

18 April 2017

Dear Colleague

Response to the Newcastle City Council consultation on Parks

Newcastle CVS is the lead infrastructure organisation for Newcastle and Gateshead's voluntary and community sector. As well as developing and supporting voluntary and community organisations to be more sustainable and resilient, we organise networks and events and represent the voluntary and community sector in strategic discussions. We carry out research and produce policy studies. We have over 750 member and associate organisations that are local voluntary and community organisations.

Newcastle CVS has promoted this consultation through our networks, e-newsletters, and social media.

We recognise the difficult financial positions of many local authorities which are likely to worsen over the next few years. Parks contribute greatly to physical and mental wellbeing and we wish to make the following points:

- We support Council retaining overall ownership but looking at a long term lease arrangement, but the Council needs to be clear that any benefits should be for Newcastle residents. For instance, it would be wrong for the Council to give a peppercorn lease to a developer who makes a lot of money from the project which isn't necessarily ploughed back into the parks eg Wylam Brewery in Exhibition Park is an asset, however we understand that the intermediaries who are the lease-holders have not necessarily invested that profit into the park.
- In some parts of the city where there are established 'Friends of' Groups these can work very well. People feel strongly about their local park. However what happens in those parts of the city where there isn't capacity and competency, and the park areas are much larger and require more direct management?
- Who decides which facilities are brought into a park – is it the local Friends group or the Council? There has to be a balance between income-generating activities and open access. Once charges are introduced, these can act as a deterrent for many people who can't afford to pay.
- There are clearly a number of spaces that the National Trust manages successfully eg Gibside, and they are experienced at working with volunteers. The role of the National Trust isn't clear from the consultation. Clearly if some land is leased to the National Trust,

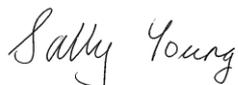
the NT can charge for entrance, such as at Gibside, Seaton Delaval Hall, as much of their income comes from membership fees.

- If a single charitable trust is established, those trustees have to work in the best interest of that charity, not necessarily the City Council. It isn't clear how the National Trust would work with this new Charitable Trust.
- How would allotment holders be involved, and also the Freeman?
- It needs to be clear that a charitable trust does not necessarily have access to more external funding than a public body. Heritage Lottery money has been given to a number of the City's parks, and external charitable trusts are very over-subscribed. Just putting the assets into a different organisational structure does not mean there are multiple additional resources, and indeed it just means greater competition in the sector for resources.
- Clearly there are issues of support for volunteers as this needs resources – it involves training, health and safety, safeguarding, recruitment and retention. Volunteering is not a free good.

We welcome being asked to participate in any future consultation.

Please regard this letter as the Newcastle CVS formal submission to the consultation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sally Young".

Sally Young
Chief Executive