

House of Commons reception hosted by all-party group hears parks professionals raise concerns with parliamentarians

HW campaign calls for urban parks inquiry

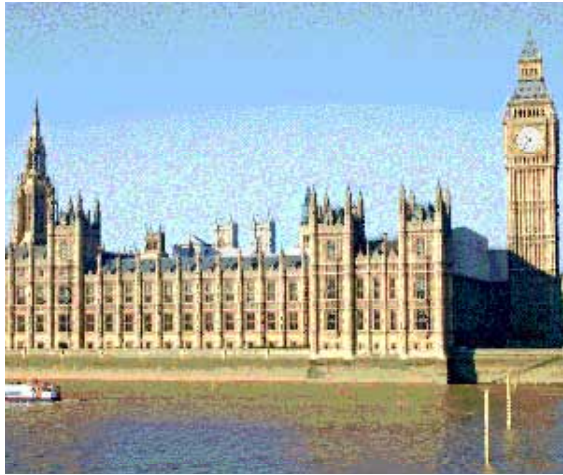


By Jez Abbott

HW has this week launched a campaign calling for a new select committee inquiry into urban parks.

The action is prompted by the fears of professionals that disproportionate cuts to urban parks services are driving horticultural skills from the sector while threatening to usher in, once again, a spiral of decline in parks across the UK.

The campaign launch followed a reception in the Commons last week organised by HW and hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Gardening & Horticulture Group (APPGHG), which saw parks professionals raise their concerns with parliamentarians.



Parliament: an early day motion has already been signed by 17 MPs

An early day motion highlighting the damage being caused to Britain's parks from disproportionate cuts and a call for a fresh inquiry into urban parks has been tabled on behalf of the campaign by supportive MPs. This has already been signed by 17.

Addressing last week's event, *Horticulture Week*

editor Kate Lowe warned that compounding the impact of budget cuts was the absence at a national level of any department, body or function with a watching brief for any aspect of urban parks.

"CABE Space has gone, the Design Council has omitted parks from the remit that it

inherited from CABE, the last civil servant with responsibility for any aspect of parks at Communities & Local Government has left, the future of the Green Flag Awards is unclear and the Green Infrastructure Partnership is focused on the creation of new landscape elements rather than the maintenance of existing urban parks.

"Where do green space professionals go with the issues they are facing, their ideas and their solutions?" Lowe asked.

Attendees at the reception heard from Tony Leach of the London Parks & Green Spaces Forum, who drew attention to the threat to volunteering by friends groups from the cuts and the mistaken assumption that they could take on activities that are normally carried out by skilled staff.

Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) head of landscape Drew Bennelick showed a

film highlighting the importance to the quality of life of local residents of a park recently restored with HLF funds. "Our concern is we are in a boom-and-bust situation and that we don't go back to those days," he said.

After chairing a debate during the event that illustrated the deep concern of parks professionals present, APPGHG chairman Baroness Fookes said: "A select committee seems to be the answer to addressing the problem and bringing it to notice. This is about making parks a priority again and we all say amen to that."

MPs attending last week's event included Sir Peter Bottomley, Bill Esterson, Brian Donohoe, Sir Bob Russell, Rosie Cooper and David Amess. Peers included Baroness Fookes — who opened the event — Lord Courtown, Lord Palmer, Lord Clark and Baroness Sharples. See campaign pages 6 and 7.

Champions of green-space sector on the call for an inquiry and why urgent action is needed



DAVID ALLISTER, HEAD OF PARKS, LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES

"The call for an inquiry is the next logical step and a political answer to the devastation some have felt from these recent cuts and all that good work we as a sector have built up over the past decade or so."



DAVE MORRIS, VICE CHAIR, NATIONAL FEDERATION OF PARKS & GREEN SPACES

"We cannot return to the

1980s and the difference now is that we have a vibrant grass-roots friends movement of 5,000 groups that will speak up. I support this proposal for an inquiry."



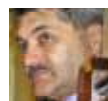
TONY LEACH, DIRECTOR, LONDON PARKS & GREEN SPACES FORUM

"We know from past experience that quality and security of parks are at risk from cuts to maintenance budgets, which have fallen by 44 per cent in London since 2008."



PAUL BRAMHILL, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, GREENSPACE

"Some £1.4bn was going into the green sector and a recent study found that it will go down to £700m. While the Heritage Lottery Fund can safeguard certain parks — say 500 — we have 30,000 parks so 29,000 are in peril."



JOHN TWEDDLE, HEAD OF PARKS, WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL

"We are losing skills across the

industry because of the people forced out by cuts to local authorities. There's no one there to track quality."



PETER NEAL, PARKS AND LANDSCAPE CONSULTANT

"This is a fantastic year to launch this initiative and for the Government to support the sector because we are welcoming the world to Stratford later this month where we have created a state-of-the-art urban park."

This week on www.HorticultureWeek.co.uk

NEWS MONTY DON TO PRESENT NEW BBC TV SERIES ON FRENCH GARDENS

The show is scheduled for April 2013. The *Gardener's World* presenter also tweeted: "I am a champion of independent nurseries but have not set foot in a garden centre in years."

➔ www.HorticultureWeek.co.uk/news

NEWS ANNOUNCEMENT ON NEW HTA DIRECTOR-GENERAL DUE THIS WEEK

David Gwyther's replacement was set to be revealed this week after HTA board members approved the selected candidate at a meeting this week.

➔ www.HorticultureWeek.co.uk/news

NEWS LOVE YOUR GARDEN-FEATURED PLANTS AND PRODUCTS REVEALED

The ITV1 series producer Spun Gold and the Garden Industry Manufacturers Association have released lists of products and plant suppliers used in the show.

➔ www.HorticultureWeek.co.uk/news

BLOG KATHERINE WILLS' DIARY OF A BUDDING GARDEN DESIGNER

"Having got over the shock — and delight — of making it to the RHS young designer of the year final three, a dauntingly regular commute began from London to Cheshire."

➔ www.HorticultureWeek.co.uk/blogs