

MAKE PARKS  
A PRIORITY

# Why we need a new

**By HW staff**

Our public parks are under threat once more as the impact of the spending cuts becomes clear.

Budget savings have resulted in disproportionate cuts to urban parks services, the *State of the Market Survey 2012* published by the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) this April confirmed.

Meanwhile, nearly a third of authorities reported front-line staff being lost in the first year of the squeeze on public spending alone, said parks charity GreenSpace.

In London, parks budgets have fallen by 44 per cent in the past four years, the London Parks & Green Spaces Forum reported last month.

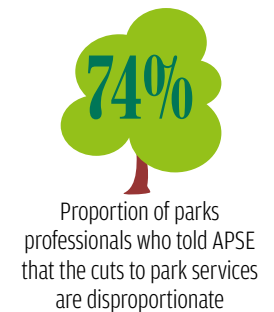
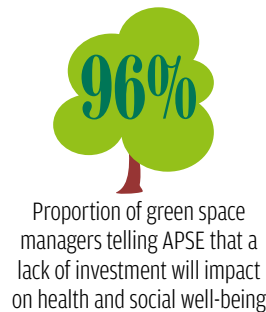
In Liverpool, which has lost a third of its green-space budget in two years along with 65 parks staff, officials came perilously close last year to withdrawing maintenance completely from all community parks.

Added to this, 96 per cent of green-space managers from councils across the UK have told APSE that the lack of investment in parks will impact negatively on health and social well-being.

Eighty per cent of parks managers are predicting a fall in quality standards as they become unable to deal with vandalism and maintenance, and 50 per cent are expecting a drop in public perceptions of safety. There is a slide back towards no-go areas for children, families and old people.

Hopes that parks' long-established ranks of local volunteers might help to ease some of the impacts of the unprecedented pressure on budgets are also being dashed as that same pressure undermines the ability of teams to support their volunteers.

Tree Council director-general Pauline Buchanan Black has warned of the impact of overstretched tree officers on professional support for the national volunteer tree



warden scheme. "The collaborative working style, through no fault of the tree officers, is being withdrawn," she told *HW* last month.

Compounding the current challenges facing the sector is the absence at national level of any department, body or function with a watching brief for any aspect of the UK's urban parks.

CABE Space has gone, the Design Council has omitted parks from the remit it inherited, 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 creating landscape elements rather than maintaining existing urban parks.

So where do green space professionals and all those deeply concerned with the quality of urban parks across the UK and the maintenance of this critical part of our national heritage go with the issues they are facing, their ideas and their solutions?

David Lambert, expert adviser to the 1999 town and country parks inquiry of the

Commons environment, transport and regional affairs committee, warned recently in *The Times* newspaper: "We are embarking on a return to the near-terminal spiral of decline in which parks found themselves in the 1970s and 1980s — vandalised toilets, untended flower beds and closed cafés and paddling pools".

This is a fear shared by many of the green-space sector's highly committed professionals. It is also why we believe that now is the time for a fresh parliamentary inquiry into urban parks.

## Last week's reception at the House of Commons hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Gardening & Horticulture



1 HW's Kate Lowe and Parks Agency's David Lambert (right) talk to Bill Esterson MP 2 GreenSpace's Paul Bramhill, consultant Sid Sullivan and Westminster City Council's John Tweddle 3 Lord Courtown, London Parks & Green Spaces Forum's Tony Leach and consultant Peter Neal 4 Heritage Lottery Fund's Drew Bennelick and Bramhill 5 Lambert and City of London's Sue

# inquiry into urban parks

## How you can help the campaign

### 1 Write to your MP

Please write to your MP asking them for their assistance in securing a select committee inquiry into urban parks and to show their support for the campaign by signing an early day motion (EDM) that highlights our concerns over the future of our parks.

EDM219 – *Reduction in Funding for Urban Parks* – highlights the damage being caused to Britain's urban parks and green spaces by disproportionate cuts to their maintenance in local government budget savings and the loss of skills in professional horticulture in the public sector through staff redundancies.

In addition, it draws attention to the fact that these problems are being exacerbated by the absence of a national-level department, body or function with a watching brief for the UK's

urban parks and calls for these concerns to be addressed in a new inquiry into urban parks.

- When contacting your MP you need to use the full name of the early day motion – EDM 219 *Reduction in Funding for Urban Parks*.
- For the full text of the EDM, see [www.HorticultureWeek.co.uk/makeparksapriority](http://www.HorticultureWeek.co.uk/makeparksapriority).
- To find out how to contact your local MP, see [findyourmp.parliament.uk](http://findyourmp.parliament.uk).

### 2 Spread the word

Do you have a parks friends group? If so, please let them know about the campaign and encourage them to write a letter supporting the call for an inquiry into urban parks to their MP. For a PDF copy of these campaign pages that you can forward to interested parties, email Kate Lowe at [kate.lowe@haymarket.com](mailto:kate.lowe@haymarket.com).

### 3 Send us your message of support

If you agree with the aims of *Horticulture Week's* campaign, then please send us your message of support.

Such messages are really important to illustrate the depth of feeling among professionals on this critical issue to all those we need to win over to the campaign's aims.

You can either post your message of support directly on the campaign section of our website at [www.HorticultureWeek.co.uk/makeparksapriority](http://www.HorticultureWeek.co.uk/makeparksapriority) or send it by email to Kate Lowe at [kate.lowe@haymarket.com](mailto:kate.lowe@haymarket.com).

- For regular campaign updates, see [www.HorticultureWeek.co.uk/makeparksapriority](http://www.HorticultureWeek.co.uk/makeparksapriority) and you can follow our campaign on Twitter at @ParksaPriority.

### MPs who have shown their support for our call for an inquiry so far:

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East)  
David Anderson (Blyth Valley)  
Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley)  
Martin Caton (Gower)  
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire)  
Mike Crockart (Edinburgh West)  
Bill Esterson (Sefton Central)  
Dr William McCrea (South Antrim)  
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington)  
Alan Meale (Mansfield)  
Sandra Osborne (Ayr Carrick and Cumnock)  
Albert Owen (Ynys Môn)  
Steve Rotherham (Liverpool Walton)  
Bob Russell (Colchester)  
David Simpson (Upper Bann)  
Mark Williams (Ceredigion)  
Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire)

### The 1999 select committee inquiry

The Department of Environment, Transport & Regional Affairs select committee report on town and country parks was published in 1999. The key findings included:

- Adequate research should be undertaken and accurate records kept of whether urban green space has increased or decreased over the past 30 years.
- Parks are a key feature in the renaissance of our urban areas and they need to be resourced as such by local and central Government.
- There should be a Government initiative to set up an urban parks and green spaces agency.
- Making parks safe and making them feel safe must be a priority for councils.
- The Green Flag Awards scheme should be coordinated with the work of a national agency.

## Group (see p3) brought professionals together with parliamentarians to discuss the issues facing the sector



Ireland 6 Barnet councillor Katherine McGuirk 7 Rosie Cooper MP 8 David Amess MP 9 Lord Palmer 10 Baroness Sharples 11 Brian Donohoe MP, Baroness Fookes and Lord Courtown 12 Consultant Bob Ivison, Farrer Huxley Associates' Noel Farrer and Lambert 13 Ireland and Friends of Parks Federation's Dave Morris 14 Lowe and Sullivan 15 Leach and Neal