

# Don't let the sun set on our parks

## – Parks Charter Launched

21 June 2018 [Amended version]

### Coalition of national organisations call on political leaders to save UK parks

On the 21<sup>st</sup> June, the first day of summer, the UK's political leaders were asked to champion parks and local public green spaces across the UK to halt and reverse their decline.

The Charter for Parks was launched today by a coalition of 12 national organisations, calling on Prime Minister Theresa May and First Ministers Nicola Sturgeon, Carwyn Jones and Arlene Foster, to celebrate these spaces so vital for all communities and take action to safeguard them.

In England, outside Parliament, the charter was handed to a representative of The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government by NFPGS Chair Dave Morris, David Lambert of The Gardens Trust,

and a teacher and pupils of The Willow School in Tottenham.

The Year 5 pupils are regular users of Lordship Rec, where Dave Morris is chair of his local Friends Group.

Their teacher said:

*“We see the local park as fundamental to the school and the children. We use it as a resource for teaching, for community events, sports and family socialising all year round. It is especially important for us as a state school. Many of our families do not have private gardens, the park is absolutely essential.”*



Rishi Sunak, the Minister for Parks and Green Spaces said:

*“I am fully committed to working together with the many organisations, voluntary bodies and local communities who dedicate their own time to support the sustainability of our much valued parks and green spaces. While there are many challenges ahead, I am excited by the work the Parks Action Group is undertaking to identify positive solutions, so we can continue to provide safe and inclusive green spaces for our diverse communities to enjoy.”*

In Scotland representatives from Friends of Parks Groups in Edinburgh gathered in the green space beside the Scottish Parliament to launch the Charter for Parks.



Welsh Parliament representatives were also notified in Cardiff.

The Charter calls on the UK’s four political leaders to:

- Endorse a legal duty for all public green space to be managed to a good standard.
- Ensure adequate long-term resources for maintenance, management and improvements.
- Recognise the right of every citizen to have access within walking distance to a good-quality public green space.
- Celebrate the central role well-run parks play in our neighbourhoods for all sections of our communities.
- Embed effective protection from inappropriate development or use, or loss of any part of our parks.
- Encourage and enable community involvement and empowerment of local people and park users.

**Groups and organisations throughout the UK are being urged to sign up to the new Charter from today and throughout the summer.**

Dave Morris, Chair of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, said:

*“Time is running out for local parks across the UK. Continuous budget cuts to staffing and maintenance are leaving them vulnerable to neglect and deterioration, or even sell offs. Many people think local councils are legally responsible for maintaining local parks and open spaces but unfortunately, unlike waste collection, that’s not the case yet.*

*“Our Parks Charter calls on the leaders of all four home nations to take action to ensure these essential and highly-popular public resources are properly funded, managed, maintained, and protected for current and future generations*

*“As the voice of the movement of more than 6,000 local Friends of Parks Groups throughout the UK we recognise the immense contribution that these community volunteers are playing. Now it’s time for government to show an equal commitment to act. The public will not forgive political leaders who let the sun set on the UK’s parks.”*

Allison Ogden-Newton, Chief Executive of Keep Britain Tidy said:

*“As the operators of the national standard for parks and green spaces – the Green Flag Award – we know how important the provision of these quality spaces is to local communities and the health, prosperity and wellbeing of our nation. We welcome this charter.”*

Julie Proctor, Chief Executive of Greenspace Scotland said:

*“Scotland’s parks are one of our national treasures, but they face an increasingly uncertain future. Like many public services, they have been feeling the pinch; and with no legal duty to maintain parks, too often they are seen as an easy budget cut.*

*“Parks really are our natural health service, our children’s outdoor classrooms, our cities’ green lungs – essential to our quality of life, our sense of place and community. Yet we are rapidly approaching a tipping point leading to the downward spiral of reduced maintenance, poorer quality greenspaces and lower levels of use. We call on politicians, organisations and park users to stand up for parks and support the Charter.*

Helen Griffiths, Chief Executive of Fields in Trust, said:

*“Our research demonstrates that parks and green spaces have proven physical and mental health benefits. These are valuable places; places where we can all move, breathe, run and play. We need to champion and support these precious spaces by protecting them for people to enjoy in perpetuity. Because once lost, they are lost forever.”*

David Lambert, Trustee at The Gardens Trust said,

*“Our heritage of public parks is a national treasure but as a discretionary service, parks remain first in line for budget cuts, and eight years of austerity have seen disastrous reductions in staffing and maintenance. We need central government to recognise the scale of the problem and the risk to health that poses, with all the consequent human and financial cost.*

**- Ends -**

## **Notes to Editors**

Organisations and groups are encouraged to sign the charter via the Charter for Parks website.

[www.parkscharter.org.uk](http://www.parkscharter.org.uk) tw: @parkscharter fb: parkscharter

The Charter for Parks was launched on the first day of summer (21 June 2018) with the initial support of the following founding organisations: Greenspace Scotland, Keep Britain Tidy, Fields in Trust, Friends of the Earth, Llais y Goedwig (the voice of community woodlands in Wales), The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, The Parks Alliance, The Parks Agency, The Gardens Trust, Unison, and 38 Degrees.

The economic benefit of parks and open spaces to people has recently been analysed by Fields in Trust whose report, Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces: Establishing the Economic and Wellbeing Value,

<http://www.fieldsintrust.org/research>, found that:

- the well-being value from the frequent use of local parks and green spaces is worth £34.2 billion a year to the entire UK population.
- the total economic value to an individual from their use of local parks and green space is £30.24 a year (£2.52 per month).

According to a survey by the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE), 95% of parks professionals involving in maintaining, planning and managing parks agreed that “the lack of investment in parks and green spaces will have health and social impacts”.

In February 2017, an inquiry into the future of public parks by MPs on the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee recognised that parks are at a ‘tipping point’ and reported that “without being able to demonstrate the contribution made by parks to broader agendas local authority parks departments will find it difficult to secure sufficient priority”. <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/news-parliament-2015/public-parks-report-16-17/>

In May 2018, the Scottish Parliament Local Government & Communities Committee held a roundtable evidence session on access to greenspace <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11557>

In 2016, the State of UK Public Parks report from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) found a continuing decline in the state of parks’ infrastructure while public use of public parks was increasing. <https://www.hlf.org.uk/state-uk-public-parks-2016>

## **Press enquiries**

Contact the Keep Britain Tidy press office in advance to make arrangements