

The Future of Newcastle's Parks



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Newcastle City Council is having to rethink how it delivers many of its services, including the city's parks.

We want to get your views on our ideas so far, and hear from you about your ideas on how parks in Newcastle should be run in future.

Why we are doing this?

Over the past seven years, our parks budget has reduced by over 90%, meaning that finding new ways of financing and running the city's parks is essential. We need to do this whilst staying committed to improving the way we deliver parks, keeping them in public ownership, safe, free to use, and making sure that local people, community groups and partners are fully involved in the future delivery of the service.

Our proposals so far...

We have been working with the National Trust, benefitting from their experience in preserving national heritage across the country, to help us find a positive way forward for Newcastle. In particular, we have been researching the possibility of transferring the operation, delivery and maintenance of a large proportion of the city's parks to a new Charitable Trust (Charity).

This is very much a work in progress, and we would be delighted if you would consider providing your thoughts and views to help shape the way forward.

Caring for Parks

Running a park involves lots of activities, all of which need to be funded, for example:

- Cutting the grass
- Planting, weeding, pruning
- Tree inspections and care
- Litter picking, cleaning, waste removal
- Running events
- Raising funds, and
- A whole lot more!

But parks do not make as much money as they cost to run. That means that public funds have been used to fill that gap. But local authority budgets are now under very severe pressure.

Core principles

As we develop new ideas for the future, we are putting the following principles at the heart of our work:

1. **Council priority:** parks are not a statutory service (they are not a service which local authorities are legally required to deliver), but their successful future is a high priority for the Council.
2. **Public ownership:** parks should remain in Council ownership.
3. **Safe and clean:** parks should be clean, and visitors should feel safe, and be safe.
4. **Free access for all:** parks should be free to access and use, but charging for some facilities / activities continues and grows.
5. **Existing groups:** an integral part of any new solutions.
6. **Your parks:** no decisions without engaging, listening, problem-solving (together), and feeding back.
7. **One city:** equality of resources and enjoyment across all of the City's parks with no "single park" solutions.
8. **No privatisation:** parks not transferred to a commercial entity but rather an entity with charity and community objectives, which preserves the parks and uses available income sources (including commercial income), to run the parks.

Parks Charitable Trust

We are researching the possibility of setting up a charity to dedicate all of its attention and resources to Newcastle's parks. We think a charity could bring some very important benefits to our parks:

- Independent from the Council therefore removed from the constraints imposed on local authorities
- Legally protects and preserves parks for public use
- Requires active involvement of the community, partners, stakeholders and staff
- Potential for trading and enterprising
- Secures the best human, environmental and social impacts
- Maximises opportunities for income generation to sustain the enterprise (not purely for commercial gain), and
- Unlocks new opportunities to access alternative funding sources.

How might it work?

- Park land held by the Council would be transferred to the Charity to be preserved and managed for public use (Council would continue to own the land).

- Existing arrangements such as leases and contracts also transfer.
- The charity employs staff, trains volunteers, generates income and delivers services based around its charitable objectives.
- Income from trading is ploughed back into the charity and the city's parks.
- The non-local authority structure enables new capacity, community and volunteer memberships.
- New and existing groups and individuals continue to help look after individual parks under a new supportive structure.
- The charity would have public reporting and accounting obligations via the Charities Commission.
- The Council as the landowner will operate in the background.

Which parks?

Subject to further work, we think the charity could potentially look after:

1. Armstrong Park
2. Benwell Nature Park
3. Big Waters Nature Reserve
4. Christon Road
5. City Stadium
6. Denton Dene South
7. Elswick Park
8. Exhibition and Brandling Parks
9. Gosforth Central Park
10. Harbottle Park and Allendale Road
11. Havannah and Three Hills Nature Reserve
12. Heaton Park
13. Hodgkin Park
14. Iris Brickfield
15. Jesmond Dene
16. Jesmond Vale
17. Kingston Park West
18. Leazes Park
19. North Kenton Park
20. Nuns Moor Park
21. Ouseburn Park
22. Paddy Freeman's / Castle Farm
23. Percy Pit
24. St Lawrence Park
25. Sugley Dene
26. Summerhill Square

27. The Quarry (South Gosforth)
28. The Spinney
29. Tyne Riverside
30. Walbottle and Throckley Dene
31. Walker Park
32. Walker Riverside Park
33. Westerhope Park

Allotments

We also need to consider whether it might be beneficial for the allotments to be looked after by the Charity. These would potentially benefit a new Trust by bringing a more diverse portfolio, urban farming skills, and very clear links to improving public health and wellbeing. With reducing Council resources, we are very keen to secure a positive future for allotments. There are currently:

- Approximately 51 hectares of allotments in total
- 62 Allotment Associations (self-managed with a number of allotment plots) also 42 individual plots, one Parish Council Allotment Association, and three sites managed by the Freeman.
- The Council also manages a number of allotment sites within the 62 above, on the Town Moor, under with an agreement with the Freeman.
- A list of all allotments is also provided.

We think the Council will continue to look after...

- **The Town Moor:** this is subject to the Newcastle upon Tyne Town Moor Act 1988 which provides special arrangements to ensure preservation as green open space for public use.
- **Recreation Grounds:** these are listed below and are not within the scope of this work.
- **Playgrounds:** playgrounds outside of the parks listed above would continue to be maintained by the Council.

Recreation Grounds...

1. Blakelaw recreation ground
2. Broadway West and Redhouse Farm
3. Brunswick recreation ground
4. Christon Road
5. Coxlodge recreation ground
6. Denton Dene North recreation ground
7. Denton Dene South (Scotswood Sports Centre)
8. Dinnington recreation ground
9. Fossway recreation ground

10. Gala Field
11. Hazelrigg recreation ground
12. King George V
13. Kingston Park East
14. Lemington recreation ground
15. Manor Park
16. McKendrick Villas
17. Miller's Dene recreation ground
18. Norwich Place
19. Swan Hunters Recreation Ground
20. Throckley recreation ground
21. Valley View recreation ground

We particularly want to know what you think about...

- The opportunities for parks in supporting public health, and their relationship with nearby hospitals.
- The role of parks in delivering a sustainable city, ecological value, and supporting diversity.
- Volunteers: roles, recruitment, training, and health & safety.
- People's involvement in the governance of the charity.
- The development of destination parks, and the role of neighbourhood parks.
- Events: community and cultural events, flagship events and their implications.
- Income generation:
 - charging for events and facilities
 - the best use of the buildings in parks
 - restaurants, catering, and licensing issues
 - parking.
- Parks and urban farming / allotments.
- The use of social media and crowdfunding.

...and anything else!

Find out more and get involved at: [**www.letstalknewcastle.co.uk**](http://www.letstalknewcastle.co.uk)