

Future Parks

www.futureparks.org

Introduction to the Parks Trust model

Why do parks matter?

Parks and green spaces have enormous social, economic and environmental value:

- Parks play a huge role in keeping people healthy, saving the NHS money.¹
- Places with more green space are home to healthier populations.²
- Green spaces aid social cohesion and improve people's satisfaction with their neighbourhoods.³
- Green spaces help minimise the effects of climate change.
- Well-maintained green spaces increase house prices, create attractive neighbourhoods and boost the economy.⁴
- Parks and green spaces are often integral to a city's identity and contribute to its sense of place.





The threat to parks and green space

- In many urban local authorities, the Parks team is responsible for tens to hundreds of parks and green spaces across a city – from botanic gardens to woodlands, nature reserves, Victorian parks and recreation grounds.
- However, parks are a non-statutory service, which means that their future is not safeguarded and is vulnerable to budget cuts.
- Local authority funding has been reduced by approximately 40% since 2010/11, and further significant cuts are in the pipeline.
- As councils face challenging financial pressures, there is a danger that some park services will not survive. Heritage Lottery Fund's report *State of UK Public Parks (2016)* outlines this situation.⁵
- While local authority funding is decreasing, those that benefit the most from parks don't have a mechanism for contributing to their maintenance.

The Parks Trust model

The Parks Trust model provides a potential solution to the threat to parks and green spaces.

- In the Parks Trust model, parks and green spaces would be transferred from the local authority to a city-wide charitable Trust.
- This could manage the parks and be financed through a model of endowment and enterprise.
- An endowment would provide a safe, sustainable income stream.
- The rest of the funding could come from enterprising parks management and other income sources, such as social finance.



Why the Parks Trust model?

Compared to the alternatives, the Parks Trust model has the potential to secure long-term financial sustainability while retaining public accountability.

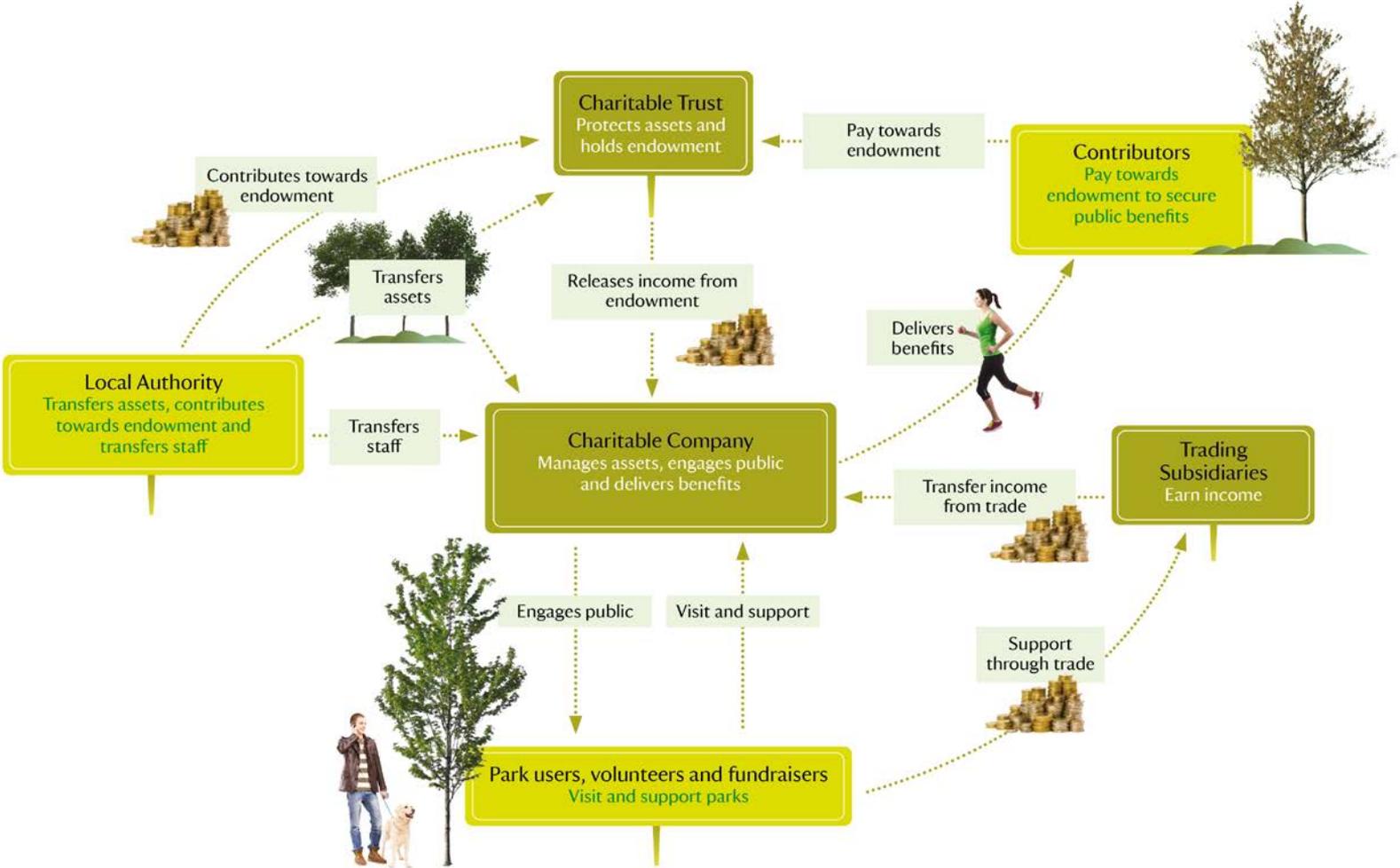
Alternative model	Comments
Retain management and ownership in-house and reduce services in line with cuts to budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If cuts continue parks will become unsustainable and a tipping point of decline will be reached.• Harder for an alternative solution to work in the future.• In many places, staff cuts have already reduced local authorities' ability to be proactive in terms of commercial enterprise and public engagement.
Increase council tax to fund parks services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dangerous precedent as cuts to services are likely to continue to create a financial gap.• If public pays more, would expect better service.• Only short term solution as cannot keep raising rate.
Outsource management of parks to a private company or social enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Short-term option to maintain services until longer term solution is established but is likely to be unpopular with the public.• In the longer term it would not deliver the public benefits that parks have the potential to deliver and so likely to be a false economy.

Will the public support this approach?

Public opinions research, commissioned from Britain Thinks by the National Trust, has shown that people generally favour the concept of a Parks Trust when presented with the alternatives. Key take-outs of the research are as follows:

1. Residents are overwhelmingly positive about the social, environmental and civic value of their local parks and green spaces.
2. Their vision for parks is for safe and accessible community spaces.
3. Residents are pessimistic about the future of green spaces in their city, and feel their worst fears confirmed when they hear about budget constraints.
4. If trade-offs are required in how parks are funded, residents feel that future decisions must not be detrimental to safety or accessibility of green spaces.
5. When reviewing potential options for looking after urban green spaces, residents favoured a dedicated Parks Trust funded by an endowment over outsourcing or private management, if the Trust is in partnership with local residents, institutions and the Council
6. To supplement the funding of green spaces, residents were most open to the idea of commercial use of green space.
7. After doing their own research, residents are surprised at the range of ways in which they could get involved in looking after green spaces in the city.

How the Parks Trust model could work



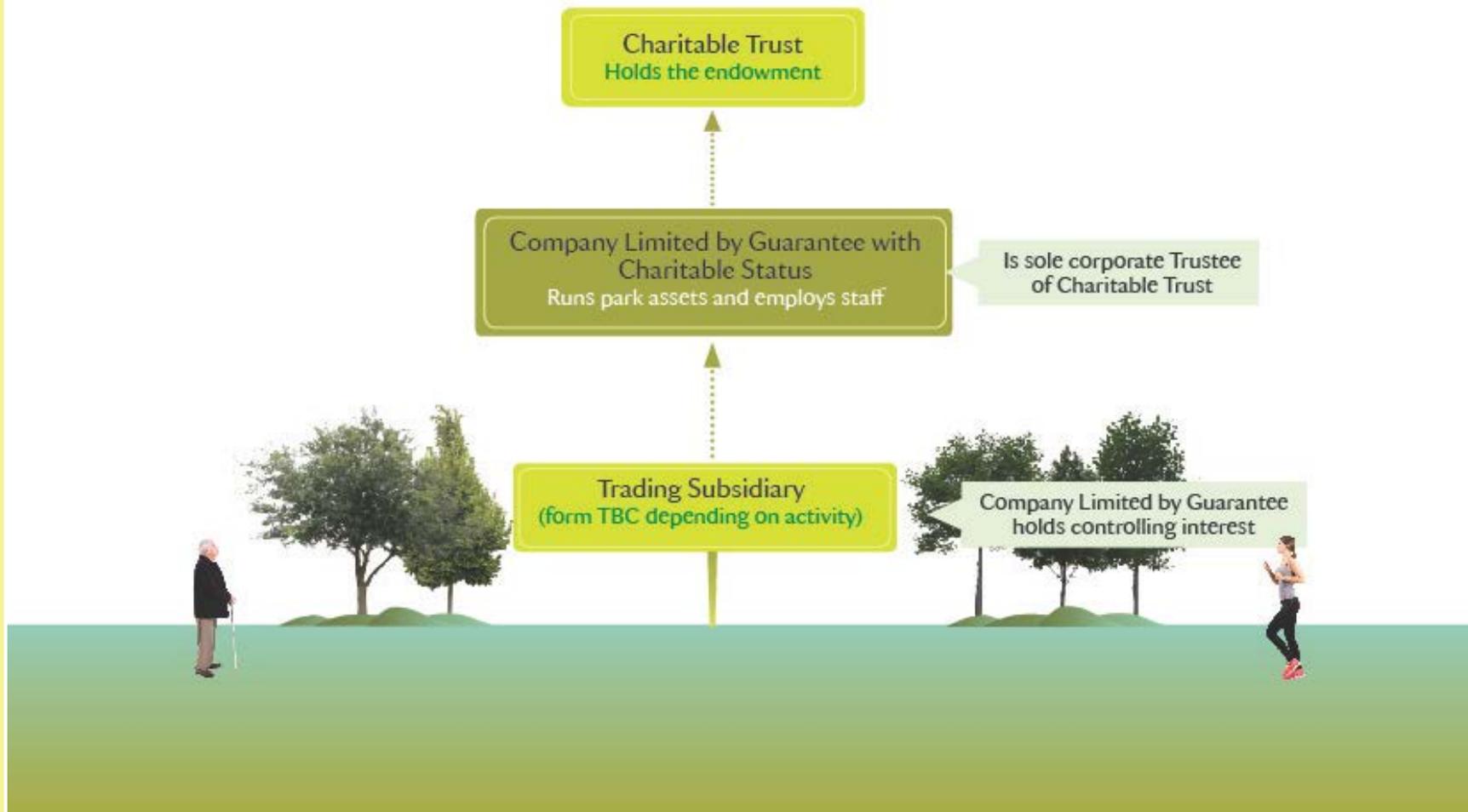
Values behind the Trust model

The Parks Trust model is underpinned by the principles of public accountability and financial sustainability.

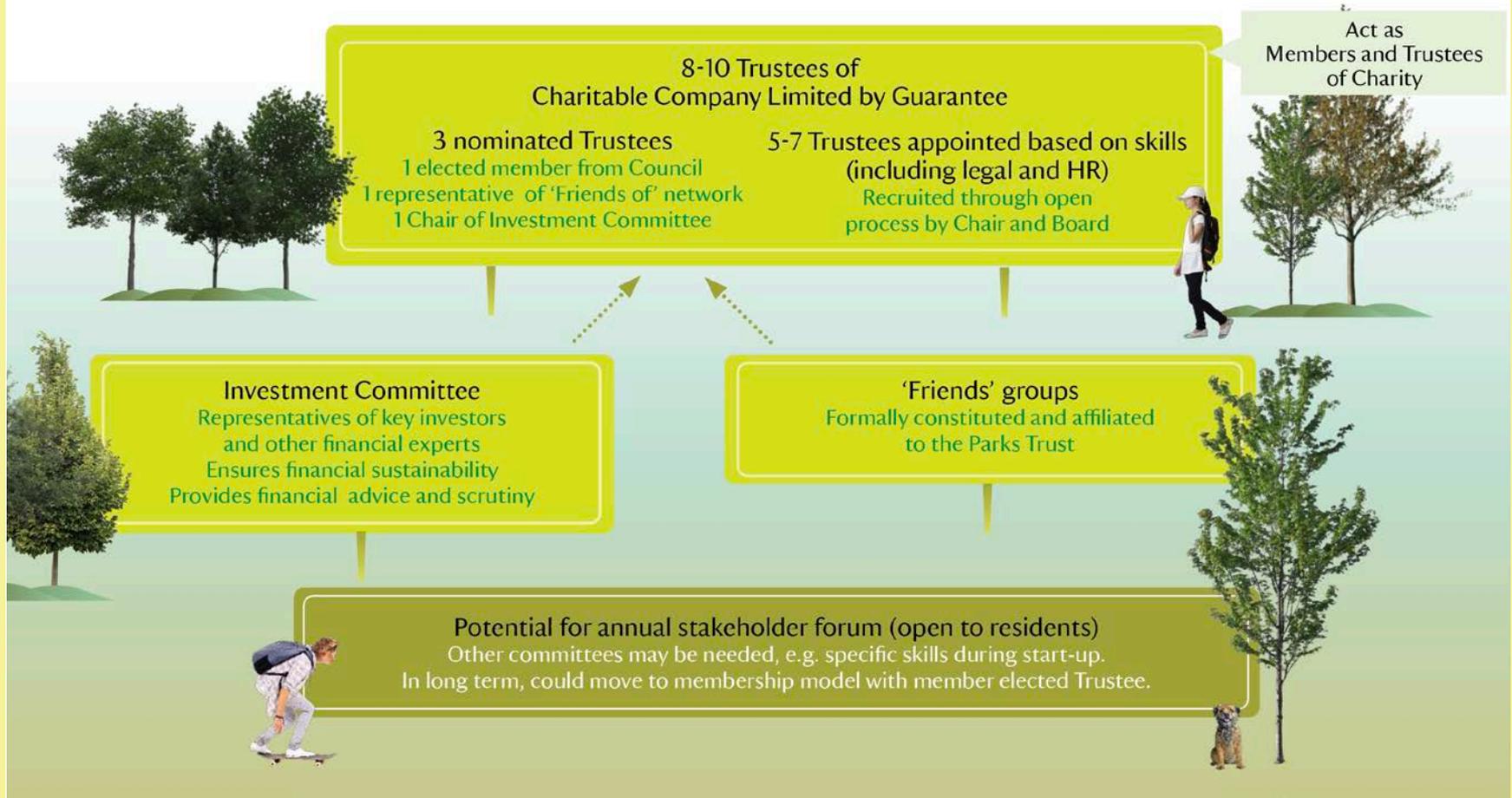
- Transferring parks to an independent Parks Trust is not ‘selling off the crown jewels’: a Parks Trust would be governed simply and transparently with public benefits at its heart.
- Provision of quality green space would be enshrined in the Trust’s charitable purpose, so the Trust would be dedicated to managing parks for a range of stakeholders and maximising their social and environmental benefits.
- The potential for the Parks Trust to be supported by an endowment creates a mechanism for those who benefit from parks to contribute.



Example of a legal structure



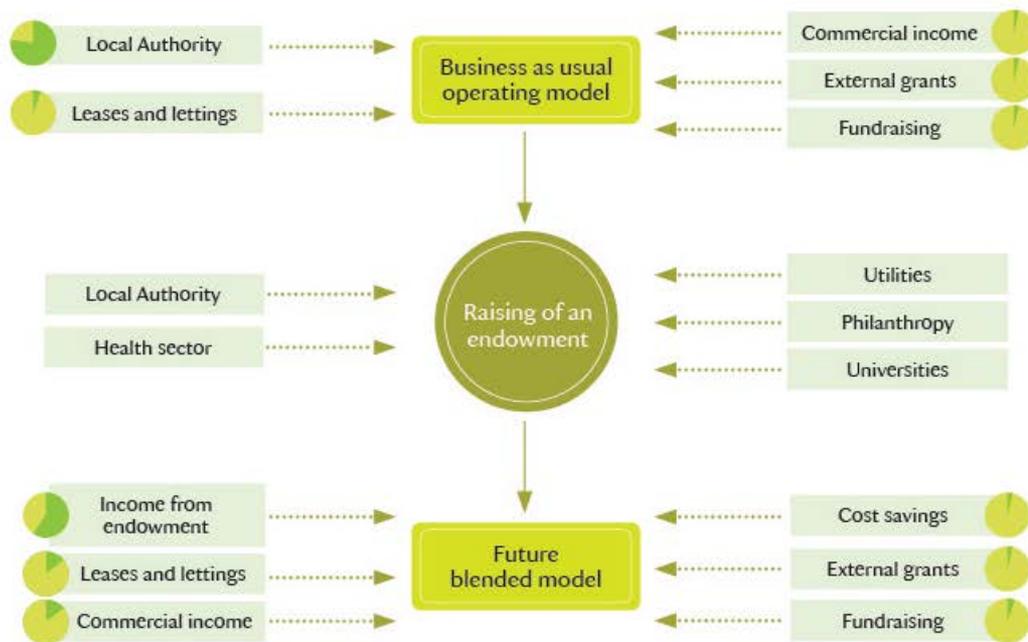
Example of a governance structure





How an endowment could work

Dark green areas of pie charts represent the approximate proportion each organisation contributes



Summary

- Parks are a highly valuable asset for any city, making significant contributions to health and ecosystem services.
- The Parks Trust model provides a potential solution to the increasing vulnerability to local authority budget cuts.
- The Parks Trust model has the potential to deliver long-term financial sustainability.
- An endowment would provide a mechanism for those who gain most from parks to contribute to them.
- When presented with the options for future funding and management of parks, the public are generally in favour of a Parks Trust supported by an endowment.



For more information, visit

www.futureparks.org

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