

Press release: Government pledges £500,000 for new action group to grow future of public parks

Parks and Green Spaces Minister Marcus Jones today (19 September 2017) launched a new Parks Action Group to help England's public parks and green spaces meet the needs of communities now and in the future.

The new Parks Action Group will include experts from the world of horticulture, leisure, heritage and tourism, and will be tasked with bringing forward proposals to address some of the issues faced by public parks and other green spaces across England. To support them, government is providing £500,000 funding to kick start their work.

The action group will propose what steps can be taken in line with the government response to the recent House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee report into the future of parks and green spaces.

Parks and Green Spaces Minister Marcus Jones said:

We recognise the value of parks and green spaces to local communities – including reducing loneliness, increasing wellbeing, and revitalising town and city centres.

But we need to do more to make sure future generations are continuing to enjoy their benefits. That is why we have announced a new expert-led Parks Action Group to work closely with the sector to find the right solutions.

This latest development builds on action the government has taken to date to encourage more people to make better use of parks including:

- In December 2015, the government published the "[Sporting future: a new strategy for an active nation](#)" which set out the importance of sport and physical activity. The [first annual report](#) on the implementation of "sporting future" was published with a specific focus on the themes of central government, local government and outdoor recreation.
- In [February 2016](#) the government awarded over £1 million to improve 87 small pockets of unloved, undeveloped or derelict land to transform them into 87 green spaces that the whole community can enjoy.
- The government has [announced](#) that is to continue the Green Flag Awards license for making sure that Britain's best parks and green spaces will

continue to be recognised for another 5 years. For 20 years, the [Green Flag Awards](#) have been recognising the best of green outdoor spaces in the UK, for people to enjoy and setting standards for park managers across the country to try to emulate. Many parks have won the award, but winners also include more unusual spaces such as social housing developments, cemeteries, canals, and shopping centres.

Parks research

Research published today from the charity Fields in Trust shows that living close to and visiting parks and green spaces can increase people's wellbeing and improve their health. The research also highlights the importance of parks as spaces for neighbours to socialise away, helping to reduce the risk of loneliness.

Fields in Trust's report, among others, will be fundamental to the Parks Action Group's work moving forward.

Helen Griffiths, chief executive Fields in Trust said:

I welcome the ministers response to the CLG Parliamentary Committee and Fields in Trust's appointment to the newly established Parks Action Group at this pivotal moment for the future of parks and green spaces.

Our ongoing research recognises how these spaces help to address significant public policy issues including health and wellbeing and community integration.

We are looking forward to furthering our work with colleagues across the sector to ensure that we value parks and green spaces and take account of the vital contribution they make to local communities.

Graham Duxbury, chief executive of Groundwork said:

Making sure that all communities and all sections of society are able to enjoy the benefits of good green spaces is vital. Joining a local group can help young people develop their skills and older people overcome loneliness.

Well managed green spaces can also help whole neighbourhoods cope with the costly impacts of climate change. We look forward to helping the action group unlock more practical support so that local communities and local authorities can maximise these social and economic benefits.

Matthew Bradbury, Parks Alliance's chief executive said:

Having been involved in lobbying for an inquiry, The Parks Alliance wholeheartedly welcomes the publication of the minister's response to the Local Government Select Committee inquiry into the Future of Public Parks and particularly the creation of a cross governmental and sector supported, Parks Action Group.

The Parks Alliance is very much looking forward to working with the minister, government and the wider sector to secure the future of public parks for the communities that they serve.

Further information

The House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee report: "the future of public parks" published in February 2017, made 17 recommendations that are addressed in full in the [government's response](#) published today (19 September 2017).

The direction of the Parks Action Group will be determined by park sector experts in co-operation with officials from a number of government departments. The Action Group will consider the recommendations from the government's response to the report and propose new projects and actions that will help our parks and green spaces thrive.

Members of the Parks Action Group

Parks and Green Spaces Minister Marcus Jones will chair the inaugural meeting.

The members of the Parks Action Group are:

- Drew Bennellick, Head of Landscape & Natural Heritage UK, Heritage Lottery Fund
- Matthew Bradbury, CEO, Parks Alliance
- Graham Duxbury, CEO, Groundwork
- Helen Griffiths, CEO, Fields In Trust
- Ian Leete, Senior Advisor on Culture, Tourism and Sport, Local Government Association
- Dave Morris, Chair, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces
- Paul O'Brien, CEO, Association of Public Service Excellence
- Ellie Robinson, Assistant Director, National Trust
- Dave Solly, Natural England

The government has taken steps to encourage more people to make better use of parks. In December 2015, the government published the "[sporting future: a new strategy for an active nation](#)" which set out the importance of sport and physical activity. The first annual report on the implementation of "sporting future" was published with a specific focus on the themes of central government, local government and outdoor recreation.

87 Pocket Parks were awarded £1.05 million in 2016.

The government has supported the Green Flag Awards for 20 years and has recently announced that it is to extend the licence for another 5 years.

The Parks Action Group's recommendations will be implemented through a cross-government group bringing together the relevant government departments including:

- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)
- Department of Health (DH)
- Department for Education (DfE)
- Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS)
- Home Office (HO)
- Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Press release: No waste permit costs driver

Caught driving a tipper truck full of waste without being registered with the Environment Agency has today (Mon 18/9) cost Patrick Egan £965.

Egan of Grange Road, Grays was convicted in his absence by Basildon magistrates of driving the truck without being registered as a waste carrier nor being employed by a registered waste carrier.

The court fined him £660 and ordered that as well as the fine he should pay a victim surcharge of £66, Environment Agency costs of £85 and compensation of £154.

The tipper truck was stopped by police in Gumley Road, Grays in the course of an investigation into fly-tipping.

When the vehicle was stopped in January this year it was loaded with rubble, bricks and plasterboard.

Don't ignore advice

Egan told them the vehicle belonged to a friend called James whom he sometimes did favours for, such as driving lorries, and was paid £100 to drive it.

He said he did not check the load.

After the hearing an Environment Agency officer spokesperson said: "People driving tipper trucks such as Mr Egan drove have a responsibility to check the load and to be properly permitted by the Environment Agency. It is not good enough to ignore this advice as the court decision has shown today."

The cost of registering with the Environment Agency in 2017 is £154. The registration is valid for 3 years.

News story: Reducing regulatory burden: the Ofqual handbook and more

Ofqual announces package of measures to reduce regulatory burden, including a new online handbook.

Today (19 September 2017) Ofqual is announcing a package of measures that support our commitment to reduce unnecessary regulatory burden.

In October, we will be launching a preview version of the Ofqual handbook – a new, online resource that brings together all our general rules and guidance, making them easier to use and understand.

We are also confirming several changes to our wider regulatory framework, removing some unnecessary rules and updating others.

The Ofqual handbook

We have designed the handbook to replace 6 existing documents. It will provide:

- simpler, at-a-glance, navigation – related requirements and guidance are grouped together, with no need to navigate between different documents
- enhanced interactivity – including hyperlinked cross-references and tooltips on defined terms
- better accessibility – built using GOV.UK, the handbook complies with a wide range of accessibility standards, and is compatible with assistive software such as screen readers, speech recognition and magnifiers

The handbook will be available alongside the existing documents during a test period (which runs until the end of the year). We will be seeking feedback on the handbook before taking a final decision on rollout in early 2018. We will be previewing the Ofqual handbook in a [live webinar on 5 October](#). We will also be holding [face-to-face workshops on 24 October, 27 October and 7 November](#), for those who are interested to learn more about it and provide feedback.

Reviewing our regulatory framework

Today, we are confirming a number of changes that remove redundant rules.

1. In line with [our earlier announcement](#), we have withdrawn our ‘Criteria

for Key Skills Qualifications’.

2. We have also withdrawn our legacy subject criteria for the GCSEs, AS and A levels that were reformed for first teaching in September 2015. Students can no longer take these qualifications, so we no longer need these rules. Our rules covering reviews and appeals in these qualifications remain in force.
3. We have published new versions of our qualification-level ‘Conditions for reformed and legacy GCSEs, AS and A levels’. These new versions simplify our rules by removing transitional arrangements that are no longer in force.

We have also published a new version of our ‘[Specifications in relation to the reasonable adjustment of general qualifications](#)’. This updates the document to reflect changes made by the ‘[Equality Act 2010 \(General Qualifications Bodies\) \(Appropriate Regulator and Relevant Qualifications\) \(Amendment\) \(England\) Regulations 2017](#)’.

News story: Government welcomes proposals outlined by the Takeover Panel

Business Secretary Greg Clark has welcomed proposals outlined today by the Takeover Panel, the independent body responsible for issuing and administering the Takeover Code. A consultation is seeking views on important reforms to the way takeovers operate in the UK.

Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Greg Clark, said:

One of Britain’s biggest assets in competing in the global economy is our deserved reputation for being a dependable and confident place in which to do business.

The Takeover Panel is a respected and important part of this regime and the Government welcomes the valuable changes it is proposing. They will require bidders to make earlier and fuller disclosure of their plans for the target company, including its research and development, location of HQ, and the composition and skills of its workforce; and give companies subject to a bid more time to prepare their response.

This autumn the Business Secretary will be publishing proposals that address the national security concerns that can arise from foreign investment. These

will set out further measures to safeguard national security, while ensuring the UK remains a global champion of free trade and investment.

Notes to editor:

- Takeovers of publicly listed companies in the UK must abide by the Takeover Code, which sets out an orderly framework for how takeovers must be conducted.
- The Takeover Panel is an independent body which issues and administers the Takeover Code, and supervises and regulates takeovers. Its principal objective is to ensure fair treatment for all shareholders in takeover bids.
- The Takeover Panel's [consultation](#) will run for 6 weeks
- The Code Committee is proposing changes to the Code which would require:
 1. bidders to be more specific in their plans for a target company. This would include making statements of intention regarding: the company's research and development, the balance of skills and functions of the company's employees, and the location of the company's headquarters;
 2. statements of intention to be made at the time of a bidder's announcement of its firm intention to make an offer;
 3. bidders to not publish an offer document for 14 days from the announcement of their intention to make an offer without the consent of the board of the target company; and
 4. companies to publish reports on their compliance with the plans they announced during the course of an offer.

News story: Mundell: Leaving the EU will transform global trade

In a speech during a trade visit at the Diplomatic Academy, attended by senior members of the Paraguayan government, Mr Mundell focused on strengthening ties between Scotland and Paraguay, and the future of international trade as we leave the EU. He also spoke, on the third anniversary of the 2014 independence vote, about Scottish politics and working with the Scottish Government on Brexit.

On international trade, Mr Mundell said:

"Both our countries are very different now than they were 20 years ago. We find ourselves in a very different world. Amid all the change around us, it is encouraging that our relationship has strengthened in the last few years.

"This includes the promotion and protection of around \$120 million worth of British investments in the Paraguayan economy. But there is much more we can

do. So it mustn't be another twenty years.

"I see my visit here this week as the start of a stronger, closer relationship. This is part of a fundamental step-change in the UK's global trade policy. Looking at our global trade policy, leaving the EU will be transformative.

"Of course, a significant part of the trade we currently do is underpinned by trade deals we are a part of through our membership with the EU. We are taking a sensible, pragmatic approach to these deals. That is why we will continue to support the EU's trade agenda, including continued support for the ongoing negotiations of the EU-Mercosur Free Trade Agreement. As we leave the EU, we look forward to building upon that progress with Paraguay and the other Mercosur members."

Reflecting on 20 years of devolution, Mr Mundell said:

"We need to pull together at home. We need to be ready for Brexit.

"Our two countries have changed over the past 20 years. In the UK, one of the biggest changes has been to devolve power closer to the people and to create a parliament in Scotland's capital, Edinburgh, and legislative assemblies for Wales, in Cardiff, and Northern Ireland, in Belfast.

"When our Lord President of the Council visited Paraguay in 1996, they did not exist. Now, a UK without them is unimaginable.

"Last week we celebrated the 20th anniversary of a referendum in Scotland when the people voted overwhelmingly in favour of creating a parliament. It means that in Scotland we are at the heart of a strong, secure UK while having the ability to take different decisions, specific to Scotland's needs and priorities, in devolved areas.

"This powerful feeling that we enjoy the best of the both worlds carried the day in 2014 when the Nationalist government in Edinburgh held a referendum on Scottish independence. Their proposal to take Scotland out of the UK was firmly rejected.

"Devolution – not independence – is the clear and settled will of the Scottish people and its achievements over the past 20 years have been considerable.

Mr Mundell stated the need for common UK-wide frameworks:

"For more than 40 years, as members of the EU, we have taken a common approach, shared by all Member States, to a wide range of policy areas. This has ensured consistency within the UK, even after the devolution of powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. A common UK-wide approach to many policy areas was built in to the devolution settlements.

"The question we need to answer now as we leave the EU is this: Where do we need to retain a UK-wide approach? And where can power returning from Brussels be transferred direct to the Scottish Parliament and other devolved institutions?

"We want to find common sense answers to these questions. For us, that will mean maintaining common, UK-wide frameworks in some areas in order to protect one of our biggest assets, our UK internal market. I am not prepared to see barriers emerge to trade within the UK, which would be extremely damaging for Scottish firms and for business across the UK.

"It is also essential that we safeguard our ability to enter into and implement trade deals or other international obligations. That is what we are talking about when we say we need common frameworks. But equally, we are clear that we will devolve powers unless there is a reason not to.

"The result will be a Scottish Parliament more powerful than it is today – indeed more powerful than it has ever been."

He spoke of working with the Scottish Government on Brexit issues and that independence is not the answer:

"Behind the scenes, that work has been happening and I am pleased to report we are making progress. But frankly, up to now, private progress has been overshadowed by public rhetoric.

"We have been accused by the Nationalist government in Edinburgh of a 'power grab,' of using our exit from the EU as an opportunity to centralise power at Westminster. That is simply not the case. Our record demonstrates our commitment to devolution.

"As a former MSP I want to see the Scottish Parliament strengthened and that is what will happen as we leave the EU. But I'm equally clear I want to see devolution delivered in a way that strengthens our United Kingdom – not undermines it. And this, sadly, goes to the heart of the matter.

"The fact is, until the recent election in June, the Brexit debate in Scotland was deliberately conflated with the question of Scottish independence.

"Despite the passage of only three short years – and despite the decisive result – the Scottish National Party – sought to use Brexit to re-open the issue that divided our country so badly.

"Their attempt was roundly rejected in the recent general election so we now need the issues to be de-coupled for good. The First Minister Nicola Sturgeon could put that to bed once and for all by ruling out a second independence referendum at her conference this autumn, and I hope she does.

"But whether or not she goes that far, I was heartened by her commitment in her Programme for Government to put the day job back front and centre. That is what people in Scotland asked for in June, and that is what they deserve.

"I look forward to the Autumn heralding the start of a more mature approach – where public rhetoric on all sides reflects the serious and constructive work achieved in private."

He summed up his hopes for a stronger relationship between Scotland, the UK and Paraguay – and in particular his hopes for the whisky industry:

"Around half of the UK's exports to Paraguay come from Scotland – mainly in the form of Scotch Whisky. I understand that this has been rising steadily over the years.

"This is welcome, of course. But twenty years ago, we were exporting three times as much Scotch Whisky to Paraguay as we are now. This is something I want to see turned around in the coming years, and which I see as a real Scottish opportunity. And trust me, as a connoisseur of Scotch whisky, a breakthrough in whisky exports will be for your enjoyment as much as ours.

"Scotch is a big deal here in South America, with the Scotch Whisky Association reporting sales of over £200 million. Scotland's biggest export is being enjoyed by millions, from Colombia to Argentina, and from Brazil to Chile.

"South America is a continent of opportunity, a marketplace of 400 million people, and home to several growing economies, including Paraguay. As these economies grow, I am certain Scottish companies will be at the forefront of this. In agriculture, education, energy, food and drink, and financial services.

"Scotland's skills, products and services are highly regarded globally, and we can build on that as we strike ambitious new trade deals and build relationships around the world. I am delighted to be here to bang the drum for businesses in Scotland and across the whole of the United Kingdom.

"I'll not pretend that we don't face challenges. We face tough negotiations with our EU partners to secure the right Brexit deal for the UK. Within the UK we must bring powers back from Brussels in a way that respects and strengthens the devolution of decision-making to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

"We must show an adventurous new spirit to reach out to the rest of the world and strike trade agreements that will benefit us all. We want to forge new partnerships and – as I sincerely hope my visit to Paraguay demonstrates – deepen ties with old friends.

"But as I hope I've shown, we approach all this with clear principles and a real commitment to work with others."