



CLIMATE SPECIAL

Hi everyone,

The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces is backing and publicising the **Great Big Green Week, 18-26th September**, alongside a wide range of national organisations, representing millions of people throughout the UK.

Everyone is invited to join: <https://greatbiggreenweek.com/>

In the run up to COP26 in November, and in solidarity with many green space and climate activists involved in various environmental causes in their area, we bring you this special newsletter.

In this update we want to explore a few of the many issues and challenges facing UK parks in relation to the climate and biodiversity crisis. We hope this information will be helpful for campaigning and project ideas in your areas, engaging with parks users, communities and with decision-makers, eg. MPs and councils.

Where possible we've included links to further information and case studies, shown as references listed at the end of the email. This list might not be exhaustive - much within the climate and biodiversity crisis are linked to various agendas, these are complex issues and should be tackled locally with good

engagement. There are lots more great resources available.

There is strong evidence that parks, green and blue spaces will be essential in mitigating extreme weather and also play a part in the journey towards zero carbon. The NFPGS continue to call for proper protection and investment in our parks, green and blue spaces. It's needed now more than ever.

Challenges faced by parks and green spaces

Changes to weather patterns will impact on our parks and without investment now, could pose significant harm to precious areas.

- **Continued declines in funding overall into the parks sector limits strategic approaches to environmental improvements.** Our own research highlights how stretched parks teams are and how this limits collaborations. This loss of funding exacerbates the declining quality of infrastructure, adds to pressures to sell, and increasingly, concessions and large-scale events are being used to make up shortfalls (*Reference 1*).
- **Extreme weather impacts parks environments.** Climate change in the UK will bring intense rains and stronger winds, already the impact of flooding is being felt. There is likely to be hotter, drier summers (*Ref. 2*). Plants and wildlife will need support, particularly through the linking of habitat sites, to be resilient (*Ref 3 and 4*).
- **Plant and animal pathogens are increasing.** It's not just covid-19 for humans, plants and other wildlife are severely affected by incoming pests and diseases (*Ref 5 and 6*). A changing climate changes the range of pests and their ability to take hold in different areas (*Ref 7*).

Parks and green spaces are essential

Whilst the challenges are concerning, green spaces, and wider green and blue infrastructure, can also play a huge part in the solution. Parks, green and blue

spaces across the UK can be part of the solution in different ways.

Resilience against extreme weather

- **Urban green spaces reduce the 'heat-island' effect.** As temperatures rise, the temperatures in cities and towns can soar. Increasing the number of street trees, and adding other greenery throughout streets and neighbourhoods, improves shading and reduces the amount of heat conduction (*Ref 8*).
- **Green spaces can protect properties against flooding.** Many urban parks already function as flood mitigation spaces, protecting homes and businesses against flooding (*Ref 9*). Additional green infrastructure, such as gardens, green roofs or street trees, can also slow the flow of water through built up areas, helping to manage localised rainfall (*Ref 10*).
- **Rural green spaces can be better managed to prevent downstream flooding.** Many partnerships of NGOs, water companies, farmers and environmental groups, are transforming their estates and catchment areas to better manage intense rainfall and prevent downstream flooding (*Ref 11*).

Sustainable solutions

- **Carbon sequestration can be delivered in green spaces.** In addition to providing space for new trees and woodlands, our large existing trees play a significant role in holding carbon and regulating air pollution (*Ref 12*). There is also emerging research about how managed parks, green spaces and urban soils can help absorb carbon (*Ref 13*).
 - **Parks could help in the transition to clean energy.** Some parks could become places where renewable energy is generated, helping deliver localised heating and electricity solutions (*Ref 14 and 15*).
 - **Greener streets encourage more active travel choices.** New pocket parks and planters can be carefully placed to reduce through traffic,
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improving the environment for walkers and cyclists (*Ref 16*). Improving the health of communities by reducing air pollution and encouraging active travel is recommended by health experts (*Ref 17 and 18*) and will also reduce carbon emissions (*Ref 19*).

- **Public green spaces provide attractive alternative travel routes.** Encouraging active travel and achieving healthier communities is a priority for local authorities. There is also a great map for those in London, showing how to travel from park to park (*Ref 20*).

Benefits for wildlife

- **Parks and green spaces, including private gardens, are havens for wildlife.** The combined network of green spaces across towns and cities, supports urban wildlife populations (*Ref 21*).
- **Planned well, new developments can bring our communities and wildlife closer together.** There are many ways to build that contribute to better living spaces for people and nature (*Ref 22*). A requirement to leave natural areas improved after development, called Biodiversity Net Gain, is likely to become mandatory in future (*Ref 23*).
- **Even humble verges can support pollinators and wildflowers.** At the bottom of the food chain insects underpin healthy ecosystems, yet have declined hugely in the UK in the last few decades (*Ref 24*). Changes to management can create important corridors, networks in and out of urban areas, plus look beautiful (*Ref 25*).

Benefits for people

- **Parks and green spaces support good physical and mental health.** The pandemic saw a huge increase in the use of our local parks and green spaces (*Ref 26*). Estimated well-being benefits of access to parks and green spaces is £34.2 billion a year., with annual savings to the
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NHS being £100m just in reduced GP visits alone (*Ref 27 and 28*).

According to the NHS, healthier populations and reductions in healthcare needs also translates into carbon emission reductions (*Ref 29*).

- **New parks can revitalise town centres.** Changes in shopping habits, and latterly the pandemic, have left empty retail spaces with opportunities provided to create new parks and green spaces (*Ref 30 and 31*).
- **Green and blue spaces can build resilience into our food systems.** Developing new areas for food growing, for example community allotments or open orchard areas in parks, rooftop farms or food gardens, can provide a good proportion of local fruit and vegetables (*Ref 32*). Growing food locally provides more nutritious food with a lower carbon footprint (*Ref 33*). Consumers want sustainable products (*Ref 34*), which could provide a ready market for community-led schemes (*Ref 35*).
- **Public green space provides unparalleled opportunities for promoting environmental education, awareness and volunteering.** The experiences of our Friends groups and environmental volunteers across the UK, show the range and scope of projects and improvements undertaken (*Ref 36*). All this work brings education, awareness and opportunities to be involved for the future.

We know lots of you out there are engaged in so many good projects that support a sustainable future - thank you for everything you are doing. Please let us know about your projects on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) so we can share your successes.

Kind regards, Michelle



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