

Speech for Deputation 16th January 2019

Good afternoon Lord Mayor and Members of Council

I am Lynda Kitching, Chair of Leeds Parks & Greenspaces Forum, here along with my colleagues, x...x, x....x, x...x, representing volunteer groups from across Leeds.

In 5 minutes, I'd like to tell you about the Forum and our hopes for greenspace in Leeds.

The Forum was set up in 2012, as an outcome of the 2009 Leeds Parks & Green Spaces Strategy.

It is an independent umbrella group, currently with 90 members consisting of Friends of and In Bloom groups, Residents Associations, Parish Councils, Environmental charities and 2 of our Universities – representing over 5000 volunteer residents.

We care about our sites, work to have them looking good and safe, encouraging people to visit; we research their history and wildlife, lead walks, fundraise, host events and generally speak up for them.

If there is a park, woodland or cemetery in your Ward with no Friends group, and you can identify a few people who are interested in the site, we can help to set them up as a Friends group, – we're happy to come along to provide advice & support. This in turn offers community cohesion around a common cause, and helps to support P&C Service. We welcome new members and it's free. SHOW FLYER, copies on tables outside this Chamber.

4 times a year, we come together as the Forum, to learn from each other, hear from senior Parks officers and listen to speakers on topics of mutual interest. We affiliate with the National Federation of Parks & Greenspaces, and with Leeds Civic Trust.

Over recent years, there has been growing concern nationally about the state of parks and whether they would exist into the future. In 2016 the Uni of Leeds conducted widespread research and produced '**The Future Prospects of Urban Public Parks**'. SHOW. This fed into the national debate resulting in the APPG for Parks' subsequent White Paper and resulting actions, although falling short of recommending statutory funding.

We appreciate that Council budgets are tight and there are examples nationally of parks being sold off, playgrounds closed/locked, flower beds grassed or concreted over.

We believe there's something about working smarter not harder. We're appreciative that in Leeds, Councillors voted to invest in the Parks service supporting various initiatives, inc the apprenticeship scheme, the Arium plant nursery, Leeds NW Country Park, Go-Ape, City Park, the revamp of the Bird Garden at Lotherton Hall and the application to the Future Parks Accelerator Fund with a Heritage theme.

The **Leeds Parks Fund** is another investment, an innovative example, set up to complement the work of the Council by encouraging charitable giving, and along with Leeds Community Foundation, the Forum is a main partner in promoting that.

What's important about greenspace?

There is much evidence telling us it is good for our Health & Well-being, and it's a topic the Forum has been working with from the beginning. Leeds' Director of Public Health Dr Ian Cameron, has spoken to us about how his team is working across Council depts and with businesses in the city. You'll be aware of his award-winning Annual Report 2014/15 '**Planning for a Healthy City**' – SHOW - and his team's work with GP's to consider issuing '**Green prescriptions**', much in the news during Mental Health Awareness Week, last October.

One journalist wrote that week that 'Parks are our natural health service'.

Research by Uni of Exeter on behalf of DEFRA, (pub July 18) models the use of parks and greenspaces, and reveals for Leeds, a headline figure of overall welfare benefit of £91 million pa. The model is endorsed by the Treasury.

So the **link with health and greenspace** is on the national agenda -, especially around young people and social isolation, and the issue won't go away.

But, in order for those green prescriptions to be effective, we need attractive and safe green spaces and green corridors.

Councillors, if we want a Healthy City to live, play and grow old in - whichever portfolio you have, greenspace, inc trees, will come into the equation, - be it, culture/tourism, clean air, Development/regeneration, flood alleviation, sport, education, Highways, and food production, which needs those essential pollinators, and of course, parks where we'd expect to see good evidence of bio-diversity, the litmus test of a healthy environment.

When our schools, colleges and universities have healthy students, leading to companies, including the Council, having a healthy workforce, it is ultimately good for our city's economy.

The Forum and its members will continue to do their bit. Please include greenspace whenever you can, and keep investing!

There is so much more to say on this, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss it further. Thank you for listening today.

Lynda Kitching
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