

Future Parks

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An evaluation of the options for parks services

As a bolder approach than alternative options, the key benefit of a Parks Trust is that it delivers long term benefits in a way that other options can't guarantee.

Model	Description	Pros	Cons	Comments
Retain parks in local authority and manage as status quo	<p>Local authority continues to run public parks whilst trying to reduce costs and/or increase income from e.g. increased commercial activities</p> <p>Will likely necessitate reducing maintenance of parks until funding improves.</p>	<p>Local authorities care about parks, have a long history of looking after them and are directly accountable to the public.</p> <p>Does not require major cultural shift within local authority or change in public perceptions.</p> <p>Retains knowledge and experience in local authority.</p>	<p>Likely to be financially unsustainable over time leading to potentially irreversible loss/degradation of urban green space.</p> <p>Income generation and/or cost reduction opportunities may not be fully realisable, particularly given that (a) insecurity of funding and annual budget cycles will make it harder to make long term strategic decisions and (b) the ability to attract other sources of funding is limited.</p>	<p>Relying on this option is likely to make parks unsustainable due to council budget pressures. This will likely lead to a steady decline in quality of parks.</p>
Increase council tax	<p>Local authority to raise and ring-fence funds required for park management through increase in council tax.</p> <p>Local authority continues to own and run city's public parks.</p>	<p>If politically acceptable, could provide a short to medium-term funding solution.</p> <p>Public opinions research by Britain Thinks suggested that there may be public support for ring-fencing funds for parks.</p>	<p>Does not ensure long-term financial stability for parks management and could be reversed in future.</p> <p>Temptation to use the extra revenue for other purposes means income not guaranteed.</p> <p>May be publicly unpopular or raise expectations of improved services which cannot be delivered.</p> <p>Ability to attract funding from other sources remains limited.</p>	<p>Potentially unsustainable in the long term as further pressure on budgets mount.</p> <p>Even if funding remains ringfenced, ownership and management remains the same, raising questions around ability to capitalise on new opportunities.</p>
Outsource management	<p>Local authority continues to own parks but outsources maintenance and operations.</p>	<p>Potential for cost savings through economies of scale.</p> <p>Protects service levels to a basic contractual minimum.</p>	<p>Does not ensure long-term financial stability for parks management as no guaranteed budget beyond contractual period.</p> <p>Loss of public involvement and likely backlash over perceived privatisation.</p> <p>Focus on cost cutting rather than growth of parks as a major community asset</p>	<p>This could be a short term option, but is likely to be unpopular with the public. In the longer term it is likely to lead to a decline in the benefits from parks</p>
Parks Trust with endowment	<p>Establish independent charitable trust which park assets are transferred into e.g. under long lease.</p> <p>Local authority and/or other partners contribute to an endowment which guarantees core funding. Remaining income is generated through trading activities.</p> <p>New ownership and management model for parks, enabling new funding opportunities to be realised.</p>	<p>Long term solution which protects parks from further service cuts and enables a more strategic focus on improving quality.</p> <p>Endowment creates a mechanism for those who benefit from parks to invest in them and ensures long-term financial stability.</p> <p>Structure fosters innovation in parks management, allowing greater focus and flexibility on how parks deliver for people.</p> <p>Public accountability is hardwired in through the lease and governance structures.</p> <p>The governance structure preserves public accountability, with the public as key 'client' - increased and better opportunities for public involvement.</p> <p>Public opinions research by Britain Thinks suggests that there may be public support for the a city-wide Trust dedicated to parks.</p>	<p>Public might feel local authority is 'selling family silver' by leasing parks to a Trust.</p> <p>Potentially financially challenging if not able to secure adequate endowment or generate enough commercial income.</p> <p>May be difficult for people to understand accountability outside of local authority, especially if some decisions are not universally supported.</p> <p>May need to make difficult decisions in order to work e.g. selling land to create endowment, charging for activities, etc.</p>	<p>Requires up-front commitment from Council (Officers and Members) to get off the ground.</p> <p>New model aligns innovation in ownership, management and funding to ensure maximum potential for success, drawing on many aspects of other models.</p>

Model	Description	Pros	Cons	Comments
Parks Trust without endowment	<p>Establish independent charitable trust which park assets are transferred into e.g. under long lease.</p> <p>Income is generated through trading activities.</p> <p>New ownership and management model for parks, enabling new funding opportunities to be realised.</p>	<p>Long term solution which protects parks from further service cuts and enables a more strategic focus on improving quality.</p> <p>Structure fosters innovation in parks management, allowing greater focus and flexibility on how parks deliver for people.</p> <p>Public Accountability is hardwired in through the lease and governance structures.</p> <p>Less complex - don't have the complexity of establishing an endowment at the same time as setting up a Parks Trust.</p> <p>There are already a number of precedents.</p> <p>Public opinions research by Britain Thinks suggests that there may be public support for the a city-wide Trust dedicated to parks.</p>	<p>Public might feel local authority is 'selling family silver' by leasing parks to a Trust and not solving the funding issue.</p> <p>Reliant on commercial income or decreasing grant from local government.</p> <p>Doesn't necessarily create a mechanism for benefactors to contribute to a sustainable future for parks.</p> <p>May be difficult for people to understand accountability outside of local authority, especially if some decisions are not universally supported.</p> <p>May need to make difficult decisions in order to work e.g. charging for activities, etc.</p>	<p>Requires up-front commitment from Council (Officers and Members) to get off the ground.</p> <p>New model aligns innovation in ownership and management.</p>
Partners management or asset transfer	<p>Transfer some parks to community groups/charities or use management partners e.g. on lease.</p> <p>May retain some parks in-house.</p>	<p>Local knowledge and enthusiasm is harnessed.</p> <p>Able to fit management arrangements to local circumstances.</p> <p>Grows stakeholder engagement and could lead to innovation.</p>	<p>Breaks up the unity of the parks estate and could cause confusion re accountability.</p> <p>Management fees likely to come under budgetary pressure.</p> <p>May be seen as 'off-loading' risks to community or partners who may or may not have capacity to deliver.</p> <p>Limited demonstrable success across the country except in unique circumstances.</p>	<p>Flexible management arrangements can be built into a Parks Trust model but does not have the added advantage of ensuring equity and long term financial stability.</p>
Partial Parks Trust	<p>Move those parks with biggest commercial/endowment potential to independent trust and retain others in local authority.</p>	<p>Gives larger parks freedom to become more entrepreneurial, providing strategic stability.</p> <p>Reduces risk/costs of moving all parks at once into a new Trust.</p> <p>Greater chance of initial Trust success - simpler and quicker.</p>	<p>Creates a two tier system with parks "left behind" in council vulnerable to cuts.</p> <p>Inability for high-performing parks to cross-subsidise other parks.</p> <p>Parks perceived as having greatest opportunity often in wealthy areas, so transfer would likely exacerbate inequality across the city.</p> <p>Reduces economy of scale for both transferred and remaining pieces of portfolio.</p> <p>Unclear basis for transfer - parks with greatest current income generation may not be those with greatest future potential if managed differently.</p> <p>Confusing to public and lack clear lines of accountability.</p>	<p>High risk as leaves large part of portfolio vulnerable to local authority pressures and creates a greater budgetary burden on local authority.</p> <p>If a local authority goes for an endowment in a model which only includes destination parks as a first phase, they may have less leverage in conversations with endowment contributors. It may also become difficult to incorporate other green space assets further down the line, especially if this involves going back to the same endowment contributors for a further contribution.</p>