



Our green and open spaces: who owns, who manages who cares?

place  keeping

17th – 18th June 2014

Taking place in the iconic Arts Tower at the University of Sheffield, incoming Head of the Department of Landscape, Professor James Hitchmough, opened proceedings by welcoming speakers and participants from around the UK to a day of stimulating talks and debate. Here's a summary!

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Keynote speech: *X marks the spot*
Graham Duxbury, Groundwork UK



Graham described Groundwork's new initiative 'X marks the spot' that focuses on joint caring for everyday places, places that matter to people. He described how, after years of support for parks and green spaces from national governmental organisations, national government is now absent from the green space debate. There is still valuable work going on, for example by the strong professional green space lobby, but it is limited.

Graham listed a number of trends shaping the current context for green space. Despite being more valued and visited than ever, parks and green spaces are teetering on the brink; there is less money, a loss of skills and a lack of strategic approach. There is a groundswell of local activity and a platform from which to grow, but it is small, and the good examples of innovative management are isolated. Central government (and the opposition) are still focussed on community rights: *'if you are not satisfied with public services then challenge it and do it yourself'*. Local governments are increasingly becoming provisioning agencies and often see green space as a liability rather than an asset that is complex and requires more strategic thinking than some service areas. This is one reason why there are no great examples of how to deliver it differently! The private sector is increasingly involved in green space assets, such as highways management in Sheffield. This has significant social and environmental impacts for all users. How these impacts are measured and managed creatively needs to be debated. The third sector is stretched and although they are still delivering social outputs such as capacity building and training these are now more likely by-products of projects rather than forming core funded work.

In looking forward, Graham first took a step back, looking to the history of Groundwork, its core values and approach - making a direct appeal to the public and businesses for a cross-sector partnership approach to making places better. The current austerity measures have happened before so we are coming

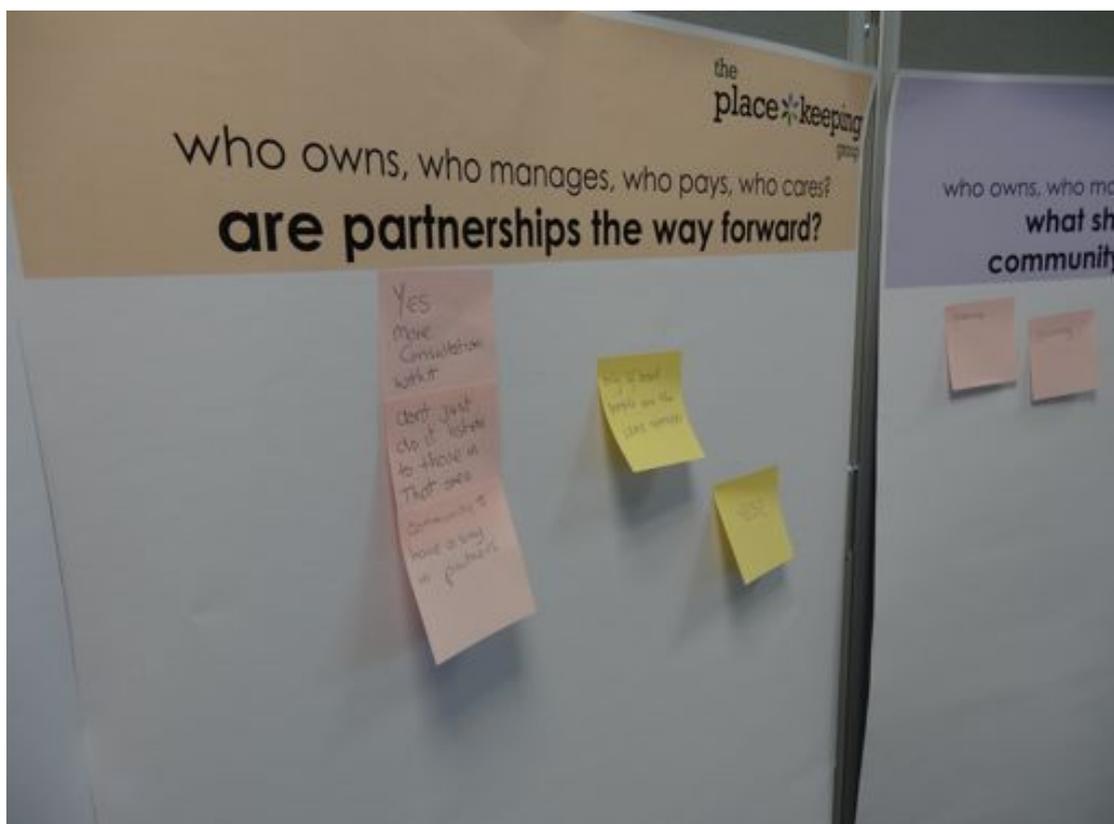
from a position of experience and knowledge. Graham described three sets of action needed to make a difference: 1) innovation in management through shared responsibilities; 2) driving political thinking – its about ideas not complaining as this will get us nowhere, and 3) a broader approach to public engagement. The focus needs to be on shared endeavour; a collective voice with a powerful message about cherished places that affect us all on a daily basis.

Keynote speech: *Sheffield Places Project*
Nicola Dempsey & Mel Burton, University of Sheffield

Nicola outlined how the term 'place-keeping' encapsulates the long-term and responsive management of green and open spaces. For this to happen in practice, partnerships, decision-making, funding, policies, evaluation and place design all need to be aligned in relation to the context of the place.

Mel described some of the key findings from the Sheffield project that explored in detail what can help and hinder partnerships in place-keeping. Calling on research conducted in two parts of the city, the team found that partnerships need a *willingness to change*, the *power to change*, *effective decision-making structures* and *flexible and effective resources*. These things were not found to be happening in the two Sheffield case studies, which led to a number of questions that the place-keeping team left participants to consider throughout the conference:

- **what are your experiences of partnerships?**
- **are partnerships the way forward?**
- **how many of your partners are willing to work differently?**
 - to share power?
 - to work together when everyone competes for fewer resources?
- **what needs to change?**



Session 1: *Who gives a £££: funding place-keeping*
Mark Walton, Shared Assets
Helen Batt, River Stewardship Company

Mark's talk focused on 'Who Pays? Funding Place-keeping'. He highlighted how today's context of austerity cuts and localism is happening alongside growing demand from community groups wanting access to land and resources. These groups are often informally developed and have a range of motivations: maybe it is a Friends group responding to a threat or a group with wider ideological focus (such as Transition Town movements). The way in which green space management is funded has changed from being predominantly council-led to now include crowdfunding, community shares, specific contracts with landowners, property/ business levies, land trusts and shared ownership.

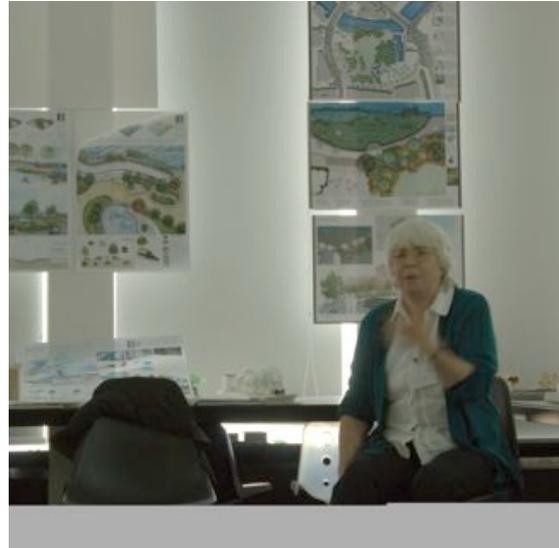


Helen described the River Stewardship Company as an example of an environmental, rather than a social, enterprise focused on caring for Sheffield's waterways. While RSC was started with traditional grant funding, it has developed a relationship with funders including the Environment Agency to co-design specific projects together for a long-term partnership, acknowledging the long-term nature of landscape change. For Helen, grant funding is 'the wrong kind of money' because it is short-term and inflexible – it has to be spent in particular way within a particular timeframe which does not suit a place-keeping approach. There's a need for 'patient' investment and an understanding that 'the beneficiary may not be the customer' – so shouldn't the beneficiary also pay?

Questions were asked about how to get the private sector involved. Scale was highlighted as important in this: big business needs to be persuaded about place-keeping at the strategic thinking level, but there then needs to be local-scale agreements with local partners to make this happen. Depending on CSR of a business this can be a non-starter– as it only seems to make a difference when it is in the business's economic interest to look after their green spaces (e.g. when there is a planning application in process). Thinking differently about how organisations can work together was a theme emerging from this session: can we tweak the procurement process to allow for longer-term working relationships that can be held to account and evaluated? Can the procurement process assess risk differently to allow for more flexible working? Mark stated that the council has a different role to play because 'while people are enamoured by public ownership, they are not enamoured by public sector management'. Does this then point to a need to challenge and change existing working practices and the design of funding streams/ procurement processes?

Session 2: *How to place-keep: skills and knowledge*
Jenny Coleman, Incredible Edible Todmorden
Ted Talbot, National Trust

Jenny gave a whistle stop tour of the amazing Incredible Edible Todmorden story. The project, which has put Todmorden on the map as a 'vegetable tourism' destination, started with a group of individuals concerned about the future and hit upon food as a uniting theme – if you eat you're in! We heard about the work they are doing with local schools and colleges, building skills and knowledge around food, where it comes from, how to grow and cook it. Jenny also described the work with local businesses promoting local grown produce and two spin off not-for-profit companies Incredible Farm and Incredible AquaGarden.



Ted described the work of the National Trust in his talk 'Gardening is not Just for Dropouts'. After a quick potted history of parks services, from Queen Victoria to MP Eric Pickles (a remarkable physical resemblance was noted), Ted described the decline in recruitment to the green sector and the loss of skills, exacerbated by the recent Local Authority budget cuts. This is despite the fact that the commercial green sector is economically buoyant. He outlined the priorities for growing green space skills including: increasing awareness of opportunities, improving entry and career routes and a strong evidence base which is needed to support a case for increased resources. Partnerships across the sector were highlighted as a way of delivering this. Returning to the title of the talk, despite the wide and positive media coverage, the image of the green sector as a career is still low and needs to be challenged.

The discussion centred on the issues of apprenticeships and career pathways for those entering the green sector. The National Trust was challenged to provide a better-paid, better-supported pathway for its own volunteers and apprentices.

Session 3: *Raising the profile: you've got to know to care*
Kate Stewart, Friends of the Flyover Liverpool
Julian Dobson, Urban Pollinators
Dave Morris, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces

Kate started this session describing her experience of promoting and crowd funding the Flyover Liverpool – the transformation of a derelict concrete roadway. The idea emerged as one of several 'provocations' for the city, to galvanise action and interest for making Liverpool a better place for everybody. The Friends of the Flyover's creative use of social media, images, messages and slogans to promote the project generated huge public and sponsor interest. A goal from the start was to involve people, not just to approach funding bodies and they used the crowd funding site Spacehive to raise over £40 000. Although responding to such large numbers of tweets has taken a lot of time, this has

helped to build a strong body of supporters and to generate a feeling of ownership of the project.

Julian picked up the baton with his presentation 'you've got to know to care – making place-keeping real'. He stressed the importance of connecting people to place, telling the human story and showing how and what there is to care about in local green spaces. He used the example of Incredible Edible Todmorden to demonstrate the power of 'showing not telling' in challenging fixed mind-sets. We need to appeal to listeners 'head' – to understand the value of green space, 'hand' – in showing how green spaces build skills and physical health and 'heart' – articulate the emotional and spiritual connections. The idea is to re-connect people with what they have lost, with what matters and in doing so they can feel better, re-learn, and re-connect with green places.



Dave talked about the rise of the Friends group movement and its impact. There are over 5000 (known) Friends groups across the UK, undertaking important work in their local green spaces such as helping to raise the profile through activities, publicity, partnerships and developing visions for their parks. He stressed the importance of word of mouth to engage residents and the local authority. There is a need to spread 'good news' to inspire people to take moral ownership of green spaces. He described the role of Green Space Forums, there are 50 involving 2000 groups across the UK, where groups collectively work to raise the profile of green space strategically across a city; sharing experience and lobbying. He used the example of the 'Friends of the Greater London National Park' using London as the world's first 'National Park City' to help raise the profile. At the national level the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces supports friends groups and raises the green space profile nationally (e.g. through the national 'love parks' week). NFGPS are leading a national initiative calling for a public enquiry to focus on funding for green spaces and a statutory duty to manage all parks to green flag standard. He concluded that although the

Friends group movement mushroomed to address green spaces crisis (1980s) these issues are still with us and likely to increase again and this now needs to everyone to speak out collectively.

The discussion focussed on the difficulties of getting volunteers; something that all groups seem to struggle with. Advice included recognising: what volunteer capacity is so they are not 'overloaded', that there is competition for volunteers in a 'market place', the need to be creative using networks and events, giving something back is needed to engender ownership and own the vision.

Session 4: *Raising capacity: place-keeping needs doers*
Darren Share, Parks and Nature Conservation, Birmingham City Council
Farida Vis, University of Sheffield

Darren started the afternoon session with a focus on how place-keeping is happening in Birmingham. The council value local parks in Birmingham at £6 million (is that all?!) and is looking to create many new friends groups alongside the existing groups who work closely with the council. Darren pointed out that Birmingham's Friends groups aren't interested in taking on wholesale green space management, but are motivated to enhance value of green spaces around the city. Birmingham also has a number of younger Friends groups (including teenagers) but that they need to attract more, given the broad demographics of Friends groups being often made up of older, retired people. In terms of the skills base in Birmingham, while the council is closing its horticultural training school, skilled staff are training communities in horticultural skills. In terms of park activities, Zumba, Taichi and tennis are provided free and delivered by the friends of groups who are funded through the active parks programme in Birmingham which is sponsored by Coca-Cola.

Farida's talk started by outlining a number of projects with the same goal of protecting UK allotments, of which *statutory* but not *temporary* allotments are protected by the 1908 Allotments Act. She highlighted how recent discussions about food growing have focused more on communal growing in meanwhile (or temporary) sites, calling into question how secure such sites are as they are not protected by the Act. There was recent national government action to scrap people's right to allotments and Farida argued that we need to value them more by having more spaces classified as allotments. Her recent projects focus on how it is difficult to get hold of data about potential allotment sites, including who owns the land, although she showed data on how allotment rents have increased dramatically in Sheffield compared to Greater Manchester. Farida left us with a poignant question to ponder: How do we protect these last remnants of the commons? A final thought from Farida in relation to the value attributed to green spaces in Birmingham: "we have to attribute value to green space but what is the right unit of value?"

Keynote speech: *Place-keeping challenges – a view from Scotland*
Deryck Irving, greenspace scotland

Deryck talked about different examples of place-keeping in Scotland, including a park in Aberdeen with a very highly motivated community group who had no problem getting funding, but suffered from problems of group fragmentation. Other parks had strengths such as enjoying central and strategic locations but experienced the challenge of poorly coordinated communication by local authorities to attract visitors. Some key messages that Deryck shared from these examples of place-keeping included the need to *get the strategic thinking right, tell the local people about it and get it implemented locally*. Deryck also outlined how systems (e.g. organisational/ decision-making) can undermine capacity. There is clearly a need for apolitical organisations such as greenspace scotland to help act as a broker and mediator between public and community organisations and groups.

The afternoon panel chaired by Prof. Lynn Crowe. Representing sectors:

Third Sector (3S): Deryck Irving, greenspace scotland
Public Sector (PS): Darren Share, Birmingham City Council
Private Sector (PR): Peter Neal, Peter Neal Consulting Ltd.
Community (CS): Jenny Coleman, Incredible Edible Todmorden & Dave Morris, National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces



Q: who is best placed to manage our green and open spaces: who should own, manage and care?

PS: It can't just be the local authorities (LAs). Communities need to be involved and LAs can act as the conduit pulling everyone together as one cog in a larger system.

CS: The LA model is best and has been for 150 yrs.

PR: No one size fits all. Lots of the public park movement was through private and public investment. It needs to be collaborative too. Multi-partner and private sector comes in many different flavours.

3S: We can't have a 500 piece jigsaw puzzle with 500 different pictures – working collaboratively is key. Strategic scale thinking needs to be translated into local individual site level action/ aspirations to become added value for green space and users.

Q: is there a requirement for fair and equitable treatment for all?

PR: Yes, you need this with the LA as an enabling body. In USA green space funding is made up of equal thirds: public funding, income generation and leveraging in sponsorship, donations and legacies etc. The great new parks in the US (Millennium Park, Chicago; High Line, New York; Kings Cross, London) all have the private sector as significant contributor/ partner.

CS: each community should have the freedom to make their own priorities – e.g. a memorial rose garden or a running track – depends on the group and the space. The local authority needs to hold the balance but also needs to be listening to what the community want.

From the floor: Should the local authority be the board, the enabler, the conflict resolver? Is it better to set up an organisation to manage the lease as an asset, not a liability, and to be entrepreneurial without the constraints of local authority?

Q: parks are essentially a local problem. Getting people involved is a political process. Cities like Birmingham have local devolution and funding for wards. Why not Sheffield?

3S: councillors are as varied as communities. Devolution works really well and better where neighbourhoods are locally recognised as geographic entities that make sense.

CS: it's all political ultimately. One big advantage is that Todmorden is essentially a group of 12-15,000 people and you know you're a part of something. It wouldn't have worked citywide in Sheffield. Small, defined communities are the way to go.

CS: politics is about our society and how it should be run. Friends Groups are an inspirational movement emerging within the last 15 years demanding their entitlement of green space to be run properly.

PS: I have worked for parks to be apolitical because of the inevitable flips of changing political sides. We need to work harder to make engineers, water authorities and other professionals be a part of this debate.

PR: politicians need to be pro-active not reactive. In the 19th century, parks people tried to outdo each other. We should look for inspiration to the mayors in New York and Chicago who have taken park building as a political vehicle.

Closing comments, Lynn Crowe

There are real opportunities open to us for learning about how things have changed over time and doing things differently:

- with the budget cuts, local authorities have no choice but to listen and get more involved with communities
- we haven't yet got the best out of the private sector in relation to open space management
- we need to better understand how we can evaluate the value of spaces

Keynote speech: *Rethinking parks – Exploring new business models for the 21st Century*
Peter Neal BA (Hons), DipLA, MDes, Dip Ecology, FLI

Peter Neal presented his evening lecture on rethinking parks - exploring new business models for the 21st Century to fund public green and open spaces. He talked about a number of case studies from around the world employing funding models involving both the public and private sector.

Examples included from the UK included [Potters Field Park, Southwark](#), where private company's pay to use the park for product launches; [Gladstone Glass House, Stanley Park, Liverpool](#), where the regeneration of a key park asset now brings in income to maintain the surrounding park; and [Letchworth Garden City](#) where the £35 million of assets have been invested as an endowment to manage the green spaces for the long term.

Peter showed an example from the US where green spaces have a huge following of people via the [The Friends of the Hudson River](#) in New York with thousands of members including a number of high profile people who continually raise money to manage the developed space.

He focused on the need to understand how funding is context specific; private/public funding partnerships will not work everywhere but can work in an area where the private sector needs to use space for publicity such as Potters Field Park. Peter showed how many different funding options have been explored and that looking to different models of funding provided by case studies can provide decision makers with alternative models. Although there are challenges due to cuts to traditional public funding of green and open spaces, there are opportunities to try a different models. Throughout the talk there was mention of the heritage lottery fund's commissioned survey on [the state of the UK's public parks](#) that has now been published.



Workshop 1: *Getting the word out*
Chrissie Elliot, University of Sheffield Enterprise
Emily Redmond, Tinder Foundation

This workshop was aimed at twitter beginners and those who love to tweet. The place-keeping group is relatively new to using twitter and other social media as a way of getting messages out. Emily and Chrissie presented different types of social media including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. There was a discussion about the inclusiveness of social media and the need to use a number of different ways to get word out about events or the goings on of a group. There was acknowledgement that just focusing on social media might miss those who don't use it: face-to-face contact gets good results in passing messages on too. There was then a chance for participants to set up an account or get some practical advice on using twitter. A number of the members of the workshop signed up for twitter and got tweeting!

Chrissie provided a twitter overview of the conference using [storify](#); an online tool that allows you to compile information from different sites and add them to a timeline to tell a story of an event.

Workshop 2: *Understanding the capacity of partnerships*
Mel Burton, University of Sheffield
Nicola Dempsey, University of Sheffield



Mel introduced the idea of governance and partnerships in place-keeping which involves stakeholders in decision making and taking responsibility for green space management. Although partnership working can bring many benefits, partnership working is not easy and is dependant on the capacity of partners – higher capacity partners make for more effective partnerships. The questions was asked - as budget cuts hit does the third sector and communities have the

capacity to take on place-keeping and does the Council have the capacity to work in partnership with them? Group members were asked to assess their own/groups capacity against six capacity 'dimensions' and through a speed dating activity 'sell' their capacity and potential as a desirable partner to others. Some, such as the Council representatives, recognised that they do not have a choice in being partner. For others the capacity self-diagnostic was seen for some as a 'wake up call' in helping to recognise how they could improve.

Workshop 3: *Valuing and evaluating green space*
Stuart Turner, Sheffield City Council
Mel Burton, University of Sheffield

How do we evaluate green spaces? Mel gave an overview of what we mean by evaluation by looking at what we might value in green spaces and how these might be measured. Evaluation is often not carried out, and when it is thought needs to be given to which method will provide the most useful information and how this information is used. Stuart then introduced [The Sheffield Standard](#), a tool created by the council for evaluating the cities' parks and how it is used to reverse a cycle of decline in green spaces by identifying need and prioritising improvement work. He reflected on the limitations of the method and recognised that green spaces also need to be valued, loved and owned by communities. Discussions reflected on how the Sheffield Standard could capture the value and issues for the diversity of green spaces across Sheffield. The group were then given assessment materials to have a go themselves at evaluating Western Park and the Ponderosa as Stuart explained on site the types of indicators assessors would look for and how the scoring system is used.



Workshop 4:

Activating space
Fiona McQuaid, Landlayers



Fiona guided the group through a number of activities that can be done with people of different ages and shared top tips on how to get people engaged in green spaces. These were low-cost, creative and easy to carry about. She then gave the members of the workshop the chance to have a go at doing it themselves. A group favourite was the [sunography paper](#). This photographic paper can be used to gain an immediate image to take home with you. Find a number of interesting shaped leaves and flowers and lay these on top of the paper, expose this to sunlight for a couple of minutes and then wash of the development solution with water. Other activities included mirrors to use as viewfinders or for peering into birds nests; getting people to guess a descriptive word by collecting objects found in the park; and making a maze using sawdust, leaves, twigs and grass.

