

Scotland's public parks under threat

Today, the Heritage Lottery Fund has published *State of UK Public Parks 2014: Renaissance to risk?* its first report to comprehensively review the condition and management of the UK's public parks. Two decades of public and Lottery investment has ensured that many parks across Scotland are in better condition, but unless future funding is generated in new ways, these parks are at serious risk of rapid decline.

Colin McLean, Head of HLF Scotland, said: "Scotland has a proud tradition of public parks, enjoyed by thousands daily. Highly valued and precious places, they are vital to the physical and emotional well-being of all our local communities. Following decades of decline, Lottery funding has revitalised parks across Scotland but this reports shows that this investment is now at risk. We realise these are financially tough times and that is why we need collaborative action and a fresh approach to halt this threat of decline. Our parks are far too important not to act now."

Key findings for Scotland from the research:

Parks at risk
60 per cent of parks managers who responded expect a decline in the condition of local parks in Scotland over the next three years as a result of average expected cuts to maintenance budgets of 11 per cent.

Trends towards greater community engagement
50 per cent of park managers report an increase of membership to friends groups in Scotland's parks over the last three

years.

Protecting £43.5million Lottery investment in Scotland
Parks across Scotland have enjoyed a twenty year renaissance as a result, in part, of £43.5m of Lottery investment. However, local authorities have no statutory requirement to fund and maintain them. Neither is there a national coordinating body able to champion the importance of parks, to assert their value to communities and the economy, and protect them for future generations to enjoy.

Next steps
In addition to calling for continued investment by local authorities, HLF's report highlights the need to develop new ways of looking after and funding parks. It highlights five key areas needing urgent joint action to ensure past investment is not wasted.

HLF pledges to:

- Continue to monitor and report on the public parks across the UK it has invested in
- Invest in innovative ideas for making parks financially sustainable, through the Lottery-funded Nesta Rethinking Parks programme
- Continue investing up to £24m each year across the UK through the Parks for People programme, with Big Lottery Fund providing an additional £10m per year in England until the end of 2015
- Commission and publish a second State of UK Public Parks report in 2016 to review progress

Finding new innovative ways to make the financing and management of parks sustainable is vital to ensuring their future. HLF and the Big Lottery Fund are working in partnership with the innovation charity Nesta on a Rethinking Parks programme. This is supporting organisations and partnerships to explore, test and scale new approaches to generating income for and managing parks. Shortly to be announced are grants totaling £1m that will enable a range of innovative park projects to be piloted. Full details will be announced in July 2014.

Rethinking Parks project

Endowing Parks for the 21st Century
National Trust
This project aims to develop and test ways to raise money for a ring-fenced endowment for public parks that could work in any city or town. The project will explore how to attract and secure funds for the endowment from sources not typically used by parks, including: public giving; corporate giving; local public sector funding, including health and wellbeing; and also investment in the 'eco' services that are provided by parks such as flood management and air quality. Through harnessing the huge value and wide range of benefits parks and green spaces give society, we hope to demonstrate the potential of endowments in securing the future for public parks for everyone.

Successful Lottery-funded park
Baxter Park, designed by the famous landscape gardener Joseph Paxton was donated to the Dundee community by jute mill owner Sir David Baxter in 1863. It is the only complete example of a Paxton-designed park in Scotland.

A £3.25m Lottery grant was used to restore the park, as far as possible, to Paxton's original layout. Gates and railings were reinstated and a brand new Exhibition Centre building was built on the site of the old bandstand. Both the children's playground and the sandstone pavilion, designed by G H Stokes, were restored.

Notes to editors

State of UK Public Parks 2014: Renaissance to risk?
To establish a national picture of the state of UK parks HLF commissioned three new UK-wide surveys: a survey of local authority park managers, a survey of park friends and user groups, and a public opinion survey undertaken by Ipsos MORI. The research has also drawn on other pre-existing data to assess how the condition of parks has changed over time, and to cross-check our results.

National picture: key findings from the research:

Parks are under direct threat

- 86% of parks managers report cuts to revenue budgets since 2010, a trend they expect to continue over the next three years. This could mean: park facilities such as cafes and toilets are closed or opening hours reduced; grass left uncut, flower beds left empty, play areas less regularly cleaned and inspected and more anti-social behaviour due to less park staff
- 45% of local authorities are considering either selling parks and green spaces or transferring their management to others. This could mean: loss of some parks, parts of parks and other green spaces, management of parks being divided between different organisations, community groups being asked to take on larger parks and needing support to do so effectively
- 81% of council parks departments have lost skilled management staff since 2010 and 77% have lost front-line staff

Parks are one of the most highly used public assets

- With 34 million people estimated to make regular visits parks are one of the UK's most heavily used public services
- 68% of park users consider spending time in their local park as important or essential to their quality of life. This rises to 71% in urban areas and 81% for those with children under 10
- 70% of park managers have recorded increased visitor numbers to their principal parks over the last year

Trend towards greater community involvement

- In the past three years park managers have seen an increase of over 30% in the number of friends and park user groups and over half of expect this increase to continue
- 47% of park friends groups say membership numbers have increased over the last three years
- Community groups are playing an increasing role in championing and supporting parks - with an estimated £30m raised for parks annually by friends groups

This announcement can be followed on Twitter Nesta website.

Further information
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