

CHARITABLE GIVING TO PARKS AND GREEN SPACES: SUMMARY FINDINGS

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Public parks are vital features of our cities that provide numerous benefits for people, communities and the environment. Given the scale of fiscal constraint on local council budgets and at a time when the future of public parks in the UK is at a critical juncture, what role can and should charitable giving play in sustaining and revitalising parks? This research explored public and business attitudes to charitable giving to parks and green spaces in Leeds, UK.



Rethinking Parks

The research was undertaken as part of the national Rethinking Parks programme. The research explored views towards a charitable fund for parks - the Leeds Parks Fund - to engage residents and businesses in co-producing improvements to parks. The findings are based on online surveys with 1,434 residents and 141 business leaders and focus groups and in-depth interviews with 45 business and civic participants.

The research found that the public and business community have complex views about the role of charitable donations and varying dispositions to donate warranting more thorough consideration by local authorities, parks foundations and others as they seek to attract voluntary donations to support parks.

Key findings include:

- Charitable giving has an important but limited role in bridging the funding gap and stimulating greater civic engagement.
- Although residents and business leaders support charitable donations to local parks, more are in favour of additional funding coming from central government, businesses and grant-making bodies.
- Charitable giving can have a role as part of – rather than in place of – the public funding of parks and green spaces. Charitable donations should not be a substitute for local authority funding.
- Despite high levels of support for the principle of voluntary donations to local parks, a much lower proportion of residents and business leaders would donate to parks themselves.
- Residents who reported a willingness to donate to parks were more likely to be under age 34, members of a parks 'Friends' group, or to have an annual income of over £40,000.
- While there were redistributive virtues associated with a citywide donation model for parks, this was seen as a barrier to giving due to the lack of choice it provides donors to give to particular projects that interest them or to specific parks that they use.
- Residents and business leaders prefer to give to the parks closest to their business/residence, parks in most need and community parks. Large, major parks received comparatively less support.
- Residents and business leaders prefer to give to habitats for wildlife and park cleanliness.

- Charitable initiatives should promote various types of donations, including donations of time, goods and skills as well as money. Residents and business leaders may be more able or likely to give to parks in these different ways.

Key recommendations for UK parks include:

- The need for an informed public debate on the funding of parks, including the role of charitable giving and the need and urgency for donations.
- The introduction of statutory protection to ensure appropriate government funding and resources to maintain parks.
- Blended models of park funding need to uphold important public principles of governance, including open and equal access to parks, universal provision of quality parks and strategic oversight of resources.
- Local authorities and their charitable partners should develop a clear public message about the role and value derived from voluntary donations, by providing a clear strategy and aims for the use of such donations.
- A dedicated national body to provide leadership, guidance and coordination for the new portfolio of parks foundations being set up in partnership with local authorities to support to parks.

Key recommendations for the Leeds Parks Fund include:

- Leeds Parks Fund partners should develop a clear, visible and accessible strategy with allied aims and ambitions for charitable donations.
- Marketing and branding materials should clearly and visibly show that the Leeds Parks Fund is a charitable initiative distinct from the Council.
- The model of the Leeds Parks Fund should be developed in ways that balance greater donor choice to target their donations towards specific projects or parks with its redistributive objective to promote and embed equity in the quality of parks across communities.
- Leeds Parks Fund partners should use the Fund as a catalyst to increase the engagement of the wider community in park governance.
- Leeds Parks Fund partners should investigate ways to make the Fund sustainable in the long term.

More information:

Leeds City Council, Leeds Community Foundation and the Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Forum set up the Leeds Parks Fund: <http://leedsparksfund.org/>

The Rethinking Parks programme is funded by the National Lottery Community and Heritage Funds and Nesta: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/rethinking-parks/>

The full report is available from: <https://futureofparks.leeds.ac.uk>

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