HLF calls for collaborative action to avert parks



Drew Bennellick speaks to Communities and Local Government Select Committee

HLF's Head of Landscape and Natural Heritage, Drew Bennellick, has called for collaborative action to deliver new ways of funding and managing public parks to avert a crisis in the sector.

Drew was giving evidence on behalf of HLF to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee as part of its inquiry into parks. Representatives from HLF, the National Trust, the Parks Alliance and other bodies from the parks sector joined for the session on Monday 24 October.

The Communities and Local Government Select Committee launched its inquiry into public parks in July 2016. In September, HLF published its second report into parks, *State of the UK Public Parks 2016*, which showed a growing deficit between the rising use of parks and the declining resources available to manage them.

The full session can be viewed online on the Parliament Live website.

Key points from the speech:

[quote]HLF and Big Lottery Fund have invested over £850million of National Lottery players' money into parks since 1996.[/quote]

- The State of the UK Parks 2016 report shows that **57%** of people use parks regularly and that use of parks is increasing. This figure is particularly high among young people and ethnic minorities
- Through the Parks for People programme, HLF and Big Lottery Fund have invested over **£850million** of National Lottery players' money into parks since 1996. Of this, **80%** has gone to areas outside London. However, HLF is not able to fund all 27,000 parks across the UK
- Based on surveys of park managers, independent park trusts, park friends and user groups, and the general public, the findings show that while parks are highly valued by the public and usage is increasing, park maintenance budgets and staffing levels are being cut
- While new ways of working and generating income are showing potential, more support, shared learning and collaboration are needed to support those that manage parks
- Research shows that there is no one model that is good for all parks; a "blended finance" solution which is specific to each park is required to take into account the different facilities/needs of each park
- Park sector skills are under threat: there are not enough staff, and remaining staff do not have the correct horticulture skills to protect sufficient park quality. This is particularly crucial as the sector deals with and transitions to the new innovative models and structures they need to adopt in order to survive
- Planning is vital to park provision and it needs to be looked at to ensure good quality parks can be accessed by those who need them most
- Parks need a strong voice and leadership, and for somewhere for parks staff to share knowledge and good practice. Drew highlighted that there are very creative people in the sector who need to be supported, and for their ideas to be brought together and shared

Drew added that he is looking forward to hearing the outcomes of the investigation. The results of the enquiry will be released in early 2017.

Read the full State of UK Public Parks 2016.