



The Land Trust's response to the London Assembly Environment Committee's Green Spaces Investigation

9 December 2016



Introduction to the Land Trust

The Land Trust welcomes the opportunity to respond to the [London Assembly Environment Committee's Green Spaces investigation](#).

To put our response into context, the Land Trust is a national land management charity that secures long term investment for managing parks and green public open spaces in perpetuity. Our business model enables us to provide a range of funding options that secure high quality and sustainably maintained open spaces that deliver economic, environmental and social benefits.

We have ownership and/or long term management responsibility for over 2,000 hectares of land with more than 60 spaces across England, and continue to grow with a pipeline of over 3,000 hectares.

Our vision is to improve the quality of people's lives by creating sustainable, high quality green spaces that deliver economic, environmental, educational, health and social benefits in local communities. We achieve this through working with developers and landowners to provide solutions for their undevelopable land.

The evidence for the value of green spaces to society is overwhelming and must not be ignored.

We strongly believe that green public open spaces are more than just spaces that cost money to maintain - they need be considered for all of the wider benefits and value that they bring to society, such as improved health and wellbeing, environmental protections and community cohesion. In addition it is increasingly the case that green space is recognized as one of the key factors in place-making and some developers are making the link between high quality greenspace design and management and uplift in property values.

Unmanaged and unmaintained green spaces cannot deliver the benefits that society expects and needs. It is critical to ensure that a focus is given to how they function and the resources required to do this effectively. The cost to society of not managing and maintaining them long term will be much greater. Therefore, they should be considered a major part of any wider spatial framework and be high up on political agendas.

As such, we feel that we are in a strong position to be able to put forward our views in response to this inquiry. Further details can be found at www.thelandtrust.org.uk

Our Key Messages are:

- It's critical to have the necessary political will and leadership to champion green space
- There's a need to ensure that the planning process recognises and prioritises green space, funds it sustainably and ensures the maintenance and creation green space within the built environment
- Funding needs to be ring-fenced and invested to secure the long term maintenance
- A strategic approach is required to embed green space into communities
- Securing sustainable investment in green spaces will cost less in the long term
- There are a range of solutions and the Trust model is one of these

Our response to the topics for consideration

1. Best practice models of green space governance and management

We believe that The Land Trust provides a valuable model for how green space might be governed and managed. The Land Trust began life as a pilot specifically set up by English Partnerships (now HCA) to test such challenges in 2004 with CLG and HM Treasury approval.

In 2010, following HM Treasury approval we became a fully independent national charity that secures long term investment for managing parks and green public open spaces for the benefit of and in partnership with local communities.

We have ownership and/or long term management responsibility for over 2,000 hectares of land with more than 60 spaces across England and continue to grow.

Our vision is to improve the quality of people's lives by creating sustainable, high quality green spaces that deliver economic, environmental, educational, health and social benefits in local communities.

We do this by having a sustainable investment model and only take on the ownership and management of land with long term plan funding to be able to manage green spaces in perpetuity. The income comes from a variety of sources, including service charges, endowments, land disposal and via the planning system. We then appoint local partners, who manage each site on a day to day basis on our behalf – these are our Managing Partners – and are selected for their competence and links with the local area and community, so are best placed to know and understand the local needs.

As such, we:

- Take full ownership of ***all types of land, including non-developable land***
- ***Manage the associated liabilities***
- ***Maintain land in perpetuity*** with local communities, by ***using income from the investments***.
- Maximise the opportunities that long term sustainably managed land can bring.

Our model demonstrates that long-term investment in well-maintained green spaces:

- Improves the natural environment
- Enhances people's health and wellbeing
- Creates educational opportunities
- Contributes to local economic uplift
- Encourages social cohesion.

Therefore, we believe that by securing the long term management of these spaces and taking on the liabilities enables communities to develop an emotional ownership of their local green space, empowering them to influence how it is used and play a positive part in their neighbourhood.

We would be very happy to explore with you in more detail how our model might support your work in London. In the meantime, further information on our work, our objectives and our sites can be found here:

www.thelandtrust.org.uk

Please also refer to our [written evidence](#)¹ and [oral evidence](#)² at the Communities and Local Government Public Parks inquiry for further information on our model as an example of managing green spaces long term.

2. To support governance and management of green space?

3. Promoting green infrastructure (GI) thinking across London

Below are key points that we believe cover both questions 2 and 3 on both governance and management as well as GI thinking and how it may be promoted across London:

1. Strong political leadership at all levels is critical
2. Continuing to support and develop the All London Green Grid. This provides a valuable framework and enables a strategic approach that fully recognizes the wider influences and impacts of GI, thereby enabling more targeted approach to delivery. Bigger, stronger, more resilient networks.
3. Maximising opportunities for green infrastructure to deliver wider objectives, such as the provision of safe and accessible routes for cycling and walking
4. Understanding and continuing to monitor and evaluate the green infrastructure resource as a "barometer" for future change
5. Developing a much greater understanding of the natural capital of London's parks and green spaces and ensuring that this is built into a wider natural capital accounting approach to resource management
6. Continuing to explore new opportunities for engaging and empowering the whole community to be involved with green infrastructure issues and especially those communities that are traditionally thought of as being hard to reach
7. Ensuring GI continues to be wholly integral to the delivery of sustainable development
8. Supporting upfront capital investments in long-term management to secure long term benefits and the added value that this brings. The full multi-functional benefits we derive from our green spaces can only be achieved with the appropriate investment in how they are managed and maintained. A minimal resource for basic landscape management is rarely sufficient to deliver the kind of "value added" green spaces that you have identified and expect. There is a need to reinforce the financial value that can be brought to such sites especially where they are located within areas of significant housing growth where opportunities should be made to fully utilize and gain further value from the planning system. We would suggest that doing the bare minimum should not be an option and that the Mayor should be looking for more from these sites and these development opportunities.
9. Seeking opportunities to reduce the burden of day-to-day green space management on local authorities by encouraging strategic disposals of green space to bodies such as the Land Trust who are able to continue to expand the multifunctional benefits they deliver whilst safeguarding the resource for and on behalf of local communities in the long-term. We already own and successfully manage a number of sites in the proximity of London which we have taken on from the local authority/public sector (for example Beam Parkland in Dagenham; Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park and Southern Park in Greenwich) and are in discussions on a range of others. We would be very

¹ <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-Land-Trust-Response-to-the-Public-Parks-inquiry-2016.pdf>

² <http://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/5d9544c0-3c6e-4797-bc65-86cc39e373fd>

happy to share with you further the details of these schemes.

10. "Seeing is believing" – making sure that it is not just lip service that is paid to green infrastructure by continuing to safe guard resources to deliver on the ground – but that it is actively managed, well used, clean, safe and tidy, well maintained public spaces.

Ultimately, there needs to be a holistic and strategic approach to ensure green spaces and green infrastructure is embedded into all Greater London Authority thinking and activity, from strategy through to delivering better places.

As the RSPB suggest in their consultation:

Nature and wildlife have no boundaries but current management between and within borough can be highly variable. It is important to work across the boroughs to ensure corridors of green infrastructure can be incorporated for wildlife, whilst also providing the local communities with green space they can easily move between and use.

In order to be fully effective any future work should factor in private spaces alongside London's public parks and gardens. Many of these historic planted sites have poor vegetation structure and little in the way of deciduous plants and sources of nectar. In order to improve these areas, there needs to be a management plan which encourages new plants and plant diversity to be introduced into these areas. This will not only improve the outcomes for nature but will improve the aesthetics of the areas as well. These spaces, if managed appropriately, not only provide valuable homes for wildlife but important and valuable areas for people as well.

4. Documenting the benefits

The evidence for the value of well managed green space is undeniable, but trying to evidence this can be difficult. But that does not mean it should be done. It is even more important to be able to demonstrate the benefits, particularly when there are stakeholders that may not see what these benefits are. Therefore, being able to communicate to them, in their language is vital.

In our own experience, we have found that our [Social Value study](#)³, published earlier in the year, has been a really useful 'tool' for engaging with our different stakeholders groups. For example, we have been able to use this to speak with local authorities about working with them on solutions for their own green spaces.

Below are our views along with our data and external evidence which hopefully helps support the case that providing the evidence to demonstrate the benefits is important...

Well maintained green spaces play a vital role in the health and wellbeing of communities:

- Bringing people together, breaking down social barriers, for socialising and meeting new people and reducing anti-social behaviour
- As places of learning and development
- Improving physical and mental health
- Improving the local environment, making places more attractive, strengthening our natural assets to be more resilient to climate change as well as support biodiversity

³ <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Value-of-our-Green-Spaces-January-2016.pdf>

- Contributing to economic uplift, supporting other businesses, making the wider area more attractive, leading to inward investment, alleviating pressures on other public sector budgets, such as health and social services.

Improving people's health and wellbeing

There is an unequivocal body of research linking the benefits of green space on improved mental and physical health as well as mounting evidence demonstrating the increasing costs to society and the health sector from physical inactivity.

Our research demonstrates that people using our green spaces have higher levels of satisfaction and wellbeing and lower levels of anxiety compared to the national averages.⁴

We know from our own experience that by providing well maintained, free and easily accessible green spaces, with networks of paths and trails, people are given opportunities to lead healthier lives and feel happier. People then feel less inclined to visit the doctor or have higher chances of not developing lifestyle related illnesses – more and more research is demonstrating that the natural environment helps combat depression, diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and some cancers. Even the Department of Health recognises that a poor physical environment can be detrimental to the public's physical and mental health⁵.

In turn, this helps reduce the burden on the NHS and other local services, which are becoming more and more under pressure.

Results of our own research identifies:

- 90% feel that our green spaces play a positive part in their happiness and wellbeing
- 90% feel that our green spaces encourage them or others to keep fit and healthy
- 25% use our green spaces to relieve stress.⁶

At Monkton Community Woodland, one of our parks in the North East, our rangers run a health programme, funded by South Tyneside Public Health with many participants being referred by clinicians. In the last 12 months:

- 78% of participants have improved their physical health (including BMI, Blood pressure and body fat %)
- 95% of participants say they are more confident, happy and have improved self-worth.

One participant explains:

"I feel like my life is like swimming underwater – and drowning at times. These sessions are my breathing holes and keep me going."

Other research demonstrates the health benefits of green space:

- Those who live within 500m of accessible green space are 24% more likely to meet recommended levels of physical exercise (Defra 2015)⁷

⁴ <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Value-of-our-Green-Spaces-January-2016.pdf>

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/216096/dh_127424.pdf

⁶ <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/charitable-aims/thebenefits>

⁷ www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/396840/pb13897-nature-do-for-you.pdf

- Just five minutes of exercise in a "green space" such as a park can boost mental health (University of Essex)⁸

The Local Government Association recognises the benefits of exercising outdoors, and is calling on NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups to drive forward a strategy for GPs to prescribe "green prescriptions"⁹.

Hospitals are also seeing the benefits of green spaces and parks, not only aiding patient recovery, but for staff to use for their own health and wellbeing.

Our work with the Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is a great example of where Senior NHS leaders see the multiple benefits our adjacent park brings.¹⁰ Kevin Eccles at the Countess of Chester Hospital said "In particular, staff use it for 'walk and talk' meetings, clinicians use it to have breaks and feel refreshed and patients use it to help them with their recovery".

Contributing to economic uplift and the wider economy

In terms of how our parks contribute to economic uplift in a local community, local contractors are used to undertake maintenance and construction works, our parks create jobs and they also help people find employment through volunteering and attending training sessions in our parks.

Our Big Lottery funded educational programme – [Green Angels](#) – delivered at one of our parks to boost community cohesion and opportunities, resulted in nearly 70 people participating, and of those seeking work, 44% found employment.¹¹

Our social return on investment study calculated that our own 2,000 hectares of well managed green space contributes the equivalent of £53.2m per year of benefits to the health and welfare sector and £40.9m per year towards the social sector.¹²

This alleviates financial pressure on multiple public services. External research also demonstrates this:

- Increasing access to parks and open spaces could reduce NHS costs of treating obesity by more than £2 billion (The King's Fund ,2013)¹³
- The health benefits of living near green space are worth up to £300 per person per year. (National Ecosystem Assessment 2011)¹⁴
- Green Infrastructure helps combat mild and moderate depression and can be more cost-effective than traditional treatments. This could help Wales save the £16m it spends on the 3.8m anti-depressant prescriptions issued per year (Wildlife Trust Wales 2016)¹⁵

⁸ www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/8654350.stm

⁹ www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/7944615/NEWS

¹⁰ <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Countess-of-Chester-Country-Park-Health-for-Life-Sept-2016.pdf>

¹¹ <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/charitable-aims/education-and-learning/green-angels-2/>

¹² <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/charitable-aims/thebenefits>

¹³ www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/files/kf/field/field_publication_file/improving-the-publics-health-kingsfund-dec13.pdf

¹⁴ www.gov.uk/government/news/hidden-value-of-nature-revealed-in-groundbreaking-study

¹⁵ www.wtwales.org/sites/default/files/green_infrastructure.pdf

As our study demonstrates, 90% of survey respondents said that our green spaces help make the local area more desirable, which leads to economic uplift.¹⁶

Property prices can increase as well – a study in the UK showed that green infrastructure can contribute up to 34% uplift in property values (Wildlife Trusts Wales 2016)¹⁷. RICS report in 2016 on Place Making and Value indicates there is a property value premium where key place making factors are at work notably greenspace, in comparison with ambient levels.

Santander Mortgages also identified that people are prepared to pay an average of £35,969 more for a property close to green space and access to green spaces for leisure.¹⁸

Having more attractive areas contributes to inward investment, attracting businesses to because businesses like locations that provide well managed public places. In turn, this creates jobs, improves a business' CSR and also attracts and retains customers, generating further opportunities for local communities.

Local environmental benefits

By conserving and enhancing our green spaces, we can increase our resilience to climate change and reduce our vulnerability.

Parks and green spaces can help us achieve this and improve the local environment through the ecosystem services they provide, such as providing shade and shelter, reducing the urban heat island effect, improving air quality by reducing pollution, helping to alleviate flooding, storing water, reducing noise and reducing contamination.

- Grass surfaces exposed to sun may be 24°C cooler than concrete (University of Cardiff, 2016)¹⁹
- Tree shade may lower air temperatures by 5 – 7 °C (University of Cardiff, 2016)
- Urban parks are on average 1°C cooler than built-up areas (University of Cardiff, 2016)
- Planting trees can slow the flow of water and reduce surface water runoff by up to 62% compared to asphalt. (Woodland Trust 2015)²⁰
- Trees also increase the interception of water as it falls, increasing the infiltration of water into the soil and lowering the risk of surface water flooding. (Woodland Trust 2015)
- Planting trees could reduce the height of flooding in towns by up to 20% (Woodland Trust 2015)

This also has economic impacts, such as reduced costs from flood damage but also the preventative measures:

- Green infrastructure provides flood alleviation and water storage, which costs less to construct and maintain than built flood defences (Natural England 2012)²¹

¹⁶ <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Value-of-our-Green-Spaces-January-2016.pdf>

¹⁷ www.wtwales.org/sites/default/files/green_infrastructure.pdf

¹⁸ Santander Mortgages 2015 <http://tinyurl.com/pkmhbdz>

¹⁹ www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14649357.2016.1158907

²⁰ www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/mediafile/100631140/pg-wt-300615-residential-developments.pdf?cb=093f261286fd4fdc8befda998e4b7c11

²¹ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6692039286587392>

Green spaces also support vital biodiversity, such as threatened pollinators, which are key to our food supply, and as such supporting our food economy.

Whilst measures used in research vary in the proxies used, all demonstrate an overwhelming positive correlation for how valuable green spaces are.

5. Monetary values

As per the response above, our Social Value study included demonstrating the value of our green spaces in monetary terms as well as through testimonials, stories and case studies. As above, this has been a really useful exercise and has provided us with another 'language' to talk to stakeholders, who may engage better when using the monetary language.

Being able to demonstrate the monetary value that green spaces and green infrastructure provides helps to provide the evidence in demonstrating its important. At the moment, it is easy for decision makers to put aside the natural environment, and see it as an 'add on' or afterthought to any development, for example, because it doesn't have a 'monetary value'.

As stated above there is growing evidence that extra value derived from greenspace is incentivizing provision of a parks and open spaces management vehicle in newly built communities. Conventional management company options are proving to be less sustainable leaving future residents to pick up heavier bills for inferior service delivery. Many places now see the character and quality of their places undermined by poor green space management and lack of funding; this affects both public and private sector schemes.

A further example is the natural capital account of our site – Beam Parklands, which was commissioned by the GLA to demonstrate exactly this.

Natural Capital Accounting Case study: Beam Parklands, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

We believe that the Natural Capital Accounting approach provides a valuable tool for assessing the real worth of our green assets as a means of balancing against other priorities.

Key findings of the study include:

- Asset value (2009): the 'baseline' natural capital asset value for Beam Parklands is estimated to have been £21m in 2009.
 - This measures the flood protection benefits and the amenity value (recreation, health, and education opportunities) of the park to the local community.
- Gains in asset value: a £10m increase in the natural capital asset value is recorded between 2009 and the 2014 reporting date for the account.
 - It reflects the enhanced amenity value for the local community due to the green infrastructure investment and redevelopment of Beam Parklands between 2009 and 2011.
- Adjustments: a further £12m increase in the natural capital asset value is recorded due to population growth and development in the local community resulting in more people benefitting from the flood protection and amenity value of Beam Parklands since 2009.
- Total maintenance provisions: the cost of maintaining natural capital assets at Beam Parklands is estimated to be £1m over the 99 year time horizon.

- This is based on the 2012 – 2017 management plan for Beam Parklands and the assumption that similar natural capital maintenance objectives will be set beyond this.

Overall the study concludes that:

- The balance sheet and natural capital account for Beam Parklands reflects the substantial benefits provided by the site to the local population.
- The calculated asset value significantly exceeds the long term natural capital maintenance costs. It provides a very different picture to a conventional financial account that would likely recognise only the maintenance liability, or at most, value the asset at replacement cost.

The balance sheet also highlights the impact of the enhancements to Beam Parklands undertaken between 2009 and 2011, which increased flood storage capacity, improved its amenity value and increased interconnectivity to nearby residential areas.

These enhancements, in combination with adjustment made for an increase in the local population, are calculated to have added £22m to the natural capital asset value. This is roughly a 100% increase on the 2009 valuation – a substantial enhancement of the estimated asset value, facilitated by the green infrastructure investment.

A full copy of the final report can be found on the Greater London Authority website at:

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/beam_parklands_natural_capital_account_final_report_eftec_november_2015.pdf

Therefore, if that means that the natural environment can be elevated up the priority list, and in order to recognize all of the benefits that green spaces and green infrastructure brings to the economy and society, then it is worth considering translating this into monetary terms, as long as this is done in the right way and in fact, does take into account 'all' the benefits and not just some.

6. The barriers to improving green space

From our experience in London and elsewhere in the UK we believe that the key barriers include:

1. A lack of political will and commitment
2. Lack of understanding about the need for quality green space management through a bespoke ownership vehicle with a network of supporting community groups
3. Under investment and reduced funding not only for green space management but also related aspects, such as outreach programmes, schools activities and welfare to work schemes.
4. A lack of strategic thinking
5. Increasing uncertainty on roles and responsibilities of the public sector (risk of green space "falling between stools").
6. Competing priorities
7. High land values
8. A lack of the appropriate mechanisms for enabling greater levels of community engagement with their local environment
9. Complacency

7. Ways of encouraging multifunctional use of green space (currently used and un-used) such as the installation of Sustainable Drainage Systems

We believe the multi-functional use green space can be further encouraged by:

1. Identifying and promoting the strengths and benefits to be achieved from well managed green space
2. Building on the existing network
3. Adopting a natural capital accounting approach
4. Seeking further integration into strategic and development planning
5. Promoting greater public participation and engagement
6. Adopting a "Natural Health Service" approach to better utilizing our natural environment for health and wellbeing
7. Enabling greater flexibility of use of the green belt – thereby avoiding undue pressure on other more valuable spaces in more sensitive/pressured urban areas

In the context of the above we are pleased to highlight our site at the Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park as an excellent example of a multi-functional greenspace within an urban setting:

- The 1.72 hectare park was developed as part of the early phase of decontamination and regeneration of the peninsula to recreate and re-establish part of the original marshland heritage and provide an asset for the local community.
- It is now a thriving urban oasis, providing a haven for wildlife and serving as a key ecological site within a major redevelopment area. This oasis will be even more important when redevelopment plans are realised, comprising over 1,300 new homes and commercial spaces in the coming years.
- The Ecology Park was established in 2002 and to ensure the park remained an asset to the area, the Land Trust took ownership in 2011, investing an endowment received from the Homes and Communities Agency to secure its long term maintenance and sustainability.
- It plays a crucial role within the area, providing community benefit through educational, volunteering and training opportunities; contributes to improving the health and wellbeing of people; provides refuge for vital wildlife and ecosystem services, supporting important biodiversity and acts as a sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) for the surrounding area.
- In the first 10 years, the Park was managed on a daily basis by the Trust for Urban Ecology (TRUE), now The Conservation Volunteers, and has welcomed over 100,000 visitors since opening, including 15,000 school children. They continue to deliver hands-on environmental education to people of all age ranges, connecting them with nature and the outdoors and providing Greenwich with a real asset to the community.

A full version of the case study can be view here: <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Greenwich-Peninsula-Ecology-Park-Case-Study.pdf>

9. How currently un-utilised green spaces (scraps of land and quiet corners) be brought into multi-functional use by communities

The Land Trust began by taking brownfield, derelict sites in deprived communities and transforming them into thriving green assets, emotionally owned by local communities and now has over 60 sites, that may have been considered at one time as 'scraps of land' which are now delivering unsurmountable benefits to people and nature across the country.

Beam Parklands in Dagenham, mentioned above is a perfect example of such a site, which is now a successful multi-functional facility used by many communities.

The Land Trust and partners transformed the 53-hectare functional flood prevention area into an innovative multi award-winning space that now provides significant community benefits and is helping regenerate a deprived area. The site's primary function is flood defence. However, the wider area, amongst some of the most deprived in the country, lacks quality public open space. As mentioned above, the natural capital account has demonstrated in monetary terms the value that this park brings to the local area.

The key points are to identify the long term funding to manage each space long term and work with communities so that they are involved, their needs are met and they then develop an emotional ownership of each space. This is important for each space thriving and delivering to its maximum.

The Land Trust would be happy to provide further details on its framework of funding models for managing green spaces and green infrastructure in perpetuity and would also be happy to take representatives on any site visits, such as to Beam Parklands or Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park, to show how our green spaces are managed, maintained and importantly valued by and delivering benefits to their local communities.

