

Future Parks

www.futureparks.org

Recommendations for building public support

based on public opinions research by
Britain Thinks

Overview

To shape the debate around parks, we wanted to fully understand people's attitudes towards them and how people viewed options for the future management of parks.

We therefore commissioned Britain Thinks to research public attitudes towards parks and options for their future.

Based on the research findings we have developed recommendations to help galvanise public opinion in favour of a Parks Trust model.

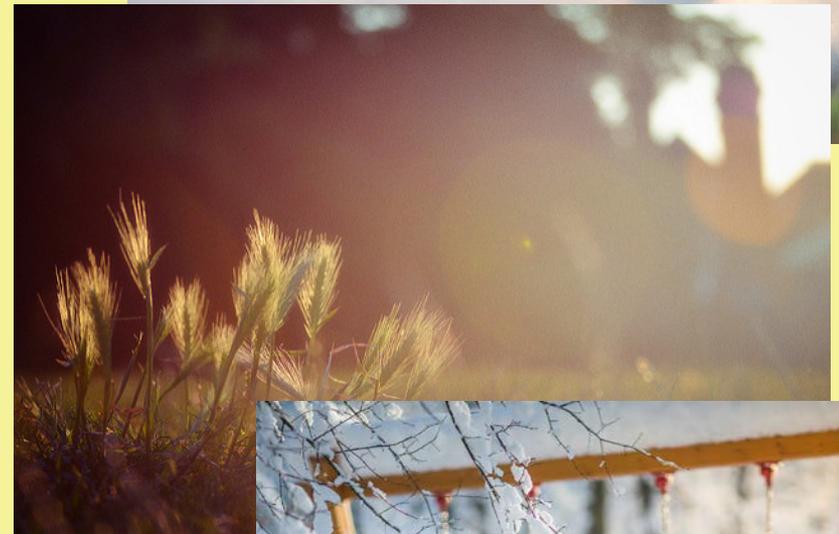


The National Trust commissioned Britain Thinks to research attitudes to parks and options for their future

Set-up stage	<p>Recruitment of 32 residents in a sample city</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representing a range of demographic and lifestyle characteristics• Varying levels of use and reasons for use of the city's urban green spaces• Coming from all four corners of the city <p>Design of materials with the National Trust</p>
Mobile Ethnography	<p>Over two weeks participants responded to diary tasks and questions about green spaces in their city</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uncovered spontaneous views and levels of understanding about the value of parks and how they are looked after, and the future of green spaces in the city
Deliberative workshop	<p>A day-long workshop in which residents were presented with information about budget cuts and given potential options for looking after parks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uncovered the criteria they felt should lie at the heart of decision-making and their reactions to a range of options for looking after green spaces in the future (including their views on responsibility and accountability)
Final phase of mobile ethnography	<p>Participants completed a final 'mission' to find ways they might get involved in looking after urban green spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding how residents go about this and opportunities and barriers to getting involved• More conclusive research is needed truly to understand residents' behaviour and motivations

Key findings

1. Residents are overwhelmingly positive about green spaces in their city, which add value to their lives, to the environment, and to the city as a whole in a number of ways
2. There are a number of outcomes residents feel parks should deliver
 - They must be safe, accessible spaces that offer opportunities to bring the community together
 - Residents also see the potential benefits green spaces deliver for the environment and the city as a whole
3. They are, however, pessimistic about the future of green spaces, predicting fewer, lower quality spaces
 - Some awareness of financial pressures and spontaneous recognition that alternative ways of looking after green spaces might be needed



Key findings

4. Residents feel their worst fears about the future are confirmed when they hear about the cost and scale of looking after green spaces and the prospect of future funding cuts
 - They accept the situation is untenable and that trade-offs are required
 - But above all else, future decisions about funding must not be detrimental to the accessibility of green spaces in different parts of the city, nor to the safety of parks, encouraging residents to use them and reap the associated health benefits
5. When reviewing potential options for looking after green spaces in the city, residents' favoured option is a dedicated trust funded by an endowment
 - This was preferred to 'privatisation' of parks, for example outsourcing or private management, which was felt to put equity and access at risk
 - It was also preferred to piecemeal approaches to individual parks which was felt to be a weaker proposition and also could leave some areas disadvantaged.
6. The Parks Trust option was seen as an 'ideal' option if it became a partnership between a newly established trust, local residents, key local institutions and the Council with the interests of the city and its residents at its heart and the option to optimise income generation
7. To supplement the funding of green spaces, residents were most open to the idea of commercial use of green space
 - Turning parks into attractions in their own right and offering ways for parks to deliver benefits for local residents and communities. However, the income from this would need to go back into the park.

Key findings

8. 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
 - Although a number of barriers – most notably lack of time, confidence, and interest – mean that few are prepared to make any commitment
 - There are, however, opportunities to capture residents' interest (particularly if harnessed to the benefits they could serve the local population and future generations)



How to build support from the public for a Parks Trust

From the research findings we have identified the following lessons:

1. Explain the potential of a Trust to safeguard provision of green space for the long term at a time of uncertainty for local authorities and public spending
2. Emphasise the fact that the Trust would be a charity and its public benefit purposes enshrined in its constitution
3. Emphasise the way in which a Trust would continue to provide access to parks in a equitable way across the city
4. Show how people will have more opportunities to engage with parks under the new Trust, e.g. dedicated volunteering support, commitment to community engagement
5. Show how this solution ensures that future income generated by the parks would go back into the parks and opens up new forms of fundraising for the 'Peoples Parks'
6. Have a clear, simple and transparent model for governance which shows how accountability to residents will work