



The Rt Hon George Eustice

Secretary of State
Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

18 March 2021

Dear Secretary of State.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson classed parks and green spaces as, "...crucial for physical and mental health..." at the start of the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. The UK Urban Ecology Forum [UK UEF] agrees whole-heartedly and would add urban parks are also crucial for biodiversity, the eco-system services they deliver to mitigate climate change, and as a catalyst for public education and real action to the linked biodiversity extinction crisis.

Many UK UEF members are concerned the recent budget and current policies are doing nothing to recognise and build on the vital role our parks and public green spaces deliver. With the UK Government hosting November's COP26 meeting in Glasgow on global action addressing climate change we respectfully urge the adoption of a ten-point plan demonstrating the UK Government is serious about building back better from the Covid-19 pandemic and meeting its legally agreed targets laid out in the Paris Agreement:

1. Establish a UK Government parks body to deliver, monitor and police future investment ensuring all parks and public green space meet or exceed an agreed standard of delivery.
2. Appoint a new Parks Minister to lead and champion this new group.
3. Provide significant central government funding for parks and public green space which is proportionate to their true value.
4. Designate parks and public green space as public assets and ensure minimum funding levels to maintain them as such.
5. In addition to central funding, enable parks and public green space managers to access the new agricultural funding model of cash in return for the delivery of "public good" services.

6. Devote some cash from the Department of Health and Social Care budget to fund healthy activities or resources boosting active lifestyles in public spaces supporting social prescribing via GP's and hospitals.
7. Provide better signage in our streets to promote walking or cycling routes between public green spaces for active travel, or dedicated cycle/running routes.
8. Roll parks and public green space together with plans for rejuvenating our high streets and city centres with Business Improvement Districts, ensuring the quality of local assets, while simultaneously creating resilient communities better able to support themselves through times of crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.
9. Encourage more urban food growing (allotments, orchards, community schemes) to boost availability of local, seasonal produce.
10. Commission an annual, independent report on the top ten actions delivering positive outcomes for improving local green space, biodiversity delivery, management, and skills training for seven distinct audiences:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| i. Individuals | v. Corporates and large |
| ii. Communities | local employers |
| iii. Local Councils | vi. Planners |
| iv. Landowners/developers | vii. Devolved and UK |
| | Government |

Investing in these incredibly versatile and important assets would bring new jobs, improvements in public health, boost our failing biodiversity and enable cities to better manage the impacts climate change will bring in the coming years. With sensible planning you can create new parks and public green spaces to speed delivery of the Prime Minister's "Levelling-up" ambitions.

This simple plan would demonstrate the UK's commitment to tackling global issues, while securing the Prime Minister's authority at the planned COP26 meeting in November. It would also raise Britain's reputation as a world leader in green investments, science, and technology at a time of unprecedented challenge. This "soft-power" would help open new doors for future trade talks based on sound ecological principles.

The notion of a 15-minute city, where people can walk or cycle to all the facilities they may need in life within a quarter of an hour journey of home, is not new. Its importance was highlighted during lockdown with those having access to shops, parks, chemists and essential services or resources faring much better than those reliant on public transport or cars to access the same facilities. A 15-minute city has cleaner air and more active citizens, making them less vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus and future pandemics. It also needs fewer cars, releasing an average of 10% of land given over to car parking in the average settlement. That is more space for people, trees, shrubs, wildlife or allotments.

For every £1 invested in parks, society gets a £17 return in social gains. That's growth which cannot be matched by any other sector. Parks must be at the center of a New Green Deal as we build back Britain. They are key to a healthier, happier, and more productive society. Adding free high-speed internet access to all parks opens new areas where people can work and play. This is crucial in areas of high density where indoor space may be limited.

People need parks. Society and nature benefit from well-managed parks. Parks need a strong Minister to enable our green spaces to fully realise their potential. Members of the UK Urban Ecology Forum look forward to working with you to ensure parks deliver the maximum benefit for all, alongside increased resilience against future zoonoses, climate change impacts and biodiversity loss.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Scott.
Chair of the UK Urban Ecology Forum

Tim Webb.
Secretary of the UK Urban Ecology Forum

On behalf of independent members of the UK Urban Ecology Forum,
representing experts from academia, ecology, policy, the arts,
and the historic, cultural, public, and charitable sectors.