



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rishi Sunak MP
Minister for Local Government

Clive Betts MP
Chair
Housing, Communities and Local
Government Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

10 DEC 2018

Dear Clive,

Thank you for your letter of 19 November requesting an update on the progress of the Parks Action Group and the cross-departmental working group on parks.

As you say, the Committee recommended that we should publish annual written statements on the group's activities and progress made against the Committee's recommendations. At the time these recommendations were made, my predecessor, Marcus Jones MP, noted that the recommendation to report annually should be reviewed owing to the general election and subsequent pressures on the parliamentary timetable. At the current time, I do not believe it would be feasible to provide a written statement to Parliament before the Christmas recess. However, I would be happy to write again in the new year to agree a likely timetable for submitting a written response to Parliament on the issues you raise.

In the meantime, I will take this opportunity to highlight some of the work undertaken since the publication of the Government response to the Committee in September 2017.

On 23 November 2017 Marcus Jones MP chaired the inaugural meeting of the Parks Action Group. The group met again on 22 January 2018, along with representatives from across Government, to set priorities, establish timescales and collate existing evidence on parks previously collected by the various members of the Parks Action Group. The group also established its six priority areas at this meeting including: funding, assessing quality standards, sharing good practice, identifying a shared vision for parks, empowering communities, and improving equitable access. I attended the third meeting of the full group on 23 May 2018. The individual working groups have met numerous times since the last meeting of the full group.

The research project '21st Century Parks', which is being jointly conducted by academics and the Association of Public Service Excellence, will identify the new knowledge required to enhance the skills of existing and aspiring park managers, enabling them to develop creative approaches to support the sustainable management of parks. We expect this project to report in the new year at which stage we will work with the sector to see how we can integrate these outcomes into our work.

Research is also currently being conducted by the New Policy Institute which is exploring new funding models and good practice. It will map an accurate picture of funding for parks and green spaces across all local authorities. Again, we expect the research to conclude in early 2019. We

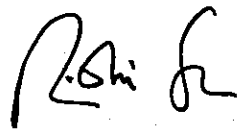
recently appointed a Parks Action Group Coordinator who will develop the outcomes of this research, and that of the '21st Century Project', to produce a business case to support the group's vision for parks.

Additionally, Public Health England and Natural England will shortly commence a research project on the accessibility of green spaces. This project will use existing data to produce a more detailed picture of how and why different groups in society access and use parks and green spaces.

Natural England are also developing The Natural England Green Infrastructure project to improve benchmarking on standards for green spaces. When finalised, it will incorporate the knowledge of local authorities and the wider parks sector, including from other members of the Parks Action Group.

Beyond the work of the Parks Action Group, we recently announced the launch of the new Pocket Parks Programme. This new round of funding will build on the success of the first Pocket Parks Programme launched in 2015 which provided financial support in the creation of 86 new Pocket Parks. This new funding will also help to renovate and restore some existing parks and children's playgrounds. We will shortly announce the details of this new project.

Working with the sector, we are currently developing a programme of work aimed at transforming the way in which parks are developed, managed and maintained. We expect to announce our progress on this in early 2019.



RISHI SUNAK MP