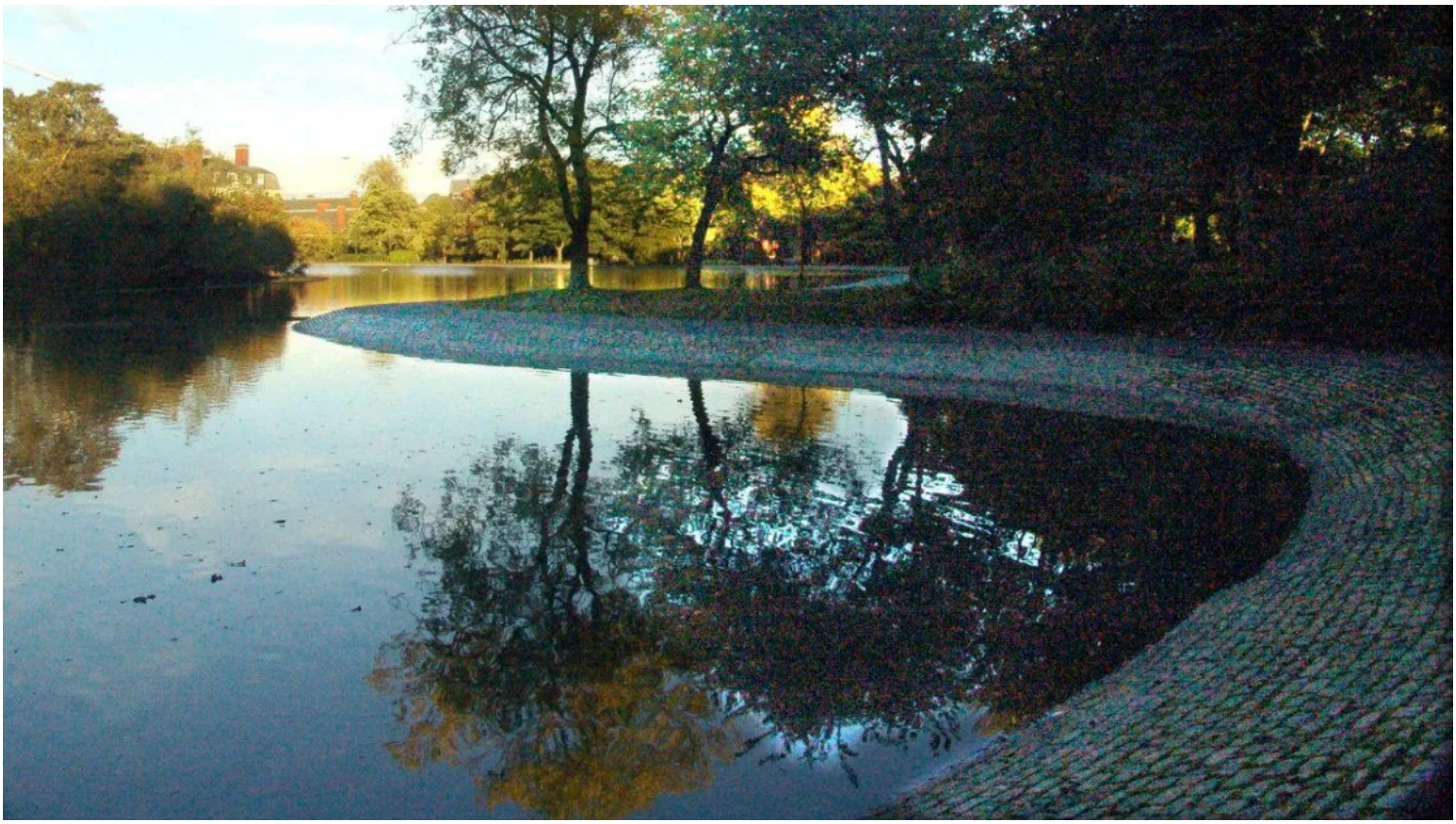


Leazes Park

A groundbreaking scheme, funded by the National Lottery, will help NCC to develop and test a new funding, management and maintenance model for 33 of the city's parks and allotments - over 400 hectares of land.

Such a proposal could see Newcastle's parks and green spaces remain the property of the city council but transfer day-to-day responsibility for funding, managing and maintaining them to a new charitable trust whose sole purpose is to manage the parks.

The scheme has been designed to help tackle the financial challenges facing the local authority, where park budgets have been dramatically reduced. Parks are not a statutory service for local authorities; however many, like NCC, recognise their vital importance to the health and wellbeing of local communities.

?The money has been announced as the Communities and Local Government (CLG) Select Committee Parks Inquiry calls for strategic local parks plans and innovation in management models and funding sources. Public engagement starts 13 February, running until 21 April. Find out more on the Let's Talk Newcastle website.

Getting the public's views

NCC is launching a consultation on the detail of the plans but if implemented, the charitable trust would independently manage approximately 33 parks across the city and possibly over 50 hectares of allotment land. It would explore new ways of best using the current facilities, space and buildings to bring in revenue for the successful running of the parks, without undermining free access to parks. NCC will also explore whether an endowment could be put in place to support the Trust.

National Lottery investment

The £237,500 for testing this approach has been awarded by HLF, which in partnership with the Big Lottery Fund has invested more than £12million to restore and upgrade Newcastle's historic parks. This further funding will help protect that past investment and further test and develop proposals which emerged from an earlier HLF-supported Rethinking Parks project delivered by the National Trust in partnership with Sheffield City Council.

State of UK Public Parks 2016

In its recent report, State of UK Public Parks 2016, HLF outlined the financial challenges facing parks in light of local authority budget reductions and called on local and national government, communities and businesses to explore innovative ways to fund and maintain public parks. This project will enable the in-depth testing of one such approach.

CLG Select Committee findings

This news comes as the CLG Select Committee Inquiry into the future of parks published its report. The report outlines the considerable challenges facing local authorities in light of reduced budgets and pressures to increase housing supply and recommends:

- Councils should publish strategies recognising the value of parks in context of wider local objectives such as health and wellbeing
- Innovation and transition funding is needed to develop management models and funding sources required to sustain parks in some council areas
- There should be a mechanism for evaluating, benchmarking and sharing best practice from across the UK and internationally

Working with the National Trust

NCC is working with the National Trust to deliver this project, drawing on its considerable expertise and experience of looking after special places for public benefit. HLF will require the Council to share its findings so that other local authorities learn from this pioneering work.

In response

Ros Kerslake, Chief Executive of HLF, said: "Having invested more than £850m of National Lottery players' money in ensuring over 850 of the UK's historic parks are in good shape, we welcome the recommendations of this report which puts their future front and centre of strategic local priorities.

“Our State of UK Public Parks 2016 report revealed the immense financial pressures facing our public parks. But it also revealed just how important these spaces are to the health and well-being of local communities and they need to be protected. This National Lottery investment is giving Newcastle City Council the tools to explore a creative approach to securing its parks for everyone.”

Cllr Kim McGuinness, cabinet member for culture and communities at NCC, said: “The city council is delighted that HLF has made this funding award, which will help us to move forward with our plan to transform the way our parks are run. It’s also really good timing that this announcement is made as we are about embark on our wide-ranging consultation with residents and park users in Newcastle about the future of parks.

“This parks engagement programme is a path finding project that will enable the City Council to work closely with residents, community groups and businesses to help shape the future of Newcastle’s parks. The State of UK Public Parks report rightly highlights the great difficulties we face in sustaining and prioritising our parks and green spaces in this climate of local authority budget cuts. We’re committed in Newcastle to moving with the times and modernising. This is a pioneering opportunity for the city as we seek to create a charitable trust model to run and protect our parks and ensure they remain in public ownership at a time when austerity has made our current operating model unsustainable.”

The National Trust has invested a similar amount of funding into the programme as they work closely on an advisory level with the City Council.

Harry Bowell, National Trust Director for the North said: “This is a really exciting opportunity for Newcastle to safeguard its parks and greenspaces, and the many benefits they provide, forever, and we are delighted to be supporting the city and its communities on this trailblazing project.”

“We are lending our experience and skills to help ensure the proposals for the new independent charity are financially sustainable and also protect the wider benefits parks currently deliver to local communities.”

“This is an important moment for local people and business to get involved in shaping the future of the city’s parks. We would encourage people to feed into the council consultation.”

The money awarded by HLF will be used to: construct a business case and legal structure for the Trust to operate the Council’s parks and allotments; and if implemented, put the governance in place and deliver training to the new trustees, staff and volunteers.

Have your say

Newcastle City Council wants views from local communities on the parks proposal. Its parks and greenspace engagement programme will start on 13 February and run through until 21 April 2017. Find out more on the Let's Talk Newcastle website.

There is also an innovative deeper engagement website developed by Open Lab (at Newcastle University).

Notes to editors

The Communities and Local Government Select Committee inquiry

The CLG Select Committee has published a report following its inquiry into the future of public parks. Details can be found on the Parliament website.

To date, more than £850m of money raised by National Lottery players has been invested in parks since 1996.

About the Big Lottery Fund

The Big Lottery Fund supports the aspirations of people who want to make life better for their communities across the UK. It is responsible for giving out 40% of the money raised by the National Lottery for good causes and invest over £650m a year in projects big and small in health, education, environment and charitable purposes.

State of UK Public Parks

State of UK Public Parks 2016 is HLF's second report to comprehensively establish the state of the UK's parks. It follows the publication of State of UK Public Parks 2014: Renaissance to Risk?

To establish a national picture of the state of UK parks, HLF commissioned three 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 Britain Thinks. 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. A fuller research report is available on our Parks Matter page.

The Parks for People programme uses money raised by National Lottery players to support the regeneration, conservation and increased enjoyment of public parks and cemeteries. In England the two Lottery Funds have been working in partnership from 2006 to deliver a multi-million pound investment in public parks. Find out more about how to apply on our Parks for People page.

*Parks for People applications are assessed in two rounds. A first-round pass is given when HLF has endorsed outline proposals and earmarked funding. A first-round pass may also include an immediate award to fund the development of the project. Detailed proposals are then considered by HLF at second-round and as long as plans have progressed satisfactorily and according to the original proposal, an award for the project is confirmed.

Rethinking Parks

Rethinking Parks was a joint Nesta, Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund programme to fund and support parks innovators to develop, implement and spread new approaches to sustaining and making the most of UK public parks.

Endowing Parks for the 21st Century was a partnership project led by the National Trust in partnership with Sheffield City Council.

This project explored how to set up an independent Parks Trust and developed and tested ways to raise money for a ring-fenced endowment for public parks. It explored how to attract and secure funds for the endowment from sources not typically used by parks, including: payment for health outcomes and 'ecosystems' services such as flood management and enhanced air quality.

About the National Trust

The National Trust is a charity and completely independent of Government. We rely for income on membership fees, donations and legacies, and revenue raised from our commercial operations.

It has over 4.5m and 60,000 volunteers. More than 20m people visit its pay for entry properties every year, while an estimated 75m visit its open air properties.

It protects and opens to the public more than 350 historic houses, gardens and ancient monuments.

One of the founding purposes of the National Trust in the late 19th century was to help protect green spaces for the enjoyment and health of urban communities.

Further information

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Runners in Heaton Park, Manchester

What does the future hold for public parks?