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GREEN PLACES

*Putting the local environment at the heart of the
devolution agenda, with Judith Blake, Ruth Davis,
Ed Wallis, Sarah Whitney and many others*



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EDITORIAL

The devolution agenda that is currently in full swing offers huge potential to support local environments and empower local communities. There are risks, however, that this promise will remain unfulfilled and that the economic focus of the 'northern powerhouse' will crowd out broader social, environmental and democratic aims of devolution.

This report assesses the evolving devolution policy landscape, and shows how the local environment can be the 'green thread' that binds devo deals together. There is growing recognition in public policy of the importance of green infrastructure – our interconnected network of green spaces. They bring significant economic, social, and environmental benefits, as well as providing crucial community spaces where people can come together, meet their neighbours and build trusting relationships.

Judith Blake outlines how councils can make green infrastructure a bigger part of their devolution strategies, as an engine of economic growth, wellbeing, and wider civic and regional renewal. Sarah Whitney makes the economic case for investment in green infrastructure, while Ruth Davis investigates how civil society can engage with the devolution agenda and Hugh Ellis considers the role of the planning system in creating 'green places'.

With Greater Manchester furthest on in the devolution process, Kate Chappell explains how it is using its new powers mainstream environmental policy. Hannah Jameson shows how getting the most out of devolution requires a different approach to politics. And Mark Walton and Kate Swade outline the options for hard-pressed local authorities as they try to keep green spaces viable in the face of spending cuts.



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The green thread

In an evolving and fragmented devolution policy landscape, green infrastructure can be the ‘green thread’ that binds devo deals together, writes *Ed Wallis*



Ed Wallis is policy and public affairs manager at Locality and the former editorial director of the Fabian Society

FOR A LONG time, the environment has found itself cast to the periphery of political debate. The hopeful spirit of the early 21st century, which saw making poverty history and securing the world from the threat of climate change as the defining challenges of a generation, disappeared in the dust of Lehman Brothers. As the Great Recession gradually exerted its stranglehold over political debate, the environment increasingly became seen as a frivolous sideshow.

Similarly, the environment is at best an afterthought in our current ‘devolution revolution’. The ‘northern powerhouse’ has been essentially an economic project: from the RSA’s City Growth Commission to Andrew Adonis’s growth review, it has been argued that dynamic regional economies can be created by giving greater decision making powers and control over budgets to local areas. And while there is a range of potential aims for the government’s programme of sub-regional devolution – from bringing power closer to people to transforming public services – Professor Andy Pike told a CLG select committee inquiry that other objectives “do not get addressed as much” as the local growth agenda. In terms of the 10 devolution deals so far agreed, only Greater Lincolnshire (flooding), Cornwall (renewable energy) and Liverpool (tidal power) have a specific environmental aspect to their powers, and these relate to their particular geographical character. It is hard to look at the deals and feel they are motivated by a desire to respond to our environmental challenges or harness the potential of our natural capital.

And yet, there is growing recognition in public policy of the importance of green infrastructure – our interconnected network of green spaces. They bring significant eco-

nomic, social, and environmental benefits to society, as well as crucial community spaces where people can come together, meet their neighbours and build trusting relationships.

The Natural Capital Committee recently concluded that investments in environmental assets generate economic returns that are competitive with the returns generated by more traditional infrastructure investments. This echoes the conclusions of the EU green infrastructure strategy, which says that, “green infrastructure investments are generally characterised by a high level of return over time, provide job opportunities, and can be a cost-effective alternative or be complementary to ‘grey’ infrastructure and intensive land use change.” This is in addition to the role green spaces play in reducing flood risk, and their contribution to all aspects of health and wellbeing, by promoting more active lifestyles.

In many ways, this multiplicity of benefits reduces green infrastructure’s political impact. It doesn’t fit neatly into one department or budget line, and so tends to blend into the background in Whitehall. And yet the cross-cutting nature of green infrastructure might just be a tremendous strength in a new political settlement that is emerging in response to devolution. Getting the most out of devolution will require a different approach to politics: patience, collaboration, coordination, relationship-building, long-termism, early action. This is a language social democrats have struggled to speak and is the polar opposite of the left’s traditional politics of centrally directed tax and spend. But with Labour out of power in Westminster, and its historic political offer increasingly put out of reach by fiscal deficits and the reduced agency of central states, there is an

opportunity for the left to develop a new politics of social and environmental justice: a red-green vision of devolution that brings people and places together.

Ultimately, devolution requires us to *connect* – and this is just what green infrastructure does. The point of green infrastructure is that it is an integrated network; it is all of the green spaces – both formal and incidental – that form the sinews of a place. So by thinking of green infrastructure as a ‘green thread’ that weaves itself around a region, a vision emerges of the local environment not at the periphery of the emerging devolution settlement, but as its very essence. As Kate Swade of Shared Assets has written: “too often we see the environment as an external thing – as something that needs to be protected and conserved (or is available to be exploited for our needs). In reality, of course, the environment is what sustains us ... it is everything.” So, in other words, the environment is not peripheral, it’s where devolution is happening.

THERE ARE TWO important ways that we might realise this potential for the local environment to be the ‘green thread’ of a new devolution settlement.

First, green infrastructure can connect ‘horizontally’ – by joining-up the various policy levers currently being handed down to combined authorities and metro-mayors. Devo deals will be most successful when they are part of a wider strategy for the region. Central to Greater Manchester’s vision for health and social care, for example, is that it recognises the wider determinants of health, and the virtuous circle that exists between employment, economic growth, and health and wellbeing. The benefits of prevention have been recognised for some

time, but rarely has this understanding truly informed decision-making. Now, by taking control of a wide range of levers – like skills, housing, transport – across a definable area, Greater Manchester will be able to practise a whole area strategy in a way that previous initiatives have only scratched the surface of. What’s more, it will be able to use its protected health spend to leverage support for other important environmental assets like parks, which have strong public health benefits but are currently under threat.

As a recent Green Alliance briefing pointed out, “city and local level devolution can create better coordinated approaches to planning and infrastructure, to enhance and protect waterways, green spaces and air quality alongside city development, with benefits to health as well.”

So with control over a greater range of policy levers being devolved to a more local level, there is an opportunity for green policy’s great weakness in national policy debates – its status in Whitehall as a jack of all trades and master of none – to become absolutely central to a place-based politics of connection and collaboration. In this report, Kate Chappell – executive member for environment at Manchester City Council – explains how this is happening in Manchester through the integration of health and social care, a refresh of the city’s parks strategy, and through the city’s 10 year plan.

This final element of strategic planning is particularly important, as it provides a framework for how the role and function of a city’s network of green spaces can be designed and invested in to maximise its economic and social value. Peter Massini – policy lead for London’s Green Infrastructure Taskforce – told a Fabian conference that the key question is at what scale you need to design a green infrastructure network to optimise its potential. London boroughs aren’t necessarily the best geography for managing flood risk for example, so the GLA provides a better strategic tier to ensure integrated investment. So newly created combined authorities may provide the right spatial level to plan and co-ordinate green infrastructure investment across a region – and also ensure each region’s network connects with their neighbours.

But while green infrastructure can connect a region ‘horizontally’, it must



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also connect it ‘vertically’ – by joining up region-wide strategic green infrastructure planning with local-level community-led green spaces. There is a big risk that rather than bringing power closer to people and

This active and democratic spirit can be given space to flourish if devolution does not stop at the regional level

communities, city and county devolution deals actually take it further away; away from local councils and into newly created regional bureaucracies. One of the main critiques of the government’s approach to devolution has been that it is an elite level project that has been cooked up behind closed doors. So now, in the early phases of implementation and with a new government in place to drive it forward, it is crucial that we are much more ambitious about the potential of devolution to reinvigorate local democracy and reengage citizens.

Hannah Jameson shows in this report how Labour’s co-operative councils have been doing precisely this. In attempting to reinvent their role in the face of the coalition government’s austerity budgets,

they have found that people didn’t want their services to be delivered to them from on high. Instead, people want “public servants to give them the means to change their communities.”

This active and democratic spirit can be given space to flourish if the process of devolution does not stop at the regional level, but flows ever downwards, so people are empowered to take control of their own neighbourhoods.

The Fabian Society report *Places to Be* has shown how important the local environment can be in empowering communities. While many councils have been struggling to maintain green space provision in the face of an incredibly tight fiscal settlement, creative new management models for parks present huge opportunities to engage local people and support volunteering, by building partnership between local authorities and local citizens. *Places to Be* suggested that community organising and development approaches, parish councils, and asset trusts all have potential to rebuild community spirit and ensure the continued viability of green space.

BEFORE THE CONSEQUENCES of the UK’s decision to leave the EU swept all before it, the big political story of this parliament looked set to be the devolution of power. In policy circles, the devolution process has been broadly welcomed. Most acknowledge England’s status as one of the most centralised countries in the world, and see potential for the decentralisation of power to tackle a variety of stubborn policy challenges.

However, this consensus comes with some sizeable caveats. The context of austerity has threatened to undermine the transformative potential of the ‘northern powerhouse’ project from the outset. What’s more, the secretive nature of the devolution deals – based around a particular model of governance and a particular model of economic growth – has called into question its democratic legitimacy.

Yet it would be a mistake to allow a focus on devolution’s flaws so far to crowd out its potential. There are huge opportunities for the left to develop a different story about devolution through a new politics of environmental and social justice, that seeks to connect devolution and the community – and is built from the ground up. **F**

Making the case for green investment

If you are a leader or a chief executive of a major city, has there ever been a moment more laden with opportunity? With new devolution deals and financial incentives to grow the local economy, investment in green infrastructure should be an important plank of a well-considered growth and reform strategy, writes *Sarah Whitney*



Sarah Whitney is a founding director of Metro Dynamics and a trustee of The Land Trust

WE HAVE TRADITIONALLY had one of the most centralised systems of government of any of the OECD countries, with a multitude of policy and spending decisions being taken in SW1 – in some instances, many hundreds of miles from the places and the people these decisions will affect. But over the last 18 months, a quiet revolution has taken place at the heart of Westminster. Ten devolution deals, transferring central government powers, funding and accountability to local councils, have been agreed with the city regions of Greater Manchester, Sheffield, the North East, the Tees Valley, Liverpool, the West Midlands, and the county areas of Greater Lincolnshire, the West of England, Cornwall and East Anglia. In total, more than 16 million people are now living in areas subject to devolution deals. These 10 areas will receive almost £250m per annum of additional investment funding from the government as part of their deals, totalling almost £7.5bn over the 30-year deal period.

Whilst each of the devolution deals is bespoke and shaped by the needs of the specific places and communities they cover, the deals follow a consistent pattern. Each has at its heart specific provisions devolving responsibility to local councils, covering substantial aspects of transport, business support and further education provision. Many of the deals also contain provisions relating to housing and planning, employment support, and health and social care.

The devolution deals are to be accompanied by a major national change in the way local government is funded. Councils are currently funded from three major sources: council taxes paid by local residents, 50 per cent of the business rate generated by local businesses, and the revenue support grant (RSG), essentially a grant from central government, the size of which is determined according to local need. With effect from 2020, the government will phase out the RSG, instead allowing councils to keep 100 per cent of the business rate they generate (subject to certain limits). As the additional 50 per cent of the business rate councils are to retain will exceed the RSG currently paid to councils (to the tune of about £10bn), councils will be expected to take on additional spending responsibilities to mop up the excess funding, the nature of which has yet to be clarified.

These changes to the funding regime will have the effect of rewarding those councils that adopt the pro-growth policies which generate business rate growth. The corollary is also true – those councils which do not, or are unable to, adopt pro-growth policies risk being indirectly penalised (albeit with a degree of downside protection in what is likely to be a form of national equalisation to redistribute the proceeds of economic growth across a broader area).

The business rate reforms have been introduced in the wake of many years of canvassing by councils for the change. Now they are to be adopted, local government is pushing for a wave of other taxes, levies

and duties to be devolved from the central to the local level. There are even calls for councils to receive a share of VAT, income tax and corporation tax generated locally, as happens in some countries. Whilst that seems highly unlikely at present, nothing should be ruled out for the longer term.

For too long, local politicians and executives have complained that they haven't had the powers and the finance to do their jobs properly. Devolution means that is now changing. Local government is being encouraged to think the unthinkable, challenge the conventional, and innovate to find new ways of delivering economic growth and public services.

Reshaping and rebalancing the economy and the state

There are two major pressures which have helped bring about this major change in government policy. The first is the need to grow our national economy. Much has been written in recent months about the productivity gap – the difference between what we produce and what our competitors produce. Productivity is the beating heart of our economy. The higher our productivity, the more we can afford to invest in maintaining our essential services and national wellbeing. Whilst there is some disagreement amongst economists about the way in which productivity figures are measured, few dispute that the gap with our competitors has widened since the 2008 recession and is showing little sign of closing. To put this into context, we have



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places to live. They turn them into vibrant, dynamic environments, which attract businesses, capital and talent – all of which are pre-requisites for healthy growing local economies. They add value to places. They partially explain why some cities always consistently top ‘liveability’ and ‘top cities’ indices. Conversely, poor quality public services directly affect our economic prospects.

And this is where green infrastructure comes into the equation. There is increasing evidence to demonstrate that not only does investment in parks, woodlands, playing fields, public squares and wetlands, feed through to economic growth, but this investment can also play an important role in reducing public service dependence and hence reduce the cost of public services, whilst potentially improving outcomes. Although those involved with the promotion of investment in green infrastructure have long argued that it has considerable economic and social benefits, attention is now focusing on the extent to which those benefits can be quantified in order to make the business case for investment.

It is acknowledged that green infrastructure sustains large numbers of jobs in its own right. A review by Scottish National Heritage estimated in 2014 that more than 55,000 people were employed in Scotland in the natural environment sector, equivalent to nearly 3 per cent of all Scottish jobs. On top of that, local government also manages and maintains a considerable number of green spaces. A recent National Audit Office report estimated that these may total as many as 27,000 individual green spaces, at an annual revenue cost of around £1.1bn per annum. The combination of employment linked directly to the natural environment and to the maintenance of public green spaces clearly accounts for a significant proportion of jobs across the country. This in itself creates a strong argument for direct investment in establishing and preserving green infrastructure.

The economic benefits of green infrastructure investment stretch considerably beyond just the jobs they maintain. Property developers have long known this: occupiers and investors will pay a healthy premium for property located close to or benefitting from green infrastructure. What is particularly interesting in the context of devolution is the body of emerging evidence suggesting that investing in

a 19 point productivity gap with the G7 nations, a 5 point productivity gap with Spain, a 30 point gap with Ireland, and a 45 point gap with the Netherlands. France can produce in four days what it takes the UK to produce in five days. We need to address this gap with a period of sustained economic growth.

But it’s not just about growing the national economy, it’s also about rebalancing it. The ‘northern powerhouse’ was George Osborne’s initiative to balance economic growth in London and the south east of the country with an economic powerhouse driven by the northern cities. However, the need to rebalance our economy goes some way beyond just the north-south divide. The balancing needs to take place in a number of ways: between high and low productivity sectors, between saving and spending, between the individual and the state, and between exporting and domestic consumption.

Whilst national economic policy clearly has a major role to play in both closing the productivity gap and rebalancing the economy, it is increasingly recognised that cities are major drivers of economic growth, and have a far more significant role to play than has hitherto been the case. Devolution is therefore, in part, be-

ing implemented to give our city leaders the powers and money they need to play a full role in driving economic growth at a city level.

The second pressure is the need to address the funding of our ever-expanding public services, to look after the most vulnerable in our society and to ensure community cohesion. Local government has made significant savings in public service spending of some £10bn in recent years, largely through implementing efficiencies. However, many of these efficiencies are one-off, and the pool of savings still to be made is diminishing. There is a growing recognition that alternative approaches are needed, which look at new models of delivering public services, including place-based budgets (which pool all sources of income in a particular area rather than treating each as a siloed source of funding), preventative strategies, and the integration of major policy areas such as health and social care in Greater Manchester.

The economic benefits of green infrastructure

Although presented separately here, both the economic growth and the public spending pressures are closely linked. High quality public services make our cities good

green infrastructure contributes to 'harder to measure' economic return, including improved social cohesion, better educational outcomes, less crime and recidivism, all of which translate to lower spending on public services. The Land Trust's work demonstrated this very clearly. The Land Trust, a charitable body which owns and manages public open spaces for community benefit, has estimated that for every £1 spent by the trust, the reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour equated to a benefit of £23.30. Meanwhile the perceived reduction in crime from the trust's activities equated to a £40 million saving to society per annum.

We could argue about whether the actual benefit reduction per £1 invested is £20 or £25, but the weight of evidence is clear: there are considerable economic and financial benefits, both direct and indirect, from investing in green infrastructure.

The unappreciated value of green infrastructure

However, of growing interest for local politicians is a new and developing focus on the economic linkage between green space and health and social outcomes.

The National Health Service costs the taxpayer more than £116bn to run annually. Physical and mental illnesses caused by obesity, stress, lack of physical activity, poor air quality, even noise, all contribute significantly to these figures. It is well understood that green spaces have a role to play in reducing the prevalence of illness caused by these factors. Obesity provides an interesting case study, as access to green space is an important predictor of increased physical activity and a reduced risk of obesity. European residents of areas with the most greenery are three times as likely to be physically active and 40 per cent less likely to be overweight as those living in the least green settings. People living in Scotland who have green space close to where they live are four times more likely to use it regularly than those who don't.

Clearly, access to green space has meaningful and measurable economic health outcomes. A 2003 study concluded that the NHS in Scotland could save more than £85 million a year if just one in 100 inactive people took adequate exercise. The Land Trust has developed this analysis by quantifying the cost of health interventions saved by users of their sites. The trust esti-

mates that for every £1 spent per annum on its sites, society benefitted by on average more than £30 in healthcare provision, because people using their sites felt fitter and healthier.

The direct health benefits of investing in green infrastructure are clear – it makes sense to spend money on our green spaces, because there are identifiable savings in both the long and the short term to the NHS. However, there is a real dichotomy here. Funding for green infrastructure comes from a number of sources, the most important of which is local government, with heritage organisations and property developers all bearing a significant share of the cost. The National Health Service is a major economic and financial beneficiary of this investment, and yet it makes very little, if any, contribution to the provision and maintenance of green spaces. This is where devolution potentially has a role to play.

For the first time, those who invest in green infrastructure will also benefit from the economic return generated by investment

The opportunity of devolution

Greater Manchester (GM) has become something of a poster child for devolution. The 10 councils which comprise the Greater Manchester city region, were the first authorities to negotiate a devolution deal, and they are well on the way towards implementing their fourth devolution agreement with central government. One of the potentially most far-reaching aspects of GM's progress towards devolution has been the devolving and integration of the health and social care budgets to local government.

By way of background, health outcomes for people living in Greater Manchester are worse than in many other parts of the country. The high prevalence of long-term conditions such as cardio-vascular and respiratory disease mean that many people living in GM not only have a shorter life expectancy, but can also expect to experience poor health at a younger age than in

other parts of the country. This translates to higher than average health, financial and economic costs, and on present trends, the GM health and social care system will face an estimated financial deficit of £2bn by 2020/21. A radical intervention is clearly needed to save the patient. That intervention is to be the devolution of the full GM £6bn health and social care budget in 2016/17, which will bring together the funding of 'health, wealth and wellbeing' for the first time ever.

The rationale for the GM health and social care devolution, which focuses on the need to increase economic growth and reduce public service spending, is that "skilled, healthy and independent people are crucial to bring jobs, investment and therefore prosperity to GM". The pooling of funding which occurs with devolution will allow a radical new preventative health programme to be rolled out, which will include a range of new measures including a large-scale social marketing programme, using behavioural insight to support lifestyle change, and a 'GM Moving' physical activity strategy. The money to fund these types of preventative health programmes will come from a centralised budget held at Greater Manchester level. This is a key reform – for the first time, those who invest in green infrastructure will also benefit from the economic return generated by that investment.

An investment worth making

Devolution therefore offers a golden opportunity to supporters of green infrastructure. Its implicit place-based approach and the removal of ringfencing between different funding budgets will for the first time see those who benefit from its health and social benefits paying for it in the same budget. This should prompt local political leaders to take a long, hard look at the role investment in green infrastructure could play in the promotion of economic growth and the reduction of public services expenditure. It is not going to be a quick fix, and it will require spending ahead of return. Nor is it a complete solution. But if you are a leader or a chief executive of a council, with a devolution deal in one pocket, and financial incentives to grow your local economy in the other, investment in green infrastructure should be an important plank of a well-considered growth and reform strategy. **F**



The importance of green infrastructure to cities

Improving green spaces and green infrastructure can make places more successful, healthy, cohesive and resilient, writes *Judith Blake*

IN AN ERA of austerity we need to make hard choices. This has meant a reduction in Leeds city council's budget for parks and countryside of 28 per cent over the last four years. Against this backdrop there is a risk that green infrastructure is seen as a luxury – but the truth is, high quality green spaces are essential for the success of Leeds.

First, attractive places and facilities for recreation are essential to the pride of all our communities. They are a basic building block for community cohesion, and what makes a place where people want to live and work.

Second, there is a clear and proven link between high quality green space and good design of places and health. In Leeds we are beginning to narrow health inequalities between different parts of our city and we have identified better design of spaces and neighbourhoods as a priority for encouraging physical activity, widening access to healthy food, making people feel safe and increasing community cohesion.

Third, for places like Leeds to grow and prosper we need to develop, attract and retain skilled and creative people, and we need businesses to invest. Increasingly, people will take decisions on where to live and work based on the quality of life on offer. When we hosted the start of the Tour de France in 2014, we showed the world how our city is surrounded by fantastic countryside.

Fourth, green infrastructure can help make Leeds more resilient to the consequences of climate change, the risk of flooding, and can help us improve air

quality. The devastating flooding that occurred last Christmas is a stark reminder of how green infrastructure is vital for Leeds. The waters may have subsided and the clean-up been completed, but the aftermath for those who have suffered will last much longer.

Leeds has more green space than any other UK city outside London. If we are going to make the most of opportunities to create new open spaces and to improve existing ones we cannot rely on traditional methods. We need to do things differently, to innovate and work in partnership.

Later this year we will open Sovereign Square, the first new park in Leeds city centre for decades. The area used to be a car park owned by Leeds city council. When we sold part of the site as a development plot, we decided to reinvest the capital receipt in creating a new park on the plot of land next door. By committing to create the park, KPMG and a major law firm, Addleshaw Goddard, were convinced to locate their new flagship Leeds offices in this area. They were attracted by the high quality environment we had created.

The city will develop another new larger park as part of the regeneration of Leeds South Bank, to the south of the river Aire. When the former Tetley brewery closed we worked with the site owners to develop a planning statement which specified a new park as a central feature of any redevelopment. This hasn't deterred investment. On the contrary, the new site developers are planning a high quality mixed use development with the new park at its heart.

But green infrastructure means more than just parks, and should be a central focus of all new development. HS2 is providing Leeds with an opportunity to reimagine the city centre and the plans for Leeds station are acting as a catalyst to regenerate the surrounding waterfront.

In an effort to do more with less, we are investing in our workforce to make it more productive and have taken on 30 horticultural apprentices. Last year we secured more than half a million pounds of donations and sponsorship from businesses to improve our parks and floral displays.

We now have a plant nursery to supply all our green spaces. The nursery plays a vital role in engaging with community groups and other third sector organisations along with providing a valuable resource to support learning. In Leeds there are now



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more than 50 'friends of' groups and over 50 'in bloom' groups, in addition to work placements, community payback, youth rehabilitation and corporate volunteers, all of whom conduct practical work on a range of different sites.

Devolution provides us with an opportunity to drive this work forward and will enable us to create better green infrastructure. Cities and councils know the issues and opportunities in their areas far better than civil servants in Whitehall. We are best placed to innovate, unlocking new funding opportunities. We can cut across normal government departmental silos to develop an integrated approach, bringing together policy, interventions and funding.

Through our £1bn West Yorkshire Transport Fund, we are insisting that green infrastructure is being integrated into the designs for all our transport investments to achieve multiple benefits. In our enterprise zone as well as investing in new roads and buildings, we have helped create a new flood storage area, and planted over 2000 new trees and large new areas of wildflower meadow.

Improving green spaces and green infrastructure can make places like Leeds more successful, healthy, cohesive and resilient. We need to be innovative and enterprising to secure the funding and investment needed. Devolution will enable us to come up with the right solutions and create great places. **F**

Judith Blake is leader of Leeds city council



The possibilities of devolution

Devolved places face a choice: to incorporate and adopt Whitehall's methods, modes of governance and accountability, and approaches to democratic engagement; or use this opportunity to develop a better alternative. Co-operative councils can provide inspiration for the latter, explains *Hannah Jameson*



Hannah Jameson is head of policy and insight at London Borough of Lambeth

THE EU REFERENDUM result has brought wider attention and a sense of urgency to the debate about devolution in England. In a country so diverse in politics, culture, wealth and attitudes, can devolution offer a means of reconnection between citizens and their political leadership? Can it help respond to the call for 'more control'? The consequences of the referendum decision may well drive further devolution, but we would be wise to pause and reconsider a fundamental question: what do we want devolution for?

Is it to bring power and decision making closer to the people, strengthening accountability, transparency and democratic engagement? Or is it to improve social and economic outcomes, enabling local leaders to more closely integrate social and economic policy, bringing public services together to achieve common objectives? Devolution has the potential to do both, but the record of the last 20 years shows that neither is easy to achieve. There are huge possibilities to reshape the way we do politics, governance, and public service reform in England but little sign yet of the ambition or mechanisms to make it happen.

As devolution deals are agreed and signed, principally on the basis of driving economic growth, leaders will need to move quickly to the implementation phase. Once they've taken on budgets and responsibility for skills, transport, or health and social care any leader worth their salt will set themselves the task of achieving more with their newly acquired powers and resources than central government could. Though in the UK context city and regional devolution may seem like a radical departure from existing models of governance, there is a considerable risk that local leaders mimic the politics, governance and public service models of central government and the Westminster model, rapidly bumping up against the same limitations and frustrations of their central government counterparts.

Devolution must not stop at the city or county hall. Local leaders who have been making the case to Whitehall for years, to whichever government, that giving local areas the means to run their own affairs and reform public services would unleash growth and efficiency, may be reluctant to start thinking on day two about how they can give power away. But there are three good reasons why they should.

The first is long-term frustration with the capacity of social policy and public services to deal with some of our most intractable problems, from area-based regeneration, to poverty, health inequalities, long-term unemployment and environmental sustainability. Even before the current decade of public spending reductions began, there was growing frustration with the UK's highly centralised models of public service delivery which, though effective in raising standards in some areas from poor to acceptable, were less able to deliver radical improvements.

Second is concern about democratic engagement, civic participation and models of accountability. The EU referendum is not the first time it has been apparent that there is a troubling democratic deficit. The expression of this is not just in levels of voter turnout or membership of political parties, but in the way that parts of the electorate are using the ballot box to express frustration, reflecting a belief that political representation will not lead to better lives for them and their families.

There are huge possibilities to reshape the way we do politics, governance and public service reform in England

Third is the serious challenge to the model of party politics in the UK posed by shifting cultural attitudes, devolution and pluralism. The 2015 general election exposed the difficulties of national political parties holding common policy positions within the devolved nations. Further devolution is likely to put even more strain on these party models. What is more, the models of leadership and electoral processes that are associated with current political cultures may be incompatible with the kind of policy making and public service delivery needed.

Local government leaders are only too aware of these long-standing challenges. Devolved places face a choice: to incorporate and adopt Whitehall's methods, modes of governance and accountability, and approaches to democratic engagement; or use this opportunity to develop a better

alternative. If they choose the latter, where can they turn for inspiration?

These same frustrations and concerns about public service delivery models and democratic engagement drove a number of councils to become co-operative councils in the early 2010s. Following the comprehensive spending review of 2010, the coalition government offered local leaders the prospect of more autonomy, but significantly reduced budgets. In response, a number of councils including Lambeth and Oldham put forward an alternative approach to political and public service leadership. There was no single definition, but all were concerned with changing the relationship between citizen and the state, seeing this as key to addressing the root causes of rising demand for public services, tackling cultures of dependency, dealing with the limits of professional knowledge, and strengthening civil society and social capital. It was about both civic engagement and improving social and economic outcomes.

Lambeth was among the first co-operative councils, and invested huge amounts of energy in trialling and testing new approaches to local public services that challenged how professionals and residents worked together. Of course in the context of rapidly reducing budgets, regulation and resident expectations, there was a need in some areas to focus on efficiency first and foremost. But there were also opportunities to look at where a more collaborative, asset-based, citizen-centred approach might achieve more.

What councillors and officers learned when they started to disrupt established ways of doing things, was that people were looking for very different things from public services and professionals. They wanted public servants to give them the means to change their communities, to help bring them together with their neighbours so they could improve the appearance of their street or start new food growing projects, to give them real influence and control over the services they used, and to work with community organisations and networks of people that already existed and were working to achieve change. They accepted that government couldn't do everything. What Lambeth learned was that some of our biggest challenges – of managing demand, of shifting the focus of services to prevention, or increasing participation – could not

be met without developing a more equal relationship with citizens. Moreover, in the long term a public service system that was focused on supporting communities to work together more successfully, rather than compensating for failure, would need to invest in the capabilities and assets of local populations, especially those in the most deprived areas.

The challenge this posed to the council, professionals and the political leadership cannot be overstated. It was not possible to achieve the kind of change that was set out in 2010 without looking at every part of the existing system. In seeking to work more closely with individuals and community groups, Lambeth had to rethink the role of elected members, emphasising their role as community connectors and facilitators, not just representatives. ‘Co-production’ (where service users and professionals work together to achieve shared outcomes) could be a valuable tool in gaining commitment from all parties to a common solution, but in turn professionals and politicians had to accept that they could not have the usual levels of control and influence, and they were not able to say at the outset what the eventual service or outcome would be. If we were to look to build on the community infrastructure that existed already, it would necessitate a more varied approach to service provision across the borough.

Lambeth is by no means unique, and plenty of local government leaders have used their freedoms to develop new approaches. They offer potential insights into the challenges and opportunities of democratic and public service reform that could be used to inform a more ambitious and radical approach to devolution. There are three insights that seem particularly pertinent:

Firstly, strengthening democratic participation is critical not just to developing appropriate accountability and governance mechanisms, but also to having more of an impact on some of the most pressing social challenges. Take area-based regeneration, for example. Public services and investment may be able to improve the quality of housing, put in place necessary infrastructure and employment programmes. But this alone is not sufficient to build communities that are able to meet their own needs, or to confer the dignity, belonging and sense of influence that are critical to good

health and wellbeing, and the absence of which seemed to underpin so much of the politics of Brexit.

Local leaders are well placed to use the power they gain from Whitehall to reshape public services so that they respond far more explicitly to this need, but it will require them to cede a measure of control. Investing in new forms of direct democracy and participation alongside representative democracy will be essential, but this can prove threatening to elected representatives. There is a need to recast the role of the elected representative so they have a clear role in a system in which collaboration between different public services, civil society and citizens will be more prominent.

Secondly, public service implementation strategies needs to change. Central government has been wrestling with how to improve policy development and

Lambeth is by no means unique, and plenty of local government leaders have used their freedoms to develop new approaches

implementation for some time. Nothing has replaced the delivery unit model of the late 1990s as a means of giving politicians greater oversight of the implementation of their policy agendas. Where it had clear advantages was in creating a strong link between the political mandate and policy implementation, but its weakness were adapting to differences in local circumstances, markedly increasing the risk of policy failure.

This leaves the field wide open to devolved leaderships. Lambeth’s experience shows there can be value in forging a different relationship with citizens, developing a more iterative and co-productive approach to policy development and implementation – but one that is highly localist, contingent on deep knowledge of local circumstances, networks and resources. Devolved leaders, together with their local councils, will need to ask at what level of government are decisions best taken and services delivered? What are the trade-offs between economies of scale, and the benefits of developing services

and interventions that can be owned and influenced by the people they serve?

Thirdly, there are opportunities for a renewal of party politics, to make it more pluralist, localist and relevant to citizens. Deepening democratic participation, and reforming approaches to policy development and implementation raise significant challenges to current politics and cultures of political leadership. ‘Pledge card’ politics fits poorly with an approach that values local experimentation, more citizen influence, an ability to build on what works in communities rather than ‘fixing’ problems. Political innovation is perhaps the area given least attention in the devolution discussion, but although Ipsos MORI’s veracity index shows public dissatisfaction with national politicians and party politics is greater than their dissatisfaction with local politicians, there is little room for complacency. An average electoral turnout of 35 per cent is hardly a ringing endorsement of local government.

Arguably as national party structures weaken, there is more scope for local leaders to seize the opportunity to usher in a new era. Membership of single issue organisations and participation in campaigns suggests that the appetite to effect change in communities remains strong, but membership of a political party is not, perhaps as it once was, seen in the same light. Were parties to enable greater variation, or federalisation, within their own structures there would be far greater scope to shape parties to reflect the priorities of their areas. This would enable greater voice and influence of members so that parties, as well as being mechanisms for electoral success, could also be vehicles for campaigning and change on local priorities.

Devolution over the last 20 years has tended to be shaped overwhelmingly by central government, and reflect its approach to accountability, governance and public services. Devolution to the home nations, cities or regions is therefore as likely to lead to further concentrations of power as it is to bring power down to its lowest possible level. Though calls for further devolution are likely to remain strong for some time, surely the political and economic challenges posed by recent events warn against simply transposing the instincts and mechanisms of central government to the local level. There are opportunities for transformative change to those bold enough to seize them. **F**



A devolved chaos?

Devolution is causing a great deal of uncertainty, but could be an opportunity to achieve a whole range of progressive policy aims. Realising this will require a coherent narrative that runs through all levels of the planning system, writes *Hugh Ellis*

THE ENGLISH PLANNING system is battered and bruised. National policy emphasises growth while sidelining the wider job of inclusive place making. Despite its vital importance in shaping outcomes for people, there is no 'green thread' in the remnants of the English planning system. This is a great shame because the post-war planning settlement, which included national parks and democratic spatial planning, was one of the most powerful and successful instruments for social and environmental progress.

If there appears to be any new opportunity to revive the vital principles of sustainable development, then it lies in the devolution agenda and in the growing popularity of neighbourhood planning. What does this opportunity amount to? It's tempting to simply say that no one knows – because national policy on planning is deeply contradictory. It has become highly centralised, with the government removing local controls over the change of use of buildings and removing the flexibility for local authorities to set local sustainable buildings standards. It has imposed a policy on the approval of fracking and a moratorium on onshore wind energy, which effectively removes any local discretion. Therefore, devolved city regions and neighbourhood plans have to work within all these centralised constraints. Furthermore, we can no longer rely on the EU environmental regulations which are the bedrock of what remains of the planning system, and we wait to see how the government will respond to this. Uncertainty reigns.

What is even more challenging is that each devolution deal is getting its own 'bespoke' planning powers. It's hard to know if this diversity amounts to chaos or opportunity or both. Some combined authorities will get the power to write planning strategies for their areas. Constituent local authority plans, and of course neighbourhood plans, will have to broadly conform with these new plans. Mayors will have extensive planning powers but in a significant departure from the London model, won't be accountable to a directly elected assembly – only to a cabinet of the leaders of the constituent local authorities. Somehow this doesn't have the feel of the modern kind of democracy that should be a core part of our future. Given that the whole devolution project has been one of the most opaque policy changes of recent times, one wonders how many people outside of planning and local government know what is going on, and whether they will accept the new agreements about which they have had no say. Let us also not pretend the environment has been central to most if any of the devolution bids so far. The reality has been a scrabble for limited resources based on a vision of economic growth from the 1980s. Climate change, resource conservation and social inclusion have all become secondary ideas.

While it is true that devolution could be an opportunity to achieve a whole range of progressive policy aims and as a matter of democratic principle it seems like a good idea, whether this opportunity will be realised remains unclear. Because no effort has gone in to an orderly constitutional settlement for England, it is not clear how combined authorities can join up with community-based initiatives such as neighbourhood plans. Such plans reflect the potential for communities to take control of some parts of their environment, but they are discretionary and so far used predominately by affluent and more rural parts of England. In any event only a fraction of these plans are focused on things like renewable energy and carbon reduction. The opportunity is there but these kinds of outcomes for the environment will depend on a step change in the focus of community planning.

The problem with this uncertainty is that many key issues, not least climate adaptation, play out at big sub-regional spatial scales and require action now.



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The solution, like many other European nations, is to set a coherent narrative for sustainable development which plays out through national, regional, local and community levels. We need a clear reaffirmation of sustainable development, as a national goal and decent constitutional settlement to work out properly the rights and responsibilities of communities and their relative powers over the local environment. We need a planning system focused on decent outcomes for people, something the TCPA is advocating in its planning for people campaign.

England is a rich nation but we are badly managed. We are a small nation in international terms and yet we are starkly divided both spatially and socially, and we lack any clear vision about a sustainable future. It is 500 years since Thomas More's Utopia set out a vision for the good society and yet this Tudor vision remains more coherent than anything we have now. This is not so much an endorsement of More's work, extraordinary though it was, but an indictment of the lack of care, commitment and foresight which we seem to have for the future of England. **F**

Hugh Ellis is interim chief executive and head of policy at the Town & Country Planning Association (TCPA)

The Mancunian breakthrough

Kate Chappell explains how Greater Manchester is using the opportunity of devolution to integrate place-based environmentalism into policymaking and take advantage of the health and quality of life benefits that green infrastructure brings



Kate Chappell is the executive member for environment at Manchester city council and Labour councillor for Rusholme

WHILE DEVOLUTION HAS been spreading across England over the last few years, it is Greater Manchester that has gone furthest and fastest. The devolution deal was signed in November 2014; and on 1 April 2016 the city region took control of new arrangements for integrated health and social care. The pace of change is hugely fast; the policymaking landscape altering virtually monthly. Everyone admits to making it up as we go along. And that was before Brexit and its attendant political fall-out is taken into consideration.

But amid the political flux, devolution is presenting a range of huge opportunities. One which has tended to be overlooked is the potential for city regions to integrate place-based environmentalism into policymaking and take advantage of the health and quality of life benefits that green infrastructure brings. There are three underlying factors which are driving the need for us to do this in Greater Manchester and invest in green infrastructure.

Firstly, Manchester's appalling health outcomes. You are more likely to die prematurely of a heart attack or stroke in Manchester than anywhere else in the country, for example. With a joint budget of £6bn per annum to cover all health and social care services, and the inflationary and demographic pressures facing these services (known as the 'graph of doom'), unless we find £2bn savings by 2020 we will have to close one of Manchester's three hospitals. We need a radical new way of improving the wellbeing of our citizens which ultimately feeds through into reduced demand for costly acute services. Could place-based environmentalism fit the bill?

Secondly, climate change. Fourteen of the 15 hottest years since 1880 have occurred since 2000. Rainfall is predicted to increase by 13 per cent. Never have ecosystem services such as localised water attenuation and tree canopy cover had such an important role to play in keeping the city's vital services operational and our most vulnerable citizens safe. It has taken nine months and £6m to fix a major sewer under the Mancunian Way, the motorway that functions as the inner ring road, which collapsed following heavy rainfall in August 2015. The cost of this single road disruption to the economy has not been calculated but would easily amount to tens of millions.

Thirdly, population increase. Manchester's population grew by 20 per cent between the 2001 and 2011 censuses. As a result, demand for housing and school expansions in particular are placing development pressure on Manchester's green spaces, whilst at the same time 20 per cent more people need to use parks, cycleways, canals and river basins.

Manchester is currently seeking to address this and put the local environment at the heart of its policymaking through three strands: the integration of health and social care; a refresh of the city's parks strategy; and 'Our Manchester', the strategic 10 year plan for the city. This all builds on a very well-received green and blue infrastructure strategy, which was adopted by the city in 2015.

Significantly, this strategy is owned by a stakeholder group called Manchester: A Certain Future, which has brought together partners from across the private, public and voluntary sectors, as well as activists, since

2009 to take forward action on climate change. The ability to mobilise experts, practitioners and passionate individuals from all walks of life puts the importance of green infrastructure in a wider context. And despite being more complex in terms of governance, it means that policy has the necessary buy-in and gravitas to then speed up the delivery phase. Wide stakeholder support also manifests itself in the very successful public consultations held on these strategies. A further benefit of the stakeholder-led approach to green infrastructure in Manchester has been the ability to harness academia to fill gaps in our knowledge base: a citizen science project on the health impacts of green space in our back gardens, for example, or how green infrastructure can benefit an ageing population.

The challenge of place-based environmentalism, however, remains the quality of the economic analysis to determine optimal levels of investment given constrained budgets.

How, in the health sector for example, can we restructure the financing of health and social care to take account of the positive health impacts of green and blue infrastructure? It's by no means a simple task, and in many cases the evidence base and relationships are not yet strong enough to facilitate the jump from common sense support to purchasing of 'green' clinical outcomes. But the green shoots of an answer are emerging.

The first stop for evidence is the many voluntary and community organisations which have been offering environmental-based non-clinical health services for many years and have made tentative forays into



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delivering activities ‘on prescription’ or by GP referral. For example, there are health walks in many of the city’s parks, or a ‘forest school’ campus targeted at adults in Moston Vale in north Manchester (where health outcomes are particularly poor). The tree-planting movement City of Trees call their services ‘health by stealth’, but arguably the outcomes – despite being evidenced by recognised methodologies such as The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale – remain too stealthy for commissioners to divert cash away from other well-established clinical services to fund.

What does impress the finance directors and commissioners then? Apparently the finance director at the Irwell Unit at Fairfield hospital in Bury sat up and took notice when incidences of inpatient violence and aggression dropped by 53 per cent following a green infrastructure intervention by Groundwork at the site. He was able to calculate in his head that the £250,000 capital investment was quickly paying for itself. But despite strong desire to do so, the project hasn’t yet been replicated in other similar sites held by the same trust. A constant refrain from green place practitioners is ‘it’s been very difficult to get the health professionals to engage’.

We in Manchester think we are on the verge of a breakthrough though. By collating all the existing evidence into ‘a prospectus for joint action on health and climate change’ and presenting this to the health and wellbeing board earlier this year, the chair of one of the clinical commissioning groups has joined the Manchester: A Certain Future steering group. Ultimately in recognition that NHS finance directors are most likely to listen to other NHS finance directors, the ask is now for a project manager from within the health sector to be appointed from Greater Manchester’s devolution transition funding which will hopefully accompany the integration of health and social care. This project manager would be tasked with converting health benefits arising from green infrastructure related interventions into the pounds and pence it saves integrated budgets.

Getting the economic analysis in place and in front of the appropriate decision makers is a prerequisite for achieving optimal investment in green infrastructure. So, however, is the strong protection of existing green and blue infrastructure. Happily in most cases this can be done with policy levers and small changes to operational procedures, rather than increased spend-

ing. Manchester’s new residential design guidance, currently out to consultation, places a heavy emphasis on developers seeking to enhance existing green space in and around a development site. The revised tree strategy sets out an aspiration to quantify the ecosystem benefits of mature trees and to levy commensurate financial compensation from anyone seeking to fell a mature tree.

Manchester’s parks help save the NHS £6m – £10m per year through enabling active lifestyles; the parks strategy consultation this year has received more responses than any other consultation ever run by Manchester city council. Enhancements to the parks portfolios will naturally increase these benefits.

Finally, in the ‘Our Manchester’ strategy, the value local residents place on their green spaces – and the role these have in place-making and liveability – emerged as a central theme. When articulating the distinctive basket of benefits that the north of England can offer as opposed to any other region – not only of the UK but of Europe – quality of life and liveability are at the fore. We need to keep investing in our environmental assets if we are to keep it that way. **F**

For the common good

The next few years are going to be make or break for many of our essential services, as spending cuts continue to bite. *Mark Walton* and *Kate Swade* survey emerging models of parks management that are helping councils keep our green spaces open, free and accessible to all



Mark Walton and Kate Swade are directors at Shared Assets

THIS IS A turbulent time for local authorities. The uncertainties of devolution and the certainties of budget cuts were already raising questions about the future of many of their core functions, especially non statutory services. The EU referendum result has only added to the complexities and uncertainties they face.

Despite increasing recognition of the multiple benefits they provide, parks and open space budgets are being hit particularly hard by cuts. Reductions of 30 – 50 per cent are common, whilst in some areas consideration is being given to cutting the service completely. As a result, local authorities have been exploring new approaches.

At Shared Assets, we support the development of new models of managing land for the common good and over recent months we have worked with a number of councils exploring the potential for new models of managing parks and green spaces.

So what options do local authorities have when thinking about the future of their parks? The first thing to say is that there is no silver bullet to the problem of delivering parks and green space services. However, there is an emerging set of options in terms of structures and business models, and some common issues that require consideration whatever the favoured approach. In terms of structure, we are seeing four broad approaches emerging.

1. Internal reorganisation: Keeping, or bringing back, the parks service in-house is one option during a period of rapid change. Contracting out to a commercial service provider may be attractive when budgets

and expectations are relatively stable, but does not provide much flexibility. By bringing the service in-house, authorities are able to add value by working more closely with community organisations, and colleagues in other departments, to access funding, attract volunteers, and secure access to other budgets in order to deliver benefits such as health, climate change mitigation, and skills and training opportunities. More direct control over their asset base may also provide opportunities to test out different management regimes or achieve savings and efficiencies across their wider estate.

Many authorities, however, are looking outside the council for solutions, transferring different levels of power and responsibility to new or existing third parties:

2. Asset transfer: Transferring the governance and management of assets to a new or existing organisation, through a long lease or freehold, can be an effective way of securing them for the long term whilst opening up new opportunities for funding and public engagement. This is being considered or undertaken at a number of scales, from the transfer of a single park to the establishment of city wide trusts. In most cases the favoured legal structure is that of a charitable company but there are a range of legal structures that may be appropriate depending on the proposed business model or the desired degree of democratic control.

3. New management organisations: Rather than transferring all responsibilities to an external organisation, many

authorities are engaging in partnerships with new or existing organisations – such as a wildlife trust, the Conservation Volunteers, Groundwork, or even ‘spinning out’ an existing staff team to form a new mutual – to undertake the management of one or more sites. These organisations are often able to reduce the costs of delivery by providing training, apprenticeship and volunteering opportunities, and to supplement their income by accessing grants and delivering other services including private contracts to other landowners.

4. Community partnerships: Local authorities often turn to local friends or residents groups, or some other existing community organisation with an interest in a specific site, to do more in terms of day to day management. Not all such groups will have the interest or capacity to take on additional responsibilities, but land-based social and community enterprises can offer radical new ideas, because they see parks and open spaces as locations for innovative service delivery. They may not want or be able to take on full responsibility, but can add huge value, undertaking tasks that the council cannot.

IRRISPESPECTIVE OF THE models and mechanisms of management, reductions in public budgets mean that new business models will need to focus on reducing costs and increasing income.

Whilst cutting costs can mean the closure of amenities and reductions in quality, some methods of cost cutting, whilst still potentially contentious, can enhance the

social, economic and environmental benefits provided by parks and green spaces. These include low maintenance planting schemes that create wilder, less intensively managed spaces, and working with partners who are able to engage volunteers and providing training and apprenticeship opportunities, reducing the costs of delivering some routine maintenance tasks.

There is a wider range of ways to increase income for parks. None provide 'the answer' on their own, and it is important to maintain parks as free to access spaces that provide opportunities for all. But a combination of approaches can diversify and grow the income available for their maintenance. Built assets within and around parks such as cafes, sports facilities and car parks, can all provide important revenue streams, as can offering leases and concessions for other commercial operators. A number of authorities are exploring the potential for greater public and corporate giving, including sponsorship or subscription. Others are looking to establish long-term endowments, either as cash to be invested or buildings to be managed, to provide a long term financial return.

IN EXPLORING NEW models of managing parks and green spaces, there are some common considerations for all authorities:

A change in perspective: Parks and green spaces are more than just budget lines or liabilities to be maintained, they are crucial community assets. As well providing amenity and character they have the potential to support the development of new jobs, enterprises and improved health and wellbeing.

Time: Creating new systems and ways of doing things takes time, and time costs money. Even if both are tight, trying to rush the creation of new structures and relationships is unfeasible and likely to fail. Any new structure may continue to require revenue support during its establishment and early years of operation.

Control: A key consideration for councils thinking about the future of their green spaces is the level of control they need or want to retain. Some of the approaches that might offer most opportunities, such as creating new organisations, or sharing responsibilities with communities, requires

a transfer of power as well as responsibility. Some authorities find this harder to reconcile than others.

The case studies below illustrate the range of approaches being explored or delivered across the country.

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board: local taxation

In a context of increasing political and financial devolution it is perhaps instructive to look overseas, for example to the USA where direct local taxation is commonly hypothecated to the management of parks and green spaces.

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) was formed in 1883. It consists of nine democratically elected commissioners and can hold legal title to property. It is able to enact its own laws governing the park system and has its own law enforcement agency. In 2015 MPRB was named the number one park system in the nation for the third year in a row by the Trust for Public Land.

The Minneapolis city charter gives the parks board the authority to levy a tax on residential property. The rate is established by the municipal Board of Estimate and Taxation, composed of the mayor, the president of the city council, a commissioner of the MPRB, other heads of services, and elected citizens. On average, nearly 9 per cent of residential property tax is allocated to the board.

These hypothecated tax revenues are supplemented by state allocations under the local government aid programme as well as fees, fines and other revenue. Most recent figures indicate that from a total revenue of \$70.9m, property taxes contributed \$52m, whilst government aid contributed \$9.1m. Fees, fines and other revenues contributed a further \$9.7m, including: parking (\$1.7m), event permits (\$1.1m), vendor agreements / concessions (\$1.5m), athletics, aquatics and ice arenas (\$855,000), golf (\$4.5m) and recreation centres (\$336,000).

Expenditure is broken down into wages of \$49.7m, operating costs of \$19.7m and capital costs of \$2.5m.

The board is an active and innovative land manager contributing to the shape of the city as it evolves. It has made strategic land acquisitions to create a network of continuous trails and park land beside the Mississippi river front, and developed the

first swimming pool in North America to use biological systems to clean its water instead of traditional chemicals.

Despite its apparent success, the view of the MPRB is that the parks of Minneapolis are chronically underfunded and they recently published a report, *"Closing the gap: investing in neighborhood parks"*, to explore how gaps in funding and maintenance might be bridged.

Elvaston country park: establishing a new management organisation

Elvaston castle and estate is a country park owned and managed by Derbyshire county council. It extends across 130 hectares and includes a castle, courtyard and stable buildings, formal gardens, a lake and parkland. The net revenue costs to the council of running the estate over £800,000 per annum.

The castle, buildings, gardens, parkland and visitor infrastructure have all declined in quality and require significant capital investment. At the same time, there is the potential for more commercial activity on site that could contribute to the development of a more sustainable business model.

In 2013 Derbyshire county council engaged the National Trust to develop a new 10-year plan and vision for the estate. The vision, developed in consultation with the public and other stakeholders, set out a number of guiding principles, including: freehold of the estate to be retained by the council; the creation of a new single management body to provide overall governance of the estate; the development of a sustainable business model to provide reinvestment in the long-term stewardship of the estate without eroding its significance; public access maintained, and access to the park by foot remain free.

Following the development of this vision the council has been working with the National Trust and Shared Assets to establish a new single management body, alongside a business plan, capital regeneration plan and funding plan for the estate.

An independent 'development board' was recruited at an early stage to act as a proxy for the new single management body, representing its interests as the process developed. The role of the development board has included agreeing the overall phasing of the transfer of responsibilities from the council and leading on the development of

the legal structure and draft business plan for the new charitable company that will be established to manage the estate.

In addition to their investment in the process of developing the new organisation it is envisaged that Derbyshire county council will act as a development partner, providing some of the capital funding required to regenerate the estate. It will then undertake a phased transfer of responsibilities, staff and assets to the new charity, gradually reducing the level of revenue support it provides.

For more information you can visit:
<http://futureelwoaston.co.uk/>

Burnley borough council: reducing costs of management

Burnley borough council is working in partnership with a local social enterprise, Newground to develop new approaches to green space management that reduce costs whilst increasing biodiversity. Their 'Go to the Park' project was one of 11 projects developed as part of Nesta's Rethinking Parks programme. It combined six main elements:

Introduction of meadow management into heritage parks: A meadow management plan was developed which identified areas of parks that could be managed as meadows. This reduced fuel and labour costs, improved biodiversity and created an annual hay crop.

Woodland management and timber production: Small, hard to access woodlands can only be managed effectively using manual labour. Specialist woodland management contractors, supported by volunteers, were able to extract timber and undertake maintenance to paths. Extracted timber was turned into woodchip for use in play areas, or split for fuel.

Conversion of annual bedding to perennial planting: Annual bedding plants were replaced with herbaceous perennials resulting in reduced costs and greater biodiversity. The changes were made in consultation with the local Friends of the Earth group.

Development of bee populations in parks: New meadows and perennial planting provide new habitat for pollinators, enabling an existing 'urban bee farm' project to develop new sites for hives.

Creation of 'Volunteer in Parks' programme: Four new volunteer roles were

created: horticulture, woodland, ranger and beekeeper. Volunteers were provided with training and a structured activity plan to ensure they were supported and understood their role and their impact.

Commercial crop production on parks' perimeters: The team is experimenting with growing crops such as herbs on the perimeter of some parks.

During the first year of operation (2014/15) Burnley 'Go to the Park' realised savings of £67,480. These are projected to rise to £117,000 by 2020/21.

More detail about this project can be found at
<http://www.nesta.org.uk/go-park-burnley>

Queenswood park and Bodenham lake: transferring to existing organisations

Queenswood park is the only designated country park in Herefordshire. It includes an arboretum, semi natural ancient woodland designated as a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) and a local nature reserve, and a cluster of buildings traditionally used as public amenities. Nearby Bodenham lake is the largest open water area in Herefordshire and includes a total of 44.5 hectares of varied habitat.

Herefordshire county council approached Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and New Leaf (a small not-for-profit co-operative), who worked together to create a new community interest company (CIC) to take a long lease on both sites. They are developing a new shop, visitor centre and food hall to generate the revenue required to contribute to the running costs of the sites.

The transfer, on a 99-year lease, took place in spring 2016. The ability of the new partners to secure legal advice was critical in overcoming issues relating to the lease and responsibilities. In this case the

legal support was through the community ownership and management of assets programme, funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Access to independent legal advice is important for any organisation taking on a new asset and local authorities undertaking asset transfer should consider providing the resources new or existing groups will require to obtain proper advice and guidance.

Following the transfer, Herefordshire county council is not providing any further public funding towards the management of the site, although it has transferred a small amount of income from an endowment associated with the arboretum. The partnership have introduced parking charges as part of their business plan and reopened the visitor centre and shop, which will showcase a mix of 'made in Herefordshire' and 'nature inspired' products. Later this year they intend to open a local food hall, linked to the partners' vision of making a real contribution to the county economy. The retail element of the visitor centre will be a Herefordshire Wildlife Trust business, paying a small rent back to the CIC.

The CIC is applying for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to support the creation of a Woodland Heritage Hub that will host partners specialising in traditional woodland management, wood fuel production and woodcraft. They intend to undertake more active woodland management to maintain the SSSI. Their ambition is to develop the site as a 'go to' place for training in woodland management techniques regionally, with curriculum links with local education providers on woodland management, and craft skills. **F**

For more information you can visit: <http://www.queenswoodandbodenhamlake.org/>



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Reflowering democracy

Green groups should play a full and imaginative part in a fresh commitment to local democracy, argues

Ruth Davis

IT IS TOO often forgotten that English people draw an important part of their identity from the particular beauty of their local landscape. Many English counties have their own special plant or flower, for example – the white and red roses of Yorkshire and Lancashire, the oak of Surrey, the Worcestershire pear tree.

Our industrial towns also once recruited their working populations from farms and villages, and were marked by a passionate connection with their hinterlands. Pride of place was central to civic identity; a connection with nature was something which people fought for as a common good.

When I began to work on a project to protect some of Britain's endangered wild flowers in the 1990s, elements of this tradition were still in place. County ecologists were central figures in documenting and protecting the distinctive natural character of their areas, and had important relationships with county recorders (expert amateur naturalists who mapped the birds, animals and plants of their local patch). Both ecologists and recorders worked to advise local planning inspectorates and to support the County Wildlife Trusts. In cities like London, similar alliances helped to preserve green spaces in otherwise polluted and cramped neighbourhoods.

And yet by the mid-1990s such traditions were under huge pressure from the managerial and centralising political culture of Whitehall. In part, this reflected a deep mistrust of local government amongst politicians who had witnessed

the downsides of poor council practice in the 1970s and 1980s. But sadly, instead of pursuing change through democratic renewal, the modernisers of the Major and Blair era responded by depriving councils of control over their budgets and disciplining them through a complex array of top-down goals and targets.

In my experience, the result was reams of bureaucracy with little impact on the outside world. I met numerous dedicated staff who did sterling work but were in the end defeated because no real power resided in their posts. National agencies had bigger budgets and a wider reach, but were themselves subject to a rigid target culture. They were also organised into regions that reflected their own managerial priorities rather than the existing structures of local government. As a result, local environmental action became fragmented, disparate and dehumanised. Targets came and went and many of the bigger green groups drifted towards national campaigning, because this was where there were big policy levers to pull.

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Now, in 2016, some of these centrifugal forces might at last have weakened. After decades of promises, city and regional devolution deals are being struck, and councils are regaining control over revenues. Local authorities are also becoming political innovators, rediscovering the civic partnerships that were once a bedrock of our democracy. Whether in the shared design of public services, or the establishment of new independent bodies to safeguard parks, a place is opening up where relationships between different interests and institutions can flourish and contribute to the common good.

In some localities, green groups and conservation charities are already active partners. The National Trust, for example, has taken an important role in designing new ways to look after city parks. Yet most big devolution deals are still conceived of in private between Whitehall and powerful councils chiefs – with precious little space for either communities or civil society to make their views heard about the quality

of the natural environment and its value in helping economies to flourish.

So there is a chance here for national green groups to make an important contribution to the emerging devolution settlement: by asking for these wider public interests to be considered during the design of devolution deals, and by arguing for better links with other relevant government policies.

This is particularly pertinent for national infrastructure planning, where there is an obvious crossover between local control of transport and flood risk management policies, and top-down planning and funding streams. By ensuring that green infrastructure funding is considered alongside more traditional investments, environmental groups can give local authorities a wider range of options for meeting their objectives on health, social care, wellbeing and economic development.

In the wake of Brexit, another opportunity lies in the design of agricultural and fisheries policies. Farmers and fishers that protect the natural environment provide benefits over and above the (vital) one of supplying good local food. Amongst other things, they protect the character and identity of our landscapes, help to reduce flood risk and cut the costs of supplying clean drinking water. Locally negotiated and tailored budgets for farming, fisheries and the natural environment could be an exciting new area of devolved power.

All these are examples of how civil society can add value to existing discussions on devolution and the environment. But perhaps most importantly of all, they can help citizens and communities directly shape the places where they live.

In practice, this means national green groups giving away power. It means helping citizens collect, record, display and interpret information about the quality of their local environment. It means supporting neighbourhood planning by communities who don't yet have the resources to map and protect their special places. And it means giving children opportunities to get to know and love nature; and if some of those children grow up to become county ecologists, all the better. In this reflowering of English democracy, we must celebrate the old as the new. **F**

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