agenda on the future of parks and green spaces, with Living Space Project, other agencies, business, funders and organisations.

We focused on examining policy, practical initiatives and best practice areas, and developing models of community and multi-sector ownership. Particularly, reviewing the evidence base of emerging models, that could tackle threats and opportunities, faced by parks and green spaces.

As part of the roundtable brief, this paper suggests key questions for consideration.

1.1 People's Parks

Our People's Parks Initiative is investigating how to combine park and

green space making, with a spectrum of income generating activities and innovations, under the auspices of community ownership or governance.

We're exploring how this could provide an opportunity for parks and green spaces to retain income that is generated, to reinvest in its own growth, creating a hub for the local economy throughout the year.

1.2 The Outcomes

The outcomes of the event were:

- **Bringing stakeholders together** - from across government, NGOs, community, business and media - working on social environmental research and policy.
- **Enabling participants to gain an overview**, and give a perspective on the current state of the parks agenda, by mapping current operational, research and policy activities of key relevance; highlighting areas of potential synergy and common ground, creating opportunities for further development, and mainstreaming to relevant key issues (e.g. well-being, climate change, business and enterprise, arts and culture, training and jobs).
- **Early thinking** future economic models for parks and green spaces
- **Developing and creating** 'consideration questions' for wider

comment and initial thoughts, within and outside the wider public debate on the future of parks, including economic models, diverse co ownership and co governance.

2 Context

How we look after green spaces and parks is a national and global concern. Developers, charities, communities, local authorities and central government are increasingly aware of the importance parks play, and at the same time the threats facing parks.

Parks are crucial to local wellbeing, local biodiversity and climate change adaptation. They offer: green spaces that are very much a part of a local place's heritage; local participation; improved health; and the opportunity for green jobs, training and enterprise.

But, in this time of austerity, it is accepted that with tight public purse strings, parks are under threat: their upkeep, and their survival.

At the same time, the last two to three years has seen a call for leadership on the way we tackle the future of parks.

2.1 Politics, Policy & Innovation

2.1.1 Central Politics

The political realm for parks, stands in against the present politics, where the state is being rolled back, and localism

is the context in which park innovation operates.

Localism, in essence is the decentralisation of government regulation, policy and budget. As part of the reform from central to local governance communities, the public authorities and developers are now being encouraged to take on more responsibilities for parks: old and new.

With the arrival of the Localism Act, including the potential for communities to take on the ownership of local places, like parks, the emphasis is cross sector partnerships. The partnerships, or single ownership of parks, however, are impacted by a number of policy discussions.

2.1.2 Policy & Innovation

Policy and political discussions are driven centrally and locally, by the increasing demand of urban housing development, and the potential risk that green spaces and parks remain only for a minority of affluent places, and are lost for the majority of disadvantaged places.

2.1.3 Innovation

The current suggestions for potential policies and innovations by, amongst others, think tanks, policy makers, innovation labs and, include:

- Full or partial council tax rebate, for local residents who join civil or community groups, and volunteer to

maintain and improve nearby green spaces.

- Park levies, where residents can vote to enforce a levy on properties within an agreed area, close to a park, or urban green space. The levies are then collected, in addition to council tax, and put into the maintenance of parks or other green spaces.
- Developers create endowments,

with local authorities; philanthropists and other funders/investors; which are used to create legacy trust funds, to finance parks and green spaces.

The current innovation discussions, will have an impact on the future of parks, and their role as green spaces and hubs for collaborative governance, training, culture and local enterprise.

3 Roundtable Discussions

From the beginning, to the end of the roundtable, the context for the discussion was rooted in the belief that parks had immense economic, social and environmental value.

It was felt, new models for the future of urban parks and green spaces, needed to be connected to, amongst others, politics, income generation, research, advocacy, community ownership and innovation. It was agreed that Diagram 1 (see right), illustrated how the future of parks and green spaces, are closely connected to a wider set of issues.

A range of issues were discussed and considered at the roundtable. The essence this discussion centred around six points. These were:

- Urgency and pace of decline.
- More compelling stories.
- Missing political policy agenda.
- Identified gaps in park innovations.

Parks

connected issues, contexts and programmes



- Economic models and vehicles.
- Leadership platforms and skills gaps

Table 1 (next page) shows six points discussed, potential opportunities and barriers for each of the seven issues discussed and the points of each discussion shown in Diagram 1.

3.1 Discussion issues and key points

Table 1

ISSUES	DISCUSSION POINTS
1. Urgency & pace of decline	<p>Highlight the need to show the rapid pace of decline, and the sense of urgency to halt, the threat to parks.</p> <p>Create a 'burning platform' for cross sector and community engagement ' that illustrates urgency and offers solutions, that can also be scalable.</p>
2. Compelling stories, dialogue & advocacy	<p>Represent better the human stories connected to the diverse community of urban parks and green spaces, and the role they play in creating better places to live, support local enterprise and simply play in.</p> <p>Help the traditional park sector get better at marketing the value of parks.</p> <p>Make robust research findings more accessible.</p> <p>Be pragmatic, and have the ability to provide strong qualitative and quantitative evidence and the business case. Highlight concern at the seemingly lack of a wide spread party political voices for the protection of parks.</p>
3. Missing political & infrastructure agenda	<p>Highlight concern at the seemingly lack of a wide spread party political voices for the protection of parks.</p> <p>Advocate for policies on parks and green spaces, which are presently lacking across the political party board.</p> <p>Highlight better the value of parks as community, local and national infrastructure assets.</p>
4. Innovation gaps & data	<p>Widen the potential for enterprise and innovation connected to parks.</p> <p>Develop cross sector budgets for parks, for example with health, education, business and skills.</p> <p>Research innovation gaps on building the supply and demand side of green spaces and parks.</p>

ISSUES (continued)

DISCUSSION POINTS

5. Economic models & funding vehicles

Get much better at analysing data related to parks and green spaces.

Continue to document what economic, governance, and ownership models support successful parks and green spaces: where, when, how and why.

Gather more examples of 'ready, steady cook' flexible models that can support small, medium or large scale parks with different levels of resources and assets.

Document examples of park generated income and non park generated income avenues that can be ring fenced for local parks.

Research the potential for co-ownership of parks between the public sector, community groups and the private sector.

Investigate the potential for social investment, and social impact bonds for parks or green space based projects and enterprise.

Review the role that philanthropy has in supporting the future of parks and green spaces.

Encourage thought leadership on the use of the Community Infrastructure Levy and S106 to care for parks and green spaces.

6. Leadership platforms, and skills gaps

Create a collaboration of 'unusual' and 'usual' suspects, from diverse communities, neighbourhoods, business, culture and education to plug and develop a political and leadership platform for parks.

Encourage 'can do' and 'thought' leadership on parks in all sectors: social, public and private.

Support programmes for flag ship economic park models.

Assist park and green space generated social enterprise and training, for example, land management, park maintenance, forestry, food growing or climate change adaptation.

All of the above discussions were not exclusive stand alone conversations. They were spoken of and understood as being interconnected issues, leading to the longevity of green spaces and parks.

4 Considerations

In thinking through the best options there are a number of considerations that need to be taken into account.

The Table below (see Table 2) focuses on questions from the roundtable.

They act as points of reflection for creating solid fast paced options for the survival of green spaces and parks, and, collaborative place making leadership, that creates viable economic park models in diverse urban neighbourhoods and cities.

Consideration Questions

- Are there other action points, opportunities and barriers that need to be included?
- Are co-governed and potentially co owned park models viable? Is this purely a matter of better change management?
- What conditions are needed for park and green space innovation?
- How can income be generated from parks, that is fair, and does not impact on the quality of the space?
- What economic models currently exist for the parks and greens spaces? What works and why? Which won't work and why?
- What role, if any can social investment , philanthropy , s106 or the infrastructure levy play in the renaissance of urban parks?
- How can we best create diverse collaborative cross sector leadership for the future of parks?
- How are the political parties and civil parties to be supported in developing a strong agenda for the future of parks?

Table 2: consideration questions

As mentioned earlier in the paper, we are actively encouraging comments on the 'consideration questions' set out above. Are they the right ones? And, what are your thoughts on the answers?

We also very much welcome comments, insights or case studies on the opportunities and potential economic models for inclusive co governance and co collaboration parks and greens spaces.

So please send your input to Emma Herbert: Emma@livingspaceproject.com