**APSE Parks and Open Spaces Seminar 2022: Sustainability and Climate Change**

**24 November 2022, Kia Oval**

There were 40-50 people attending, mostly seemingly from local government in and around London.

**Paul Naylor from Eastleigh Council**

Gave a pretty bleak overview of the current situation. Money is short and getting shorter (albeit with the larger cuts coming after the next General Election), staff are getting cut back and new people don’t want to join Parks departments as the spend is discretionary and so not a great way to get to the top of the career ladder.

Government sees parks as being ‘at the bottom of the pile’ of funding priorities even though APSE Survation polls showed that parks were the highest regarded local authority service for each of the last seven years [unable to find source].

**Tony Leach from Parks for London** <https://parksforlondon.org.uk/>

PfL’s current focus of activity is on litter and waste, asset management and female safety.

He mentioned their Young Green and Well report and the attitudes of young people to green spaces. There’s a video of the launch here but I haven’t been able to source the full report.

He sees the trend in London greenspaces management as being towards insourcing and to contractors consolidating into three major groups.

Change is being driven by reduced funding, policy changes, climate change, innovation and collaboration and the current state of play can be sound in the latest Good Parks for London report which centres on Keeping Parks Clean. The 2021 report was titled Parks and Climate Change

Tony then centred on flooding and referenced the Mayor of London’s [Reimagining Rainwater in Parks and Green Spaces](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/rba-gla_guide-parks_and_greenspace_final.pdf) report and highlighted that money could sometimes be found from the drainage engineering departments of the local authorities to mitigate flooding flowing into the sewers – and that these engineers and the parks departments were rarely joined up. An opportunity which has led to some impressive swales and wetland development.

He noted that during the 2022 heatwave Thames Water had agreed that trees up to three years old could still be watered, even during the hosepipe ban, and that other useful information and campaigning had been done to mitigate the effects of increased use on green spaces including their [Picnic In, Pack it Out guide](https://parksforlondon.org.uk/litter-free-picnic-guide/) and that in Germany, South Korea and other countries green spaces are used to educate people more widely about climate change, principally through signage.

**Hana Sutch GoJauntly**

Hana presented her [GoJauntly app](https://www.gojauntly.com/) which has now been downloaded 450,000 times and charts out walking routes and the interesting places that the routes pass. Routes include the Green Chain, the London Loop and the Thames Path.

Individuals and groups can create and upload their own walks free or pay GoJauntly to do it for them. They are working with the University of Derby to quantify the effectiveness of the app in changing behaviour and medical outcomes.

**Kevin Crook, Lambeth Council**

This was essentially a reprise of their pitch to win an APSE prize for their progress in improving Lambeth’s green spaces, since the function was insourced in 2016. The achievements were very impressive and contributed to 47% of respondents to a survey saying that the parks were the best things about living in Lambeth [source not found].

They had innovations such as sinking a ground source heat pump in Brockwell Park, turning verges into ‘bee roads’ with wildflower seeding, and setting up Strategic Partnership Boards to identify what to do and how (these comprise local groups, councillors and officers), which exemplify what is now a very collaborative approach for all concerned.

**Giles Nicholson, Dorset Council**

Gave a presentation on their work with ‘cut and collect’ management of grass areas to reduce the nutrient load and permit the development of suitably seeded flower meadows (after the ground had been cleared using glyphosate). They have reduced the cutting of most of their 5k miles of verges from six times so twice a year.

They also have some attractive signage to explain their actions and guide behaviour, for example an explanation that piles of clippings should not be moved as grass snakes nest in them, and a sign showing a cow and asking dog owners to pick up their dogs’ mess as the hay would be fed to the cows.

**Mark Schofield, Plantlife International**

Continued on a similar theme showing that using clippings as feedstock for an anaerobic digester could make the process of grass management carbon positive as well as offsetting the costs. It seems, however that neither the technology nor the regulatory framework are quite there yet.

Finally (and most inspiringly) **Matthew Lipton of South Gloucestershire Council**

Matt’s talk centred on the [Local Nature Action Plan](https://sites.southglos.gov.uk/newsroom/environment/south-glos-collaborating-with-town-and-parish-councils-on-pioneering-local-nature-action-plans/) system that he has developed and that is being rapidly adopted throughout his local authority area which equip town and parish councils to take control of their own environment and put in the steps locally to protect and enhance nature. This looks likely to be taken up more widely as it appears to be gaining momentum.

All in all an inspiring conference, after a bit of a negative start, with some interesting and useful tools and resources that could be used in planning action on nature degradation through climate change and other reasons.