

Park volunteers at work in Bristol

Public parks must diversify their income if they are to remain free and open, according to a new report supported by HLF.

Learning to Rethink Parks comes at the end of an 18-month programme testing innovative new ways to raise income or reduce running costs for the UK's parks.

Models tested included greater use of herbaceous and wild meadow planting, public donations, mobilising volunteers and friends groups to help with maintenance and even the creation of pop-up meeting spaces.

[quote]"There is no one 'silver bullet', but innovation is key to future parks funding."[/quote]

Learning to Rethink Parks brings together insights from Rethinking Parks, a joint programme between HLF, Big Lottery Fund and Nesta.

While there is no one 'silver bullet' for replacing local authority funding, some promising new models emerged, including:

- turning some areas over to meadows and replanting traditional beds with perennials rather than annuals in Burnley, forecast to save the council £119,000 a year
- encouraging public donations, including via text and subscriptions, at projects in Bournemouth and Heeley

- working with volunteers in a Bristol project which saw 40 per cent of participants transitioning into employment and £27,000-worth of improvements to parks across the city

Drew Bennellick, HLF Head of Landscape and Natural Heritage, thinks that local engagement is vital when looking for new funding streams: “Parks are facing significant funding challenges and Rethinking Parks has shown there is no one solution to putting them on a sustainable footing.

“What we do know is that any change should be managed in a sensitive, constructive way that involves local people and local businesses. Ultimately, local taxation is still an essential cornerstone for funding parks into the future, but a diversification of income is also necessary if parks are to remain resilient.”

To find out more, read the full report on the Nesta website.



Roberts Park

Public parks under threat