**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF PARKS AND GREEN SPACES** [www.natfedparks.org.uk](http://www.natfedparks.org.uk)*The umbrella organisation for the UK's Friends of Parks Forums and the Friends Groups movement*

**A new year's resolution everyone can make..
Save and Protect UK Parks
Please join the effort by widely promoting the 'Save Our Parks' UK petition:** [**http://chn.ge/TXdqhj**](http://chn.ge/TXdqhj)**Let's make the protection and improvement of our open spaces an issue in the May 2015 General Election.
And make a date in your diary for 2015's Love Parks Week - 24 July to 2 August**See below for examples of the growing underfunding crisis across the UK and what we can all do about it.

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Save our Parks Liverpool**You may be aware of the high profile campaign in Liverpool to save parks and greenspaces in the face of sell offs to developers. It would be useful to link to national and regional campaigns in a more formal way. The most high profile campaigns in Liverpool are Sefton Park Meadows, Woolton Woods, and Walton Hall Park. Save Sefton Park Meadows campaign, of which I am vice chair, has been working for almost 2 years to save this greenspace from Redrow Homes development. A planning application will be lodged shortly.

As other sites have come under threat from developers and identified as potential sites in the emerging Liverpool Local Plan, a new Greenspaces Alliance has formed in the city by 10 groups. Green Party, Lib Dems and independent councillors also support this - we only have 10 in total, with a predominantly Labour Council and Labour elected Mayor.

Save Sefton Park Meadows supports your Save Our Parks alliance and supporters have signed the petition and encouraged others to do. If the Alliance in Liverpool can maybe campaign under a wider objective to gain government commitment to parks at the forthcoming election, this would gain wide support here I am sure.

Janet Pell, Vice chair, Save Sefton Park Meadows: <http://saveseftonparkmeadows.org>

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Next round of budget cuts raises serious fear of deterioration in state of UK parks***Horticulture Week - 28 November 2014, by Sarah Cosgrove***London's councillors are seriously concerned about paying for parks in the short term despite them being central to saving money long term, according to London Councils' transport and environment committee chair.**Speaking ahead of the chancellor's autumn statement on 3 December, Julian Bell, also leader of the London Borough of Ealing, said he does not know how local authorities will "square the circle" of further budget cuts over the next five years - after already cutting "low-hanging fruit" - without seriously damaging services.

Despite the economy improving, wages and tax revenues remain low and UK borrowing is higher than last year, leaving chancellor George Osborne little room for pre-election giveaways.

Ealing needs to cut 96m from its budget over the next four years, adding to 87m already cut over the past four years. Only 56m of new cuts have been identified in the draft budget so far.

"It's pretty harsh," said Bell. "We're looking the graph of doom in the face. In Ealing, we've had a 30 per cent birth rate increase at the same time as an increase in the number of older people."

The "graph of doom" originated in Barnet in 2012. It showed the council in danger of running out of money for everything except core services by 2020. The "nub of the problem" is adult social care, which is 50 per cent of the average London borough's budget, leaving less for non-statutory services.

It is a picture mirrored in urban centres across the UK. Walsall, for example, must find savings of 104m by 2019, with 362,708 to go from green spaces next year alone.

Bell said Ealing has "taken a fair amount out already" from its park budgets but it was inevitable there would be more. Encouraging volunteering and revenue raising are also key, he added. Cabinet members were also due to vote on a proposal to turn one of three council golf courses into a Christmas tree nursery and mountain bike park producing 4,800 trees a year that would save 60,000 a year and earn an estimated 60,000 to 80,000 in net revenue. "We're trying to be more creative but there's only so much you can do," said Bell. "If you take too much management out you lose that experience. There's a real danger that parks will deteriorate and that's the real worry. I'm not sure how it's going to look. It's a very worrying time of change."

Yet Bell believes parks are a weapon in tackling the adult social care spend. "Parks and green spaces are critical to having a healthy population. We are all struggling but we all recognise that a healthy population is going to be more independent and less reliant on social services."

**Case study - Impact of cuts to 2015-16 parks budgets in Walsall***Allotments* Fifty per cent grants cut. Green spaces reduction including deletion of posts, cessation of events, loss of Green Flag status, reduced maintenance. *Grounds maintenance* Staff cut at arboretum, bedding plants ceased across 75 sites, grass cutting reduced from 14- to 20-day cycle. *Tree management/urban forestry* Number of posts cut from nine to seven, management programme reduced from four years to six years. *Green spaces and countryside management* Five posts removed and events reduced to make saving of 362,708 in 2015-16.

The council said the result would be "less attractive parks and community events for improving the health and well-being for older people; an increased risk of antisocial behaviour in parks; a decrease in education programmes; the borough will be less floral and aesthetically pleasing; and potential impact on reactive maintenance for storm damage".

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Act for nature**

*Royal Society for the Protection of Birds:* [*http://www.rspb.org.uk/joinandhelp/campaignwithus/act-for-nature/index.aspx*](http://www.rspb.org.uk/joinandhelp/campaignwithus/act-for-nature/index.aspx)**The Nature and Wellbeing Act Green Paper sets out the evidence which shows just how much people need nature. It details the ambitious package of measures to turn around the decline in our natural environment and contribute to many of our most pressing social and political objectives.**We want an Act which puts our need for nature at the heart of decision-making, for our own mental and physical health, and the health of our economy. We all know how much nature matters to us, not just for the moments of wonder with which it enhances our lives, but because it underpins every aspect of our existence it is our foundation. But across our society and economy it is still a foundation that is largely invisible and unaccounted-for. We know nature is under great pressure as we take from it to fuel our economy without giving back, and many of the worrying effects were outlined in last years State of Nature report produced by 25 conservation organisations.

Beyond this our health service is in crisis and one in four of us will suffer from a mental health problem at some point in our lives. Nature offers immense benefits to our mental and physical health, and this needs recognition. In 2011, this Government laid out solutions to these heath, economic and environmental issues in their paper The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature, but policies alone arent able to deliver. Our existing environment laws are strong, and they provide protection for our wildlife, but now we need to go further we need recovery.

So together with The Wildlife Trusts were calling for a Nature and Wellbeing Act in England, to create the right laws now to bring about the recovery of nature for future generations. As the 2015 General Election approaches, now is our moment to influence their promises. We're calling for the next Government to do something that lasts longer than five years, something that sets the tone for the next generation, and for generations after that.

**How you can help** We need nature. Join us, and ask your MP if their Party will Act for Nature, and commit to a Nature and Wellbeing Act in their election manifesto.

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**Petition against plans to privatise parks and waste services attracts hundreds of signatures ahead of public meeting***24 Nov 2014 - Wimbledon Guardian*A petition against plans to privatise [Merton's] parks and waste management has attracted hundreds of signatures ahead of a public meeting. Conservative councillor David Dean has organised a debate after strong public reaction to Merton Councils 32m cost-cutting plans which could see parks management and waste collection privatised. A petition entitled Save Merton's Parks has 451 signatures calling for the council to, among other things, retain control over the parks services locally, and for improvements to either maintain or improve the service.

The SLWP will procure the contract for parks and waste management. Merton Conservatives have called in the decision made by the cabinet on Monday, November 10 which means it will be open to scrutiny at a meeting sometime soon. The plans are to set up an integrated contract for waste collection, street cleaning, winter maintenance, commercial waste and vehicle maintenance.

Sutton and Merton councils could work together on grounds maintenance, including parks, arboriculture and grass verges as part of the South London Waste Partnership. The proposals are part of moves to fill a projected council budget gap of 32m over the next four years.

Jane Plant of the Merton Tree Warden group said: "Something as major as this should be widely consulted on. Time should be given to get it right if it does go ahead. I am very concerned that it is going ahead. The council is throwing parks management away with waste and litter."

Dan Goode, founder of litter campaign group Merton Matters, said: "The idea that volunteers will pick up the slack from a company protecting its own profits is laughable. Parks should be secured for future generations - this doesnt make any sense at all."

Merton Council cabinet member for environmental cleanliness and parking Councillor Judy Saunders said: The SLWP has huge expertise and experience in procuring contracts and will get the best deal for all the partnership boroughs and the tax-payer too. The partnership will commission environmental services specialists from 2017 to carry out waste collections and keep our parks clean. We are having to look at different ways of delivering quality services that are good value to the tax-payer. The government is continuing to reduce its funding to local authorities meaning were going to have to save 32m over the next four years."

Coun Dean said: *"Merton Councils Labour politicians are making a monumental mistake in hiving off the boroughs park maintenance to SLWP. Clearly, this organisation has no experience and will make a complete hash of one of the stand-out reasons for living in Merton; our gorgeous parks. The fact that nearly 500 have signed a petition in six days shows the strength of feeling of residents."*

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**The Government is made to recognise that they must act to protect libraries under threat due to Government underfunding of public services - but what about parks?**Mr Edward Vaizey (The Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy) said: " Today (19th December) I am publishing the Independent Library Report and depositing a copy in the House Library. This has been undertaken by William Sieghart and I would like to state on record my particular thanks to him and his expert panel for their endeavour and ambition to create a positive action plan for libraries. I am also very grateful to everyone who has contributed to this important work.

We welcome the panel's recommendations, which are being considered in detail. I am taking the immediate first step in partnership with local government to set up the joint taskforce to advise on implementation of the recommendations which will be chaired by Dr Paul Blantern, Chief Executive of Northamptonshire County Council. He will be supported by a range of experts with an interest in libraries. This taskforce will report both to Ministers and the Local Government Association and the first meeting is due to take place in Spring 2015. I whole-heartedly support the public library service which has been making a vital contribution to the knowledge, delight and quality of life of communities in every part of England for more than 150 years. They are a cherished part of our cultural heritage, and a key player in our future. "

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**Promote the 'Save Our Parks' petition - let's make the protection and improvement of our open spaces an issue in the May 2015 General Election**The Government's cuts to Local Authorities for our local public services, combined with the lack of statutory protection for open spaces, are causing the most of the problems we are facing. So please sign and promote the UK 'Save Our Parks' petition to step up the pressure on the Government and all political parties to take seriously the future funding and protection of our vital green spaces.

**1. Sign the petition:** <http://chn.ge/TXdqhj>
**2. Spread the news via Twitter:** @LoveParks\_Week  #LoveParks
**3. Spread the news via Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/ukparkspetition](http://www.facebook.com/ukparkspetition) - and: [www.facebook.com/LoveParksWeek](http://www.facebook.com/LoveParksWeek)
**4. Refer to the Parks Petition webpage:** [www.natfedparks.org.uk/parks-petition.html](http://www.natfedparks.org.uk/parks-petition.html) - the page includes a Sign Up Sheet and leaflets to distribute

Please don't forget to support your local green space Friends Group or help set up one for any green space without one!
**Please lobby your Council now on behalf of your local parks and open spaces!**

We have been sent the following appeal, from a Friends of Parks Forum in a London borough. It is for all those who care about our vital green spaces to lobby their Councils throughout the winter as they discuss next year's budgets. Its an informative, passionate and well-crafted guide on why and how to do it! Please feel free to adapt their appeal to your own local circumstances.

**ISLINGTON FRIENDS OF PARKS FORUM: SAVE OUR PARKS!**
Islington’s parks and green spaces are vital for everyone of all ages and every part of our community! They are an essential and unique provision promoting relaxation, recreation and play, wildlife and bio-diversity, green jobs and skills, heritage, flood control, health and social well-being, and community cohesion

However, because there is no statutory obligation for the council to fund them, there is growing alarm that the dramatic national cuts in local government funding could lead to serious long-term damage to parks. If not reversed, this will cause them to decline and become abandoned problem spaces plagued by vandalism

This threat must be halted. It's time for action, especially as the Islington Council budget for 2015-16 is now being discussed by councillors and will be finalised in January and February 2015.

The Islington Friends of Parks Forum asks individual friends of parks groups to follow this four point course of action.

**1. Contact local ward councillors** - many of whom were newly elected in May and some of whom may not live in the ward they represent - and invite them to visit your park. (Feel free to use our letter [point 3] as a basis if you wish.) Show them what the park has and what it might also provide in the future. Details of ward councillors can be found here <http://democracy.islington.gov.uk/mgFindMember.aspx>

You can find out which ward you are in by putting an appropriate postcode into <http://www.islington.gov.uk/islington/Pages/find-my-nearest.aspx?extra=15>

**2. Create a petition about your local park** (possibly using the National Federation petition leaflet [below] as a starting point). Details of submitting a petition to Islington Council can be found at <http://www.islington.gov.uk/involved/consultation-engagement/Pages/petitions.aspx>

**3. Support the Forum to lobby all councillors** **by December.** We will be sending the following letter to all councillors.

*The Islington Friends of Parks Forum call on all Islington councillors to pledge to maintain existing resources for the borough's parks and gardens when deciding priorities for the 2015/2016 Budget. Here's why we believe it would be a cost effective, sensible as well as a popular thing to do:

It seems to us that Islington's wonderful and popular parks and green spaces might be under threat due to increasing funding constraints, as they are not a statutory obligation for Councils. Yet Islington's parks are an integral part of our "natural health service" and provide, at reasonable cost to the community, an unparalleled range of opportunities to help prevent and tackle major health concerns. This includes the need to reduce the worryingly high levels of mental health problems and obesity in the borough. Parks also provide a vital "green lung" for all of us in a borough which has a high percentage of homes without any open space of their own. It's not just our people who benefit from high quality parks but hard pressed wildlife can also find a home here on our doorsteps.

Reducing funding for maintenance and staffing would undermine the benefits we all gain from visiting parks. Reductions in funding during previous periods of public spending cuts led to an increase in vandalism; it took much Council time, energy and money to restore our parks and open spaces to their present high state. We believe Islington has the opportunity to show other local authorities the way forward by continuing to invest in our parks and green spaces - to maintain their high quality which has been built up over many years. It is money well spent.

The Islington Friends of Parks Forum would welcome the opportunity to meet with councillors to explain the case for maintaining the current level of spending and investment in our parks and green spaces.***Resources** Sign the 'Save Our Parks' UK petition: <http://chn.ge/TXdqhj>Save Our Parks petition leaflet <http://www.natfedparks.org.uk/mediapool/118/1181937/data/NFPGSpetitionleaflet2014_1_.pdf>
Speak Out leaflet <http://www.natfedparks.org.uk/mediapool/118/1181937/data/NFPGSfederationSpeakOutleaflet2sidesA5.pdf>
Standing Up for Green Spaces leaflet <http://www.natfedparks.org.uk/mediapool/118/1181937/data/NFPGS_standing_up_for_our_green_spaces.pdf>
State of UK Parks report 2014, Heritage Lottery Fund http://www.hlf.org.uk/state-uk-public-park