

Newcastle Parks Consultation – Public Feedback Sessions

Questions and Answers

Feedback sessions took place as follows:

18 July 2017	Newcastle Civic Centre
20 July 2017	Trinity Church, Gosforth
22 July 2017	Jesmond Dene
24 July 2017	Nun's Moor Centre
25 July 2017	Pottery Bank Community Centre

Please note this paper refers to information reported to Council Cabinet in July 2017 which can be accessed at the following link:

<http://democracy.newcastle.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=857&MIId=8025&Ver=4>

Car Parking

- 1. Huge increase in parking income – not sure how that could be achievable. It will reduce air quality.**
- 2. Can you explain the increase in income from car parking spaces?**
- 3. Extra car parking is against Council Policy.**
- 4. Increased car parking will result in loss of park land.**

There are existing free parking spaces where charges could bring in some income for parks, perhaps act as some disincentive against car use, but still provide vehicle access for those who need it. It's about making way for new access where needed, and charging appropriately for existing free parking spaces.

But there are mixed opinions about whether or not new car parking is an acceptable form of income, and the whole subject requires more consideration.

- 5. Concerns around car parking at Leazes Park. Friends of Garden will be located next to car park – this would mean increased pollution therefore impact on users of the garden.**

Post Meeting Note:

The existing car park is accessed through the "Heritage Jubilee Gates" this entrance which is narrow was not designed for the motor car and will be pedestrianised.

The existing car park has a natural flow enabling an extension and a new 2 way entrance/exit whilst minimising disruption to the parks heritage features.

There are planning conditions related to tree preservation, surfacing, drainage and protection of heritage.

In addition there are also conditions relating to the position of the new entrance leading on to the highway.

Full public consultation has taken place which included English Heritage.

The garden is a new Park entrance feature, sponsored and supported by The Friends of Leazes Park.

- 6. Would parks receive all car parking income from parks?**
7. If a parking ticket is issued, does the fine go to the Trust?

If the Trust were to establish a car park then they would keep the parking income and any fines.

- 8. Does this mean we might have a car park in a park like Gosforth?**

Yes, it might. Temporary parking for events is also a possibility in general.

Additional Information

The Council is currently reviewing assumptions about car parking, reflecting on air quality and traffic considerations as well as resident feedback.

Charges for existing free spaces will proceed where appropriate.

General Finance

- 9. Is the £1m loan from the Council or private sector and is it part of the £9.7m financial support?**

The £1m is an assumed capital loan from the Council to the Trust. It is separate to the currently projected £9.7m financial contribution, but the loan repayments are included in the £9.7m.

- 10. What happens if the Trust does not repay the loan?**

We can take back assets, or whatever is used as capital, or we can deduct its value from the financial contribution the Council pays to the Trust.

- 11. How much did you pay the consultant that did the report?**

£10,000.

- 12. So you paid them £10K and then altered the figures?**

No, we had open sessions where the current model was discussed, challenged, and developed.

- 13. Over time asset values might increase – how will the Council take the properties back?**

The Council would not plan to take assets back because of increases in value. If values increase, that would be a positive position for the sustainability of the parks estate.

14. Is there a need to raise an endowment? How much would the National Trust and others put in? They might want naming rights?

Funders might want naming rights. We haven't started this work yet – it will be led by the National Trust (who won't be contributing to the endowment), approaching other organisations, and the Council may be able to provide some match funding.

15. £75K from health? Is that the NHS?

Yes it is, and the Director of Public Health is of the view that this is a modest assumption.

16. How is public health defined in this model?

Partly in the form of the financial contribution from the budget of the Director of Public Health (Public Health funding currently helps the parks each year, but there is no guarantee it can continue to do so after 2020), and partly by the involvement of health-related organisations in the operation.

17. What is the flexibility on financing, how fluid are the figures?

The information presented is a model which projects how operations might work, but it will be the Trust's decision on how best to move forward.

18. How will the endowment be controlled?

The endowment would be ring-fenced and controlled by the Trustees of the Charity. They would be able to apply interest earned from the endowment for the benefit of the Trust's objectives, but would not be able to spend the endowment itself.

Allotments

19. Clarification required regarding the projected income from allotments.

The model assumes to reach actual income of £245,000 by Year 10.

20. Income from allotments will be used to subsidise the rest of the estate.

Income generation will be used across the estate whether from parks or allotments, so allotments may also benefit from income from parks.

21. Have Freeman allotments been discussed with the Freeman?

Yes, initial discussions have taken place with the Freeman and we will be meeting them again.

22. The charitable objects don't refer to allotments.

Allotments are not for public benefit, and therefore are not explicitly referred to in the objects. They would be held in a trading subsidiary of the Trust if it is set up. That trading subsidiary would be set up to have a charitable purpose that reflects the charitable objects of the Trust.

23. Please explain allotment income, and will the income be ring-fenced for the allotments?

10% increase over 10 years.

Income from new sites.

Income from advertising / sponsorship.

It will be ring-fenced for the whole estate – please see the answer to question 20 above.

24. There are allotments on Freeman sites and their approach is not encouraging – they haven't been involved

The Freeman have been involved. The Council has briefed them and they would like to work together. They understand why we're looking at doing this. The Council would like the estate equally managed; we can't transfer the land on Freeman sites as it's Town Moor land and it has its own legislation, but we will speak with the Freeman again, and find a solution aimed at keeping the estate together if at all possible.

25. Where will the new allotment sites go?

Don't know yet.

26. Can you specify which allotments sites are included?

These are listed on the Council's website with Cabinet papers for July 2017.

27. The Social Finance report includes advertising in the allotments sites. What will the advertising look like? Will there be big billboards?

There is some advertising on allotment sites already. The proposed advertising would be subject to necessary planning consents and any other relevant approvals.

28. Will statutory allotments still exist as statutory allotments?

Yes.

29. The press release only mentions parks. Will recreation grounds and allotments suffer?

No, the council is aiming for equitable provision across the estate.

Trust Governance / Structure

30. Governance – where does accountability lie? Where do the public go if they have any concerns?

Accountability lies with Trustees.

They will be accountable to the Charity Commission.

There will also be rights and responsibilities in the leases.

We also hope to establish a way for the Trust to report to the City (an annual public meeting perhaps).

As is the case now, residents will still be able to go the Parks staff or their Ward Members to report concerns.

31. Will Board Membership be on a voluntary basis?

Yes, positions will be voluntary.

32. Will there be one representative from the Newcastle Parks Forum?

Not necessarily. The final governance structure is still coming together. But Forum members will be able to apply to be on the Board.

33. The consultation process clearly says that Friends of Parks groups should have a seat on the Board. A community reference group is not good enough – they should be part of the decision-making process. The diagram is upside-down – this will not work without the hard work of staff and volunteers. You will alienate the volunteers.

Anyone can apply to be a Trustee and there will also be some sort of community reference group. We are happy to look at the diagram again (it is a work in progress) but it is the Board that will have legal responsibility.

34. Has the consultation suggested who these nameless people will be?

No. But we do know there is interest. Earlier this year we were going to openly advertise for a supporting advisory group, but had to retract the advert due to the pre-election period (“purdah”) and the restrictions it places on advertising. One advert slipped through and we found that there was interest in these positions.

35. So if it goes ahead the parks will transfer to the Trust?

The leasehold interest will transfer – the Council will still own the land.

36. Is the Trust subject to FOI?

No. Only public bodies are subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and a Charitable Trust is not a public body.

37. What are the challenges in attracting trustees?

We do well in the City with volunteer Board members, even when the cultural sector was struggling. This is an exciting opportunity for people with the right skill sets and interest.

38. We can't understand how our charity fits in.

Individual charities will continue if they wish to, supporting their specific park under the umbrella of the citywide trust.

39. Will leases be made public?

No. They contain commercially sensitive information.

40. Where does the community come in? Where will the open forum be? Can Trust meetings be held in public and if not, there should be some meetings where the public can openly attend. What will be its community engagement strategy?

There will be an open recruitment for the Board which the Council will appoint and anyone can apply. There will be some sort of Community Reference Group to be consulted by the Trustees on key issues.

41. Will all trustees be from Newcastle?

Don't know. It's not a requirement that they are, and restricting the pool could restrict the skills available.

42. Will the Board of Trustees be paid?

It is possible that expenses will be paid in respect of the Chair of Trustees.

43. Has the Council considered other corporate forms that a company limited by guarantee e.g. mutual, CIC etc.?

Yes, we did, and the 'company limited by guarantee' form is the most appropriate in this case.

44. What is the objective of the Trust? Will it have to improve the parks?

The objective will be to protect the green estate and develop it for the benefit of the city.

45. How will you ensure that the Trustees are not all white men?

The position of trustee will be openly advertised and appointments will be made on merit.

46. Would the trustees be appointed for a limited term of office?

Yes, although we have not finalised the detail of governance yet.

47. How will Friends Groups influence the Trust?

Possibly via the Community Engagement Group.

48. Where are the allotments in the charitable objectives?

As the allotments are not "open to the public", they cannot be part of the charitable objectives. The allotments will probably be transferred to the trading company of the Trust (see 22 above).

49. Can you describe the different options of corporate structure?

We will look at putting something on Let's Talk Parks to explain how we chose the charitable trust model.

50. Will Board members be paid? Volunteers will be expected to give their time for free, and there is the concern that the people 'at the top' may be paid extortionate amounts.

There may be appropriate expenses for Board members but they will be expected to give their time freely.

51. We need to ensure that Board Members come from diverse backgrounds and it is important to have community involvement.

There will be an open recruitment process for Board Members and a "job description" will be prepared. It is not possible to predict who will apply. The intention is to have a Community Reference Group to ensure community involvement.

Fund Raising / Income Generation

52. Concerns around commercialisation of parks. Discussion around the Go Ape proposal and the turnover Go Ape would generate.

There will be activities within parks to generate income, as is the case now.

We cannot comment on how much money Go Ape might make, as we have not had any discussions with them.

53. It is a political decision to cut the parks budget by 91%. Why weren't income-generating activities identified and carried out before now?

There was no need to generate large-scale income in the past, and the Council was able to subsidise the majority of parks costs. But there is an urgent need to generate income now due to the budget position. Any new or additional income generated in parks would be ring-fenced for the Trust to use for the benefit of the parks, whereas any income generated now, whilst the Council looks after the parks, cannot be ring-fenced to the parks estate. Instead income goes into the general Council budget and is allocated according to all the Council priorities. Protecting income is one of the major benefits to parks of setting up a Trust.

54. Treetop activities will affect the profile of parks.

Should this happen, it will be done so in keeping with ecology requirements.

55. Concern from Leazes Park Anglers Association regarding future lease agreement. Request for meeting to discuss issues.

Meeting was set up and held to discuss concerns.

56. What does activities in parks mean? Is it 'pay to play'? And what about people that can't afford it?

Yes – sometimes called pay to play. People choose what they can afford. For example, some people will bring a picnic rather than paying to eat in a café in a park.

57. What is a concession?

Example might be ice-cream vendors – not long-term tenants, but those with licences to sell.

58. Are concessions not also an air-quality issue – with ice-cream vendors keeping their engines running?

This requires a separate piece of work. There are rules around how long vehicle engines can be kept running, but unfortunately these do not apply to ice-cream vendors. So it is about putting in place the infrastructure for them so that they don't need to run the engine.

59. How do you protect lower-income families when it comes to allotments and concessions etc...?

Concessions are a choice for people – take a picnic or buy food in the park – that will always be the case.

Play areas are open but might contain some activities which you pay for if you want – crazy golf is a good example – but you can still enjoy our parks without spending money if you wish.

We can no longer subsidise everything, so it's a mixed model which also assumes some growth within the allotment estate.

60. What kind of events?

Don't know yet. We already have a variety of events in parks (pop-up theatre, seasonal events and shows are all examples) but historically have not had to worry about charging. In some cases it costs us more to cover our costs (to reinstate grassed areas for example) than we receive in income (if we receive anything at all). This cannot continue.

61. What is income from park activities? When we have activities now, will the Trust take that income?

The Trust would keep the income from its own activities.

62. The events income in the report has been benchmarked against events in other parks. Will the suggested figure of £300k per event be interrogated further?

Yes, we have already done that to some extent and the figures have been pushed down from what was first suggested. We have also done more work on benchmarking against events in the region.

63. The report includes advertising in the allotments sites. What will the advertising look like? Will there be big billboards?

There is some advertising on allotment sites already. The proposed advertising would be subject to necessary planning consents and other appropriate approvals.

64. Are costs included in the model for re-instatement after events?

Yes and we expect that the Trust will develop a policy on what is and isn't acceptable.

65. Parks are used by disadvantaged members of the public who can't afford to use gyms etc. Fairness needs to be visible.

Access to parks will remain free (including playgrounds) but there may be a charge for some events / activities.

66. How will people be able to run a business in a park?

Those interested will need to speak to the Trust once it has been established.

67. There are commercial opportunities for the bigger spaces but what about the smaller ones? Is it the Council's policy to allow those to be run down?

No, we're clear that the whole estate is managed and the income is ring-fenced back in across the estate.

And we're only covering playgrounds in parks. There is a wider issue about playgrounds not in parks, which is a separate piece of work.

68. How will the Trust decide what to charge for use of the parks by sporting groups?

That will be a matter for the Trust to decide.

69. Education and training is a concern – what does that cover – Jesmond Dene already has problems doing this, and you're going to charge?

Charging for education activities works quite successfully at Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums for example, and it also depends on the type of educational activity.

Woodland Burials

70. Woodland Burials – issues associated with burying people in parks especially near to play areas. Also, there may be issues about 'getting land back' once used for burials.

Noted. Any proposals would be worked up in detail to understand implications.

71. How would woodland burials work? There is a lot of anti-social behaviour in Jesmond Dene at night. People will be digging up bodies and throwing them around.

There is guidance on natural burials from the Ministry of Justice.

There is no reason to think these sites would be any different to existing burial sites.

There are many areas around the country that have this burial option but there are no options in Newcastle at the moment.

Any proposals would be worked up in detail to understand implications.

72. Any parks in mind for Woodland Burials?

Not yet.

Volunteers

73. Issue about uneven voluntary activities across the city.

Existing Friends of Groups and volunteers will be respected. There are concerns in some areas about succession. There is also a need to consider apprenticeships and supported employment and other types of 'volunteering' activities. There is only a 3% increase of volunteers built into the model.

- 74. Regarding numbers of volunteers, it's built on a ratio of 1:15 but you're lucky to have 1:10. And the suggested staffing cost of the volunteer manager is only £20K – you would get someone with no experience trying to manage me – I've been a volunteer for 15 years and will know more than them.**

The model assumes that various resources are used including some paid, some existing staff, and some volunteers themselves. The intention is not to suggest that a junior post will manage all volunteers. The volunteer ratio figure has been benchmarked by National Trust and refers to the supervisor:volunteer ratio.

Scope

- 75. Why have you not included playgrounds in the scope of this?**

Playgrounds in parks are included.

Other playgrounds are the subject of separate work and were felt to present too much potential liability for a Trust.

- 76. There is a proposed sports ground at Bullocksteads – will that be part of the Trust?**

Post-session: no, this is not expected to be part of the Trust.

- 77. Why is The Valley not on the list when the Quarry is? The Valley (in East Gosforth) is bigger than The Quarry and has more wildlife potential.**

Post-session: parks in scope are defined according to criteria. The Valley is not classed as a park whereas The Quarry is a Neighbourhood Park.

- 78. Why isn't Barbendale Lonnen not in scope?**

Post Meeting: this is an area of open space that does not meet the full definition of a park.

- 79. Can a list of recreation grounds in scope be provided?**

A list is available with the cabinet papers that have been published on the council website.

- 80. What's the other 81% of green space made up of?**

It's all other green space in the city, and not just council land.

- 81. Can you provide a definition of "Freeman's land"?**

Post-session: Land commonly referred to as "Freeman land" is governed by the Newcastle upon Tyne Town Moor Act 1988. It is owned by the Council with rights historically granted to the Freeman of the City for grazing and for the general benefit of the public.

- 82. Can you supply a large-scale map showing the land and acreage area consisting of Nun's Moor Park and Recreation Area?**

Supplied post-meeting to the requestor.

83. The consultation talks a lot about spaces, but there is no list – we would like clarity about where they are.

They have all been published on the council website.

84. Will work on playgrounds be made public?

Colleagues in the Council are working on this. We are looking to develop a strategy on the future management of playgrounds across the city, and will consult on this in due course.

Staffing and Park Maintenance

85. Will there be experts on wildlife and conservation?

Yes, those skills have been considered.

86. Only 14 staff in the park service – no wonder you have a problem.

There are 14 members of staff in the Parks and Countryside Service, but maintenance is provided by another department.

87. Will the council's departments still do the maintenance work and in which year will this start?

The Trust has the freedom to choose how it carries out / procures this work.

88. So you currently have 14 staff – what about shared services like finance and HR, etc.?

The model recognises the need to fund supporting services such as these.

89. Who will be responsible for highways that go through parks?

Anything that is a statutory responsibility of the council like highways maintenance will remain with the council. Pavements and footpaths within parks are not adopted highways, and the Council has no statutory duty to maintain them. The trust would be responsible for these, not the Council.

90. How can staff who TUPE into the Trust be protected long-term?

Any changes to terms and conditions have to be achieved through negotiation and agreement with staff.

Miscellaneous

91. I live in a park – will I lose my house?

No. The income from lets refers to an empty property in Jesmond Dene, where staff suggested it might be a good holiday-let opportunity.

92. What is renewable energy?

Examples could be wind-powered energy, ground source heat, etc...

93. How long has the council been working on this idea?

About three years.

94. What will happen if the model is not recommended?

The council will have to consider alternative ways of working and generating income.

95. How will the impacts on communities of interest be captured?

An Impact Assessment will be produced. There is also the potential to consider equalities issues in the leases / management plans.

96. There has not been a considered public view – there should be an examination in public like with the One Core Strategy, otherwise you will end up with recriminations in future.

You have shoehorned people's comments into a proposal which is a fait accompli with no feasible alternative – it is an abrogation of responsibility.

There should be more consultation, you are leading Newcastle blind following a period where there have been cuts year-on-year and with staff inexperienced to lead this.

There should be a democratic process to decide – not just Cabinet.

We have consulted – this was one of the most successful consultations we have run, with around 4,300 responses which are helping to shape the proposed model and reflect concerns from the public. Please bear in mind that no decision has been made to proceed to implementation.

When a recommendation is made it will be the Council's Cabinet, a key part of the local authority democratic machinery, which makes the decision.

97. Can the objectives reflect that the parks be free to access?

The parks being free to access is one of the Council's core values, and will be translated to the Trust as a requirement through the lease(s) rather than the objectives. Some areas of land are not free to access (e.g. recreation grounds) – so it would be restrictive for the Trust to have that as an objective. It will be dealt with elsewhere in the governance.

98. Sheffield is not proceeding – no one else is doing this. Why? So are we a guinea pig?

In 2012 NESTA and HLF put a call out for organisations to look at different ways of delivering various projects and a new model for delivering parks was one of them, which involved National Trust and Sheffield.

Sheffield needed an endowment of around £100m and included a wide estate within the project. Sheffield eventually decided it was not right for them at the time, because of some other issues they were experiencing that were in the public eye. Liverpool also did a huge amount of work but paused. Newcastle was looking at this anyway and is now the national pathfinder for other authorities to share learning, and we're benefiting hugely from National Trust and HLF support.