

London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network

www.lfgn.net

Press Release, 28.7.2011

Parks lovers hold first ever 'Love Our Parks' Picnic by Parliament on Sunday 31st July

The picnic, the first of its kind, is organised by London's Friends of Parks groups and will mark the last day of national Love Parks Week, 23-31 July, in which hundreds of thousands of people are taking part in over 1,000 local events [see below and www.loveparksweek.org.uk]. The picnic will be from 12noon to 4pm @ Victoria Tower Gardens, Millbank, London, SW1P 3JA - adjacent to Parliament.

Reps from Friends of Parks groups will be gathering to celebrate the UK's green spaces, and to call on the Government to value green spaces as much as the public do by committing the resources and statutory protection measures urgently needed. Friends groups will also be celebrating their efforts to improve green spaces in their own communities.

There are now over 3,000 such groups, most set up in the last 10 years. Over the last 2 years in particular Friends groups have begun to link up in towns and areas of the country. Through the new National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces [www.green-space.org.uk/community/nfpgs] they have developed into a national co-ordinated grass roots movement. There are already 29 area-based Friends Forums affiliated to the National Federation, involving over 1,500 local groups. In London, the London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network, organisers of the picnic, links together the 500 local groups throughout the capital and is encouraging the setting up of Friends Forums for every borough.

The event is a picnic, but there may be a few impromptu speeches around 1.30-2pm (ish).

" The UK's green spaces should be properly appreciated, protected and resourced because of the immense value they provide to all sections of our communities. The picnic, at the end of national Love Parks Week, will be celebrating the inspirational but often unrecognised efforts of local Friends groups to improve their green spaces through organising regular activities, publicity, lobbying and partnership-working with parks' management. At a time of shocking and unacceptable public service cuts threatening the staffing and maintenance of green spaces throughout the country we are calling on the Government to value them as much as the public do." Dave Morris - Chair, London Green Spaces Friends Groups Network

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR EDITORS

About Love Parks Week

www.loveparksweek.org.uk

Love Parks Week is an annual campaign, organised by parks charity GreenSpace. Founded in 2006, the campaign has grown steadily and is now established as a major event that is celebrated in parks across the country. Each year hundreds of events take place enabling thousands of people to get out and enjoy their parks and help put forward the case for reinvestment.

Benefits of parks

We are showcasing the benefits of these free, local resources and encouraging further promotion and reinvestment into such valuable, but often forgotten assets.

Did you know?

91% of people believe that public parks and open spaces improve their quality of life. Over 33 million people in England choose to use their green spaces, with around a tenth of the population visiting daily, and over half of us do so weekly. Air quality, air temperature, water and flood management, are all kept within manageable limits because of parks and green spaces. The more often a person visits urban open green spaces, the less often he or she will report stress-related illnesses. A brisk walk every day in your local park, can reduce the risk of heart attacks, strokes and diabetes by 50%, fracture of the femur by 30%, colon cancer by 30%, breast cancer by 30% and Alzheimer's by 25%. Local authorities are not legally required to provide, invest in or maintain public parks and green spaces.

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Cuts to staffing and maintenance to green spaces across the UK - the facts

GreenSpace: Comprehensive Spending Review Impact Study Interim Main Findings, March 2011

www.green-space.org.uk/CSRsurvey

The green space sector, mainly Local Authorities, responded in detail to GreenSpace's request in March for information on 2011-12 budgets following the Government's spending review:

- o Almost half of the respondents stated that cuts to green space budgets would**

be greater or significantly greater than the cuts to the local authority as a whole.

- o The vast majority of respondents had lost, or expected to lose staff.**
- o 60% of the jobs being lost involve those on the front line - directly involved in the maintenance and upkeep of green spaces.**
- o 70-80% report that quality standards will fall.**
- o 50-70% report that sites will become less beautiful, will fail to meet the needs of users and will not be as safe and secure.**

Of the 82% of local authority parks and green space teams facing budget cuts:

- o 30% will lose more than 20% of their budget**
- o 46% will face budget reductions that are greater than those facing the organisation as a whole and this trend looks set to continue across the three following years.**

80% of respondents report that they are reducing staff numbers:

- o 31% of job losses are to 'frontline general operatives'**
- o 17% are skilled horticulturalists**
- o Arborists, ecologists, landscape designers, security staff and apprentices account for a further 12% of job losses**

The vast majority of respondents report reduced ability to deliver against important green space management objectives:

- o 70% have reduced ability to provide attractive and welcoming sites**
- o 80% expect quality standards to fall**
- o 80% have reduced ability to deal with wear and tear and vandalism**
- o 67% won't be able to keep sites as beautiful and aesthetically appealing**
- o 68% are more likely to not be able to meet the needs of users**
- o 50% expect a drop in safety and security**
- o 44% of respondents report reduced ability to meet the needs of children and young people**
- o 37% are less likely to meet the needs of older people**
- o Around a third of respondents report reduced ability to deliver on biodiversity, climate change, healthy lifestyles, barriers to inclusion and building and supporting stronger communities.**

The loss of staff will extend and compound existing known skills shortages:

- o 44% have report significant skills shortages in community engagement**
- o 42% significant skills shortages in horticulture**
- o 35% significant skills shortages in landscape management**
- o 33% significant skills shortages in working with volunteers**
- o 25% significant skills shortages in programme and project management**
- o 23% significant skills shortages in partnership working**
- o 21% significant skills shortages in ecology**
- o 21% significant skills shortages in commercial acumen**

The service delivery model most likely to be widely used and broadly applied in

response to the reduced resource to deliver, is ‘merging with other service areas as part of a broader delivery unit’:

- o 54% are considering this approach**
- o 75% will apply it to much or all of the service**
- o 75% state that it is likely or highly likely to happen**
- o Potential loss of dedicated parks and green space teams**
- o Potential loss or redeployment of the specialist staff needed to deliver the full range of social, economic and environmental benefits or engage with the community and retain the sector’s position as a vanguard of Big Society.**