Uncertain Prospects : public parks in the new age of austerity A short report by the Gardens Trust

Friday 2 December, 2016

A new report by the Gardens Trust rings alarm bells over the increasing risk to public parks from continuing budget cuts. Written by the University of Leicester academic Dr Katy Layton-Jones, it highlights both what has been achieved over the last twenty years and how much has been undone in the last six. The Heritage Lottery Fund's 1996 launch of its Urban Parks Programme heralded a renaissance in parks, and over the last twenty years some £850m has been invested, but the report pinpoints the austerity cuts introduced in 2010 as the beginning of the end for that renaissance.

'It's not entirely straightforward,' says Dr Layton-Jones. 'Parks budgets were still under pressure throughout the golden age of Lottery funding, but the general trend is clear. As a result of austerity cuts, we will have more parks in declining condition in 2020 than we did in 1998. That is a terrible indictment of what government policy has done to parks.'

'In the past six years, cuts of 40% or more have shredded staff numbers both on the ground and at management levels. While local authorities put on a brave face and accentuate the positive, we felt it was important to speak up and say this situation is not sustainable: we cannot keep doing 'more for less'. Parks are embarking on a catastrophic spiral of decline which must be stopped.'
The report, which is a successor to the Garden History Society and Victorian Society report, *Public Prospects: the historic urban park under threat*, 1993, includes among its recommendations:

- Maintenance of public parks to be a statutory duty for local authorities
- Identification of baseline funding requirements for all parks
- Enabling local authorities to introduce local taxation to fund parks
- Recognition that for the vast majority of public parks, there is no alternative to local authority ownership and management.

The report follows Dr Layton-Jones' appearance for the Gardens Trust at the Select Committee public parks inquiry on 14 November, and will be submitted to members of the Committee as supplementary evidence.

The report is available to download at
http://thegardenstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/uncertain-prospects-2.pdf

The Gardens Trust
The Gardens Trust was created in July 2015 following the merger of The Garden History Society and the Association of Gardens Trusts. The combined membership of the Gardens Trust and the County Gardens Trusts is around 8000.
The GT's main aims are:

- To speak with a more powerful voice for the protection of parks, gardens and designed landscape;
- To play a key garden conservation role in the planning system as a statutory consultee;
- To provide support to strengthen the local activity of the County and Country Gardens Trusts;
- To be an internationally regarded centre of excellence in the study of garden history;
- To live within the means of the merged organisation and be financially sustainable over the long term.

The Gardens Trust ensures that garden history is 'on the map' as an academic subject, publishing the twice-yearly academic journal *Garden History*, which remains the leading forum for scholarly work in this area. It additionally takes an active conservation and campaigning role, with a small professional team of conservation officers employed to comment on developments affecting important gardens and designed landscapes. As the statutory consultee for designed landscapes, it is informed of any proposals which may affect places listed on Historic England's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest (graded I, II* and II).

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Note

Dr Layton-Jones most recent publication is Historic England research report, *The History of Public Park Funding and Management*, published this year:
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