



Councillor Andy Moorhead  
The Leader  
Knowsley Council

**6 November 2017**

Dear Councillor Moorhead

### **The Report of the Knowsley Parks and Green Spaces Review Board**

I'm very pleased to be able to let you know that the Parks and Green Spaces Review Board established by Knowsley Council in February has completed its work. The Board has identified a tangible alternative delivery model for funding and managing Knowsley's parks and green spaces.

You will recall that we were set the following task:

*To identify, for Knowsley Council's consideration in November 2017, a new way of paying for the maintenance, management and positive use of Knowsley's parks so that their unique qualities can be sustained in the short term and then for generations to come.*

This has certainly not been an easy undertaking and we have had plenty of lively debate along the way. The Review Board has met on seven occasions over the last eight months, visited parks and green spaces in Knowsley, and those across the country to see how they are being managed and to ask lots of questions. It is fair to say this has been a very interesting, thought provoking and rewarding endeavor. I must emphasise the collaborative nature in which the 20 Board members have come together voluntarily and worked through some quite complex and challenging issues – they have all made a great effort!

Given the significant financial implications and substantial community interest in this matter we have taken steps to ensure that the information we considered, our interpretation of it and our subsequent findings, conclusions and recommendations have been documented for public record. As such on behalf of the Review Board I'm able to present the following papers to you for Knowsley Council's consideration, they are attached to this email:

- A quick read summary;
- The Report of the Knowsley Parks and Green Spaces Review Board; and
- Book of Appendices.

I'm sure you will recall that Knowsley Council set eight policy objectives for the Review Board. The Board has very much kept these in mind during the course of its review and used them as a point of reference to shape its recommendations to the Council. Therefore to give you a flavour of what the Board is proposing and to reassure you that our plans align with these objectives I'm pleased to update you as follows.

### ***Policy Objective (A) - Safeguarding Knowsley's Parks and Green Spaces***

Ensure that the Borough's parks and green spaces remain freely accessible to be enjoyed by all, and belong to the people of Knowsley in perpetuity.

The Review Board's proposals allow this to happen.

The Review Board has identified that Knowsley's parks and green spaces should be transferred under a long-term lease from Knowsley Council to an independent charitable trust called The Knowsley Parks Trust. The Trust's primary charitable objective would be to sustain these sites as freely accessible public assets. Therefore they would belong to the people of Knowsley who would not have to pay the Trust to access them.

### ***Policy Objective (B) - Delivering Strategic and Corporate Objectives***

Deliver the Council's Green Space Strategy 2015-2020 and realise its outcomes, which will contribute towards meeting the Priorities of the Council's Corporate Plan 2017-2020.

The Review Board's proposals allow this to happen.

Knowsley's parks and green spaces offer a unique means of supporting the delivery of Knowsley Council's Corporate Plan's five priorities. This is articulated in the Green Space Strategy. The Review Board has recognised these priorities and in so doing fully appreciated the attributes that parks and green spaces bring to the borough's communities, Knowsley Council and its partners.

Furthermore, this is an alternative delivery model which the Council recognises in its Corporate Plan as the future means of delivering appropriate Council services; we believe this is such a service.

### ***Policy Objective (C) - Improve Grounds Maintenance Standards***

Maintain and where possible improve the 2016/17 quality grounds maintenance standard outcomes of Knowsley's parks and green spaces.

The Review Board's proposals allow this to happen.

The Review Board has noted that current benchmarking demonstrates that Knowsley Council's parks and green space team provide a quality service at a good value for money; this is not the driver for change. The Board also understands that good quality maintenance standards encourages positive community use and ownership of green spaces e.g. as seen through Knowsley's 18 Green Flag Parks. Therefore ensuring that sufficient funding and staff skill, expertise and capacity is available moving forward to enable such standards to be kept and where possible enhanced is essential.

### ***Policy Objective (D) - Establish an Alternative Sustainable Funding Model***

Through the implementation of a new funding and management model, replace the Council's 2016/17 budget of £1.114 million on the development, management and maintenance of Knowsley's public parks and green spaces, whilst also identifying £0.185 million of new annual funding in order to avoid the need for the Council to find new capital funding resources to maintain green space infrastructure. A total value of circa £1.3 million.

The Review Board's proposals allow this to happen.

The creation of an endowment which, invested wisely, will generate an annual income that will replace Knowsley Council's annual expenditure of circa £1.3 million. The endowment will need to be created through the sale of up to 10% of parks and green spaces for new use e.g. housing or social care homes (for which there is great demand) but this will allow the majority to be protected forever.

In placing the majority of parks and green spaces into the independent Knowsley Parks Trust and funding them via an endowment will protect them from any future funding cuts that may need to be made by Knowsley Council. This will give reassurance to the public that this approach will protect the vast majority of parks forever.

### ***Policy Objective (E) - Develop a more Commercial and Entrepreneurial Management Culture***

Establish a new funding and management model which enables the delivery of the Council's Green Space Strategy through an entrepreneurial spirit and the utilisation of the most effective public, commercial, charitable and social enterprise governance structures.

The Review Board's proposals allow this to happen.

Whilst an endowment is the proposed mainstay of funding the parks and green spaces the Review Board very much recognise the need for traded services, corporate social responsibility, grant funding and community volunteering. These sources of income / resource will not on their own meet the shortfall in funding needed to be met, but will provide much needed funding to develop sites so they offer greater value and assist in toping-up core maintenance requirements.

The Knowsley Parks Trust and its trading subsidiary (with social enterprise credentials) will require the skills and experience to enable these activities.

### ***Policy Objective (F) - Promote the Principles of a Co-operative Council***

Embed the delivery of the appropriate components of the Council's Priorities, Outcomes and Co-operative Principles into the new funding and management model's terms of reference and business plan.

The Review Board's proposals allow this to happen.

The Review Board acknowledges the wide range of parties who have interest in Knowsley parks and green spaces. The creation of The Knowsley Parks Trust must be done in recognition of the first-rate efforts and commitment of the many volunteers who maintain such sites and encourage their positive community use. The Trust offers great opportunity to establish a new organisation in Knowsley founded on collaborative, co-operative and social value objectives bringing skill development, employment and community cohesion attributes. Additionally, the method of funding the endowment very much aligns to the demand for development land in Knowsley – a top priority for ensuring the economic prosperity of the borough is secured over the long-term.

***Policy Objective (G) - Ensure that oversight and scrutiny rests with the Council***

Maintain the Council's overarching oversight of Knowsley's green space assets through appropriate arrangements in the alternative funding and management model.

The Review Board's proposals allow this to happen.

The Knowsley Parks Trust will be independent of Knowsley Council. However the Council will establish the Trust and in doing so will set its charitable objectives, ethos, method of operation, founding members, trustees and staff; so all controlled by the Council through legal agreements and land lease conditions. There are many excellent examples of charitable trusts using an endowment to maintain public open space – such best practice would be followed.

***Policy Objective (H) - Secure Political and Public Confidence and Support***

Ensure public confidence in the intent, positive outcomes and sustainability of the future funding and management of Knowsley's public parks and green spaces.

The Review Board's proposals allow this to happen.

The Review Board has placed great importance in testing its proposals with those who live, work and do business in Knowsley i.e. given the financial circumstances of Knowsley Council are they supportive of establishing The Knowsley Parks Trust, largely funded by an endowment that is created from the sale of 10% of parks and green spaces for alternative use? This was undertaken in a comprehensive manner to ensure statistically sound data was collected and as many people as possible had a chance to have their say. A good level of response was received, with the majority supporting the Board's plans.

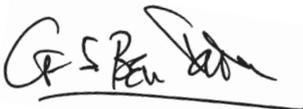
The people of Knowsley will need more information about how The Knowsley Parks Trust would be established and how parks and green spaces will be selected to fund its endowment. This is an important part of the next steps that Knowsley Council will need to undertake.

Finally I should highlight that given the nature of the Review Board and its terms of reference we have conducted our research at a strategic level. Therefore, as I'm sure you will appreciate, if Knowsley Council decides to progress the Board's recommendations it will need to undertake further more detailed business case preparation in order that the necessary due diligence is carried out to ensure the successful delivery of our proposals. The Review Board is willing and able to support the Council if it wishes to call on it again during the course of next steps.

I do hope that you find the conclusions and recommendations of the Review Board helpful and I wish you all the best in taking this really important matter forward on behalf of all those living, working and doing business in Knowsley.

Please let me know if you would like to meet with me, or indeed the Review Board, to discuss our Report.

Yours sincerely



**Gideon Ben-Tovim**  
**Chair The Knowsley Parks and Green Spaces Review Board**