

# LES Consultation Qualitative Research Programme

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Green Infrastructure

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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# Background

- As part of the publication of the London Environment Strategy (LES), a three month stakeholder and public consultation was conducted in the period August-November 2017
- The public consultation used the following methodologies:
  - Representative polling of 1,000 Londoners
  - Surveys of the Talk London community (38,000 Londoners)
  - Online discussions with the Talk London community
  - Focus groups and interviews with select sample of the Talk London community

# Objectives

- This research aims to explore Londoners' attitudes towards green infrastructure, with a specific focus on parks and gardens
- The discussion guides for both focus groups and interviews covered the following topics:
  - Background views on the environment
  - Attitudes towards garden management
  - Attitudes towards green infrastructure, including use of parks
  - Response to ideas for turning London into world's 'greenest global city'

# Methodology

- In September 2017, the Opinion Research Team conducted 8 telephone interviews and 4 focus groups
  - 3 groups with homeowners/ 1 group with renters, all of whom had a garden
  - 8 interviews with people who lived near a park but did not visit it often
- Participants were recruited from the Talk London community, and were paid £40 to attend the session
  - At point of recruitment participants were told that the research was on the environment but were not told that the specific focus would be green infrastructure\*
  - Spread of inner and outer London participants

\*This method of recruitment results in a more engaged sample than would be the case in the general population. This sample were more **pro environment and civically engaged** than would be expected from the general population. Results should be read with this in mind.

Total sample size: 28									
Gender		Age	Ethnicity		Nationality		Housing tenure		
Women	Men	Wide range of ages	White	BAME	British	Other	Home-owner	Private renter	Social renter
11	17		24	4	26	2	18	8	2

This report also contains finding from a representative poll of 1,000 Londoners conducted in September 2017 by YouGov on behalf of the GLA

# Executive Summary

- Participants felt that London has exemplary GI, but there are fears this is being eroded
  - The debate around green infrastructure taps into fears around what rapid development is going to mean for London and evokes anxiety about the future
- Green infrastructure seen as essential to quality of life and to tackling air quality
  - The more busy London gets, the more important GI becomes
- Polling indicates that Londoners make good use of their parks, and in the qual most reported positive experiences
  - But some reported that cuts to council budgets were having negative impact on their local green space and others said they had seen green space or trees lost to development
- Participants felt that most people do not think of their garden as part of London's green infrastructure, but rather as just another room in their house
  - As a result participants said they thought many Londoners prioritise convenience and aesthetics above all else, resulting in practices such as paving, plastic grass and cutting down trees
- 'Greenest global city' overall well received, but seen as a huge challenge for London
  - All immediately saw a tension with house-building, and thought that inevitably one would come at the expense of the other
- Trees seen as the frontline of the fight for London's green infrastructure
  - Many participants had the impression that tree cover in London is being reduced
- 'Greening' of buildings seen as an exciting opportunity area
  - Seen as a real opportunity area for London, and one that could re-frame the debate around house-building vs GI, but participants felt it was not acceptable for green roofs/walls to wholesale replace provision of green space on the ground

# Implications for LES

- There is nervousness around how development will change London, and what this will mean for quality of life in the city
  - Green infrastructure seen to increase in importance as the rate of development increases
- Reassurance on green infrastructure will be key to mitigating concerns around development
  - Above all Londoners are looking for reassurance that they will be able to keep what they've got
- 'Greening' of buildings a way to re-frame the debate, and position development as an opportunity for green infrastructure
  - Evokes a positive vision of London's future, but green buildings not seen to offer the same benefits as space on the ground
- There is a need to make the case for the value of London's gardens to the city's environment
  - Participants felt that the current mind set around gardens is acting as a barrier to positive behaviours
- Changing behaviour around paving will be very difficult if relying on voluntary action
  - Participants felt that flooding risks were well known but the convenience factor overrides this
- Evidence from polling suggests there is an appetite for community involvement in green space, but question marks remain around how to convert this into action
  - Time a major barrier, but also high level of satisfaction with local parks means for many there is no burning platform to doing this



# Literature Review

- A review of existing research has been undertaken to inform the design of this research, and to provide context for the analysis of the results
- The review was not intended to be exhaustive, but has instead focused on the most relevant texts that provide key context to the research findings

## Texts Reviewed

- [State of the UK's Parks II, Public Survey, June 2016](#)
- [The Value of Public Space, Design Council](#)

# Literature Review: State of the UK's Parks II, Heritage Lottery Fund

- Use of local parks is widespread: 85% of UK adults have used their local park (up from 78% in 2014) and 35% use, visit or pass through it at least once a week.
  - Use is generally higher among younger adults (aged 16-34), parents with young children, BAME residents, and urban residents (particularly London).
- Perceptions of the condition of local parks are generally positive: 49% of UK adults think their local park is in good condition and a further 33% think it is in fair condition.
  - Perceptions of the condition of local parks have improved since 2014, when 44% of local residents thought their park to be in good condition.
  - The condition of parks is generally seen as stable, though 20% see their local park's condition as having improved in the last 3 years and 10% as having declined.
  - Children's play areas are the aspect of local parks most likely to be seen as improved, while anti-social behaviour and vandalism are most likely to be perceived as getting worse.

<http://britainthinks.com/pdfs/Heritage-Lottery-Fund-State-of-UKs-Parks-II-Public-Consultation.pdf>

# Literature Review: State of the UK's Parks II, Heritage Lottery Fund

- A majority of UK adults (55%) are very or fairly concerned about reductions in council budgets having a negative impact on the condition of their local park.
  - This concern is most widespread among frequent users of their local park (66% of those who use their local park once a week or more are very or fairly concerned) and those who perceive their park to already be in poor condition (78%).
- In the context of potential park maintenance budget reductions, UK adults are fairly divided in terms of which type of park should be prioritised for funding. On balance, neighbourhood children's playgrounds are most likely to be prioritised for funding, with sports pitches and tennis courts least likely to be prioritised for funding.
- UK adults are generally supportive of supplementary forms of funding for parks, with most widespread support for greater funding from the national lottery (79% strongly or somewhat support). There is, however, widespread opposition to increasing charges for using park facilities (with only 20% supporting and 53% opposed).

<http://britainthinks.com/pdfs/Heritage-Lottery-Fund-State-of-UKs-Parks-II-Public-Consultation.pdf>

## 2. BACKGROUND VIEWS

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# ‘Green space’ is top of mind when discussing London’s environment

- Participants had a strong sense that London’s green infrastructure is under threat
  - Across the LES research this tended to be one of the first topics raised when asked about challenges to London’s environment
- Primary threat perceived to come from rapid rate of development, and increasing population
  - There was also concern about cuts to council budgets and ‘privatisation’ of public space
- The prevailing view is that the current provision of GI is exemplary, but there is concern that this is slowly being eroded
  - Most participants spoke of their day to day experiences as positive, although some said they had seen a decline in provision in their area
  - Despite positive experiences, many were concerned about what the future would bring

*“As cities go it’s actually not bad. The heritage of it that we’ve still got most of. But my concern is they put in the new builds and it becomes a concrete jungle.”*

TL Member, Homeowner

*“They just nibble away at it. We had allotments near us and we’ve lost half of that because they wanted to develop it.”*

TL Member, Homeowner

*“It used to be nice and open. It’s getting more congested and more crowded and the parks that are there are being used by more people.”*

TL Member, Homeowner

# Participants have a sense of urgency about the protection of green space

- Participants had a strong sense that London is developing at a rapid rate, and were concerned about the implications of this for London's quality of life
  - Very low level of trust in developers and a sense that councils are at a disadvantage drives concern
- Underpinning these concerns is a fear that London's character will be fundamentally changed by development
  - Fear that it will move from being a liveable city characterized by an abundance of open, green space to a 'concrete jungle'
- The debate around green infrastructure taps into these fears, and evokes anxiety about London's future
  - Anxiety heightened by a sense that this is a slow, creeping change, the full implications of which will only become apparent once it is too late

*"I am concerned about the new builds. All these properties being built and they are like little rabbit hutches and where are people going to go to relax. It's so important."*

TL Member, Homeowner

*"I live near Wembley and there's actually hundreds, literally hundreds of flats in very tall blocks going up and it's a concrete piazza to be honest."*

TL Member, Homeowner

# 3. GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

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# Green infrastructure seen as essential to quality of life and to tackling air quality

- Participants saw GI as a necessary antidote to the stress, noise and pressure of city life
  - Mental health benefits most commonly cited in terms of needing a place to find calm and of the uplifting effect of greenery
  - Physical health benefits, particularly in relation to children, also frequently cited
- At a city level, GI is seen to be crucial to tackling the issue they care most about- AQ
  - There was high awareness that 'green lungs' act as a counter balance to pollution
- Many also took an interest in the benefits of GI to wildlife
  - A minority of participants, most of whom were keen gardeners, spontaneously raised decline in biodiversity as a top environmental issue for London
  - Many participants remarked that part of the pleasure and fun of GI was that it offered a chance to see wildlife in the city

*"It's a way of winding down, relaxing for half an hour. Some jobs can be quite stressful and it's nice to have a break and clear your mind."*

TL Member, Homeowner

*"Green lungs. And with more and more building going up we really need it."*

TL Member, Renter

*"It's the only way we share our city with other species isn't it? Let nature into the city."*

TL Member, Renter



# Green infrastructure in London a source of pride

- London seen to do better than most other cities in terms of the quantity and quality of its green space
  - Participants felt that there were very few areas of London that were not well served by green infrastructure, and that this was quite unusual for a major city
- Considered to be a key part of London's appeal for both residents and tourists
  - Participants had anecdotes of visitors being surprised at the abundance of green space in London
- Pride at a local as well as at a city level
  - Participants were almost universally positive about GI in their local area

*"I think we do quite well. New York has Central Park but not much beyond that. In London there are places dotted around that have been there for ever. It's a bit random in its occurrences but they are well known and well maintained."*

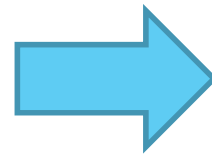
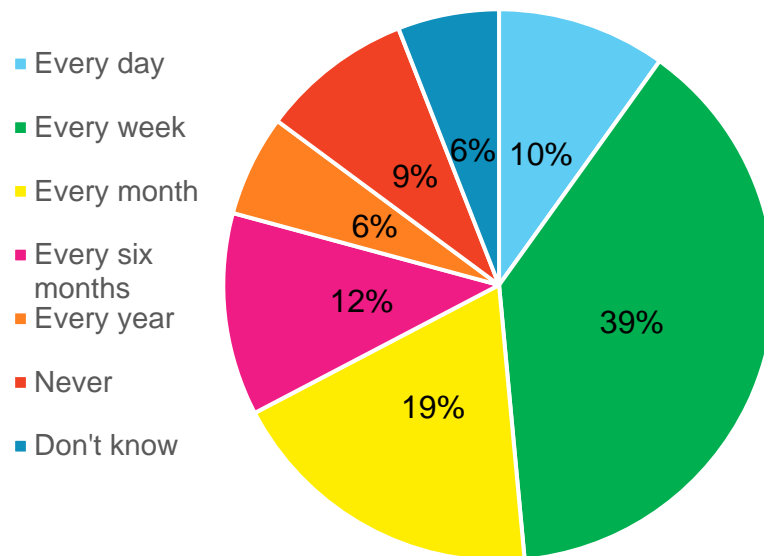
TL Member, Homeowner

*"I like how the green areas are tucked away. Around Pall Mall you have squares which have beautiful, tranquil spaces with flowers and in St James' there's statues and table tennis. There's things you only know if you live in London. It's fun showing them to visitors."*

TL Member, Renter

# Half of all Londoners use their local park or green space on a daily or weekly basis

*How often, if at all, do you go to a park or green space in your local area?*



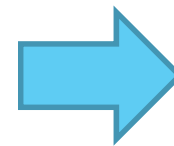
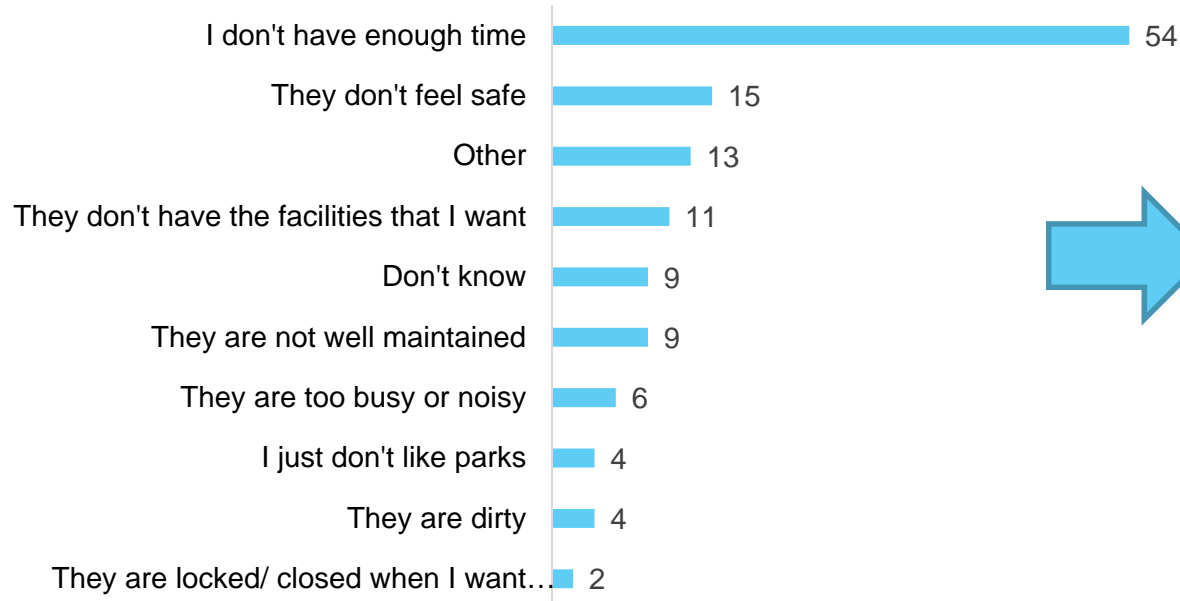
- Male, white, ABC1 Londoners are more likely to regularly visit a park
- Women, under 25s, C2DE and social renters visit parks less often.

- **84% of Londoners say they have a park within roughly a 10 minute walk of their house**
  - This rises to 92% for those aged 65+
  - ABC1 and white Londoners are more likely to have a park nearby
  - 93% of home owners have a park within roughly a 10 minute walk of their house, compared to 82% of private renters

# Reasons why people don't use parks are varied and complex, but there are clear barriers around safety and facilities

Of those who have a park within roughly a 10 minute walk of their house, **88% like visiting their local park** whilst 10% don't like the park, of which 5% still use it or pass through it

*What are your main reasons for not visiting these local parks or green spaces more regularly?\**



- High number of 'other' and 'don't know' responses suggests this is a complex picture
- Participants in the focus groups remarked that there is a bit of a postcode lottery, with GI in affluent areas tending to be better quality than GI in deprived areas

\*Only asked to those who lived within 10 minutes walk of a park and do not visit it regularly (n=495)

**\*Profiles based on interviews with Londoners who visit their local park every six months or less**

*I don't have time...*



*"I go as often as I can. Once or twice a month in the summer and less in the winter. Weather and time the reasons I don't go more. I work far from home and now it's starting to get dark early."*



*"I'm from Poplar. I've lived on the same estate my whole life. I'm a student. There's a park ten minutes from my house but I don't go there at all really. I am so busy day to day I don't have time to relax...I didn't really go the park as a kid so guess I'm not in the habit."*

*I don't enjoy it...*



*"The problem is I'm not a very active, out-doorsy kind of person. I like knitting and in door stuff. As much as I would love to enjoy visits to the park I rarely do. I love the principle of living in a green place but would I notice if I wasn't? Probably not."*



*"I never use parks. Maybe once or twice a year. I don't enjoy looking at flowers or plants. I grew up in Lagos. I never went to the park as a child. I like it when there's lots of people around."*

*I don't feel safe...*



*"I don't like going to parks on my own. Drinkers. Stray dogs. People who don't look after their dogs properly. On my own I wouldn't feel completely safe."*

Women are almost three times as likely to cite not feeling safe as a reason (22%), as are home owners and Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnicity Londoners

*I can't because of my health ...*



*"I don't go to parks because since my accident I'm largely immobile. It's affected my balance. I used to go to St James' quite a lot because it was next to my work but I can't do that anymore."*

# Participants had a clear sense of what their ideal park would look like

Ideal park



- ✓ **Amenities** provided within the park grounds e.g. toilets/ café
- ✓ Caters to **all age groups** e.g. playground for children but also quiet areas to sit
- ✓ **Brings people together** e.g. Picnic areas, outdoor chess boards
- ✓ Gives a sense of '**escaping**' the city e.g. variety of landscape (wooded areas), wildlife
- ✓ **Well maintained** e.g. paths not overgrown, equipment in good order
- ✓ **Feels safe** e.g. well used by a variety of ages, park wardens

*"I think communal areas are really important. The park near me has bbqs and you get communities of people who take their own food and music and meet up. It's a nice atmosphere"*

TL Member, Renter

*"I think play areas for kids are so important. But not ones that are put in and look lovely for 5 minutes but are actually well maintained."*

TL Member, Homeowner

*"I think it's got to have something for all ages. Shaded areas for those of us who like sitting quietly."*

TL Member, Homeowner

# In line with the quant, not feeling safe the most off-putting quality a park can have



- × **Doesn't feel safe** e.g. not enough people around, only used by one age group, rough sleeping, needles on the ground
- × **Doesn't look clean** e.g. litter, overflowing bins
- × **Not well maintained** e.g. broken equipment
- × Maintenance **does not encourage wildlife** e.g. paving over of green areas
- × **No amenities**, especially toilets- particularly a problem if visiting with young children
- × **'NO' signs**

*"The borough I live in (Lewisham) we've had to fight for quite a lot of stuff. They wanted to astroturf our park and turn it into a private sports area."*

TL Member, Renter

*"My local park (Roding) is really beautiful but it's also got a real rubbish problem. I've cleaned up needles and all sorts and I know that's why some people don't take their kids there."*

TL Member, Homeowner

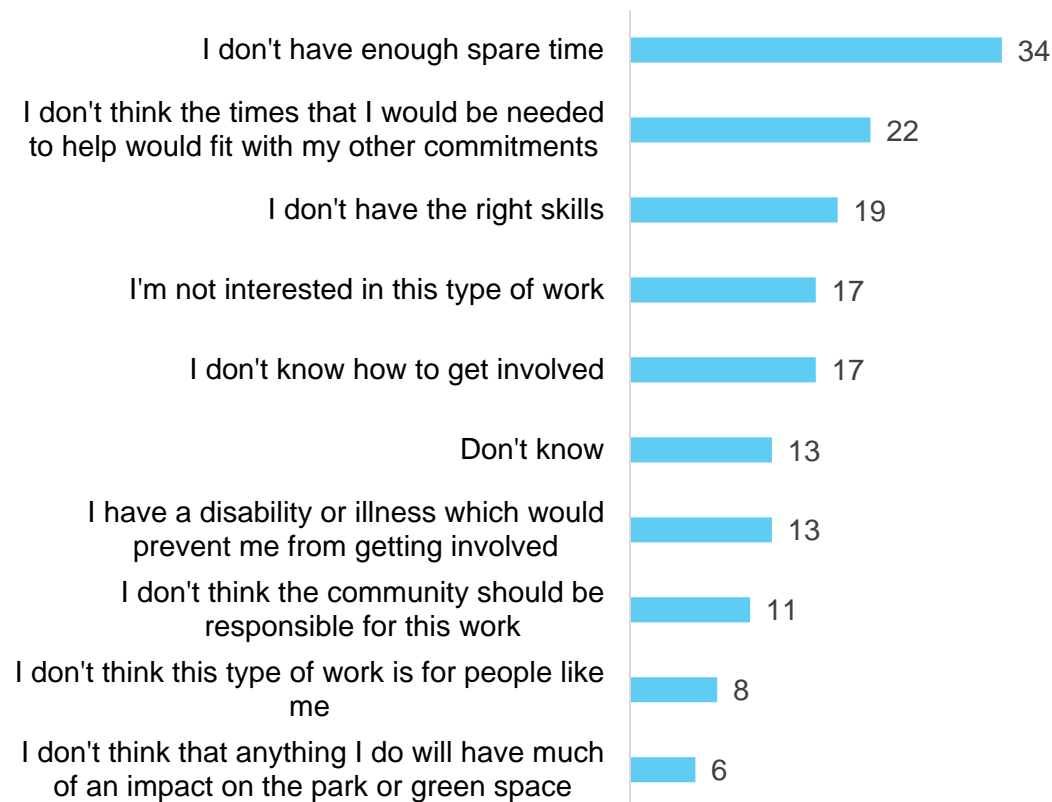
*"When my kids were little I would select parks on the basis of whether they had a decent toilet or not."*

TL Member, Homeowner

# Nearly half of Londoners say they would volunteer in their local park

46% of Londoners would be interested in helping run a local park, compared to 45% who would not

*Which of the below would be your biggest concerns about helping to run a local park?*



*"I volunteer once a year but a lot of the volunteer days are on a weekday so I can't do it as regularly as I would like. They don't really have them on weekends so I have to take time off to do it."*

TL Member, Homeowner

## 4. GARDEN MANAGEMENT

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# Participants were on a spectrum in terms of interest in/ knowledge of gardens

*Gardening experts*



- Tended to be older homeowners
- More likely to be interested in environmental benefits of gardens, and in wildlife
- Gardening a hobby which extends beyond their own garden e.g. visiting other gardens, listening to gardening shows etc

*Gardening novices*



- Tended to be young renters
- More interested in aesthetic and functional aspects of a garden
- Lack of confidence in own ability to manage garden
- See gardening as a chore

*"I visit RHS gardens and I read quite a lot and then just doing it and making mistakes and learning along the way."*

TL Member, Homeowner

**Participants all agreed it was a long road from novice to expert, with much trial and error involved**

*"It feels like a very grown up thing. Like something my grandparents do. It's not something I feel I could ever do until I'm at least 50."*

TL Member, Renter

# All participants agreed it was highly desirable to have a garden in London

## More space

- Important for all as space at a premium in London
- Garden can be useful place for storage
- Particularly important for those with children, as they can have space to play outside

## Private outdoor space

- In contrast to going to a park, a garden allows you to enjoy good weather without being disturbed by others and with a different level of privacy
- Good for socialising

## Aesthetic enjoyment

- All said they found it relaxing to look outside and see greenery
- Enjoyable to watch the change in the seasons

## Connection to nature

- 'Gardening experts' saw this as the main advantage- took pleasure in observing wildlife, and being able to grow their own fruit and vegetables
- Those with young children also felt this was an important thing for them to experience

*"It's just nice to be able to put a table out there and know that you can sit in a green space and not be surrounded by people smoking or teenagers!"*

TL Member, Renter

*"I think especially in a big city it's one of your few connections to the natural world. And it's always changing. It's so rewarding."*

TL Member, Homeowner

# But also felt that having a garden was not without its drawbacks

- Gardens require constant attention
  - Keeping grass mown the biggest drain on time
- Gardening is difficult
  - Steep learning curve and much trial and error involved
- Garden maintenance can be expensive
  - 'Garden novices' who may not have access to tools (especially renters) and who are unlikely to know the tricks of the trade are likely to face the biggest costs
- Gardens can be messy
  - Gardens lead to mud being brought in the house, and can drag down the overall aesthetic of a house if they are not well maintained e.g. grass overgrown, leaves everywhere
- Garden waste a hassle, especially if you have to pay to have it taken away
  - Participants speculated that this might encourage people to pave over gardens

*"I spend a lot of time commuting around London and get back late in the evening and weekends are busy. I don't have time for the garden."*

TL Member, Renter

*"I think it's an extremely steep learning curve. You've got to enjoy it otherwise I think it's quite easy to give up."*

TL Member, Homeowner

*"If you're not doing things like swapping cuttings then it's expensive. You go to the garden centre and before you know it it's £100"*

TL Member, Homeowner

# There was high spontaneous awareness of link between paving and flooding

- Across the LES research, flooding was spontaneously raised as a challenge for London's environment in nearly every group
  - Link between paving and flooding well known
- Paving over for cars seen as an inevitable response to lack of on street parking
  - Some participants had had paving put in to their front gardens for cars, but of these several said they had used permeable material to reduce flooding risk
  - Some also remarked on paving used in back gardens to minimise maintenance although it was felt this was less common
- Paving disliked by participants for aesthetic as well as environmental reasons
  - Felt to make streets more drab and grey, although top concern is flooding
- Participants felt the convenience benefit of this was so high that it was unlikely people would voluntarily stop doing it
  - Most felt that people do this in the full knowledge that this increases flooding risk, but that individual interest trumps any wider concern

*"We need gardens for absorption of water because otherwise you keep paving over everything and you end up with floods."*

TL Member, Homeowner

*"I think greenery has a huge impact. It contributes to how you feel when you walk down a road. If there are gardens you feel happier. Paving can be bleak."*

TL Member, Homeowner

*"I think if you need a parking space or you need paving for some reason I think you're thinking of your needs before the environment's needs."*

TL Member, Renter

*"I don't think people care about that because all they care about is being able to park."*

TL Member, Homeowner

# Low awareness of other benefits of gardens to London's environment

- Participants tended not to reference their garden when asked what actions they took to reduce their environmental impact on the city
  - Most common answers were not taking public transport and recycling
- Most participants said they had not thought of their garden as part of a wider network of GI in the city
  - Many said their garden was small and just 'one green patch in a sea of concrete' meaning it was difficult to think of it as having any environmental importance
- And did not have a strong sense of the contribution gardens could make
  - Assumption that impact of gardens is minimal
- The opposite is true of keen gardeners, for whom biodiversity and positive environmental impact is a key goal
  - Seen as synonymous with being a good gardener

*"There is a belief that nature needs taming...If you concrete over everything it's going to be cheaper, easier and cleaner and that's the mindset really."*

TL Member, Homeowner

*"My garden is so small in comparison to what I see when I walk out of the front door and there's just construction and traffic everywhere. It's hard to think what it could really contribute."*

TL Member, Renter

# Garden management strategies often prioritise convenience and aesthetics



Participants thought that **most people** think of their garden as an **extension of their house**



And therefore apply the same principles to its upkeep e.g. keep it **neat and tidy**



Results in management strategies which aim to get maximum **aesthetic effect for minimum effort**

*"It's a pride thing isn't it? People come in and you want them to like your garden. You don't want them saying 'oh it's overgrown' or 'oh I might get stung'."*  
TL Member, Homeowner



**Keen gardeners** are more likely to think of their garden as part of a **wider network of green infrastructure**



And therefore have **environmental impact** at the forefront of their mind



Results in management strategies which aim to **encourage biodiversity and wildlife**

*"For me it's all about wildlife. The whole of the front is bee friendly with pollinator friendly plants and I've got bird hedging in the back with lots of berries and a small pond."*  
TL Member, Homeowner

# Convenience/aesthetic approach often in tension with environmental concerns

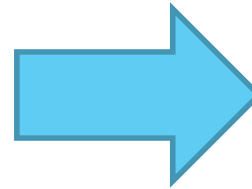
## Convenience and aesthetics management strategy

- Participants remarked they had seen an increase in use of plastic grass in gardens
  - One participant had put in plastic grass on the advice on his garden centre to minimise mud/ maintenance
- Many said they had neighbours who had chopped down trees
  - Main motivation seen to be keeping maintenance to a minimum/ avoiding expense of a tree surgeon
- Some said they had seen houses with new sheds built/ extended, and used as additional storage/ living space



*"I was getting fed up with the lawn because there was mud everywhere and it was getting such a pain to cut it. We got people who work in Blackheath and they are horticulturalists and they suggested it."*

TL Member, Homeowner



- Participants thought that most people are aware of the environmental downsides of these measures but choose to prioritise their self interest
- Participants thought that getting people to change their behaviour would require a total shift in mind set in terms of how people think about their garden

*"I think people think this is small you know. It doesn't really have an impact"*

TL Member, Homeowner

# Managing garden in an environmentally friendly way seen to require time & expertise

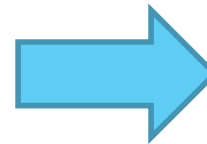
## Biodiversity and wildlife management strategy

- Keen gardeners were particularly interested in how to attract birds, bees and hedgehogs
  - Bird friendly hedging/ corridors for hedgehogs/ pollinator plants e.g. budleia
- Many said they had also planted trees in their gardens- often fruit trees
  - Planted because of pleasure of getting fruit (especially those with young children) but also to attract wildlife
- Composting and avoiding pesticides also commonly cited practices by keen gardeners



*"When I see bees coming it's just amazing because I think that's our little bit of helping to contribute to get the bees back."*

TL Member, Homeowner



- Going beyond a simple 'do no harm' approach to one where you are actively trying to boost wildlife/ biodiversity seen as difficult
  - Keen gardeners describe a process of trial and error to arrive at a point where they understand how to get results in their garden
  - Novice gardeners worry that they will spend time/ money only to see it all fail

*"I think I am held back because I don't want to spend say £100 on it and then have it all die."*

TL Member, Homeowner



# Amongst novice gardeners, there was a lot of nervousness around planting trees

- Planting a tree seen as a big step that will have long term consequences
  - Renters were unsure whether they would need permission from their landlord to do this
- Concern over how big the tree would grow and how to know what the right place to plant it is
  - Assumed this will have significant implications for surrounding properties
  - Questions around insurance costs
- Assumption that is expensive to do
  - Surprise that saplings could cost as little as £20
- Those who had done this tended not to share these concerns
  - Saw it as an easy thing to do but did warn that trees need to be planted in the right place/ require a lot of potentially expensive maintenance/ fruit trees can be messy

*"I'd want to know my landlord isn't going to get annoyed with me."*  
TL Member, Renter

*"I'd want to know that someone in the future is not going to be really pissed off that I had planted a tree."*  
TL Member, Renter

*"I thought they cost about £350."*  
TL Member, Renter

# Renters felt that they were quite restricted in what they could do in their garden

- Unlikely to be there a long time so not worth expending a lot of time/ effort/ money into changing things
  - Especially if the real benefit is only going to be felt further down the line
  - Uncertainty about how much freedom they had to change things in their garden
- Homeowners tended to agree that they only put a lot of care into their garden if they thought they were going to stay there for a good many years
  - Several noted that buy to let landlords often pave over gardens/ take out trees when they acquire properties to make them easier to manage

*"I feel like because I'm renting I can't sort of do anything. The garden is what it is. I wouldn't want to start trying to plant new things in a place I don't own."*

TL Member, Renter

*"It's quite a commitment isn't it? A few years until you see anything come of it. You might be gone by then."*

TL Member, Renter

# Overall participants were excited by the thought that their garden could be part of something bigger

- For many the potential for wildlife to thrive in the city was not something they had considered before
  - Many spoke with great enthusiasm of local honey production in London, and said they would never have thought it possible but were keen to be part of anything to encourage it
- There was a high degree of interest in getting more information/ advice on what to do with gardens
  - Nearly all participants said they tended to go to their local garden centre for advice, as often what they needed was an answer that was specific to their garden
- And a high degree of interest in any scheme that would support Londoners in planting trees
  - Particularly in the form of advice on what to plant and where to plant it

*"I bought a pot of honey once that had been grown locally in Croydon and I thought that was just amazing. I mean where do they come from? I would never have expected that in Croydon."*

TL Member, Renter

*"I might go down to talk to someone at the garden centre. I would want someone who I could talk to about my specific garden."*

TL Member, Renter

*"Yes a scheme where someone came to my house and said plant it there and you'll be fine."*

TL Member, Renter

## 5. GREENEST GLOBAL CITY

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# ‘Greenest global city’ overall well received, but seen as a huge challenge for London

- Participants like the ambition, but want the focus to be on ‘keeping what we’ve got’
  - Participants mostly happy with the current level of green infrastructure in the city, but want assurances that this will not be eroded/ will be maintained to high standards
  - Participants had little expectation that GI in the city would be increased
- All immediately saw a tension with house-building, and thought that inevitably one would come at the expense of the other
  - Scepticism over feasibility of delivering on both house-building and GI promises caused some to say that the Mayor is just ‘promising everything’
- Participants were split on what they wanted to see prioritised
  - The majority, and particularly homeowners and keen gardeners, wanted to see a focus on protection of GI even if this meant less house-building
  - A minority, particularly renters and those who do not frequently use parks, felt that the construction of *social housing* should be prioritised at all costs

*“The most important thing is to keep what we’ve got and then add to it if we can.”*

TL Member, Homeowner

*“He’s not going to be able to increase it. I can’t see how we’re going to create more space for parks versus say housing.”*

TL Member, Homeowner

*“He seems to want the best of both worlds doesn’t he? He wants to get the house building and have it all green.”*

TL Member, Homeowner

*“You get the housing built first- social housing that is- and then you worry about the green stuff.”*

TL Member, Homeowner

# Trees seen as the frontline of the fight for London's green infrastructure

- Many participants had the impression that tree cover in London is being reduced
  - Lots of anecdotal stories of trees being cut down in their neighbourhood, either by individuals, the council or developers
- Participants were sceptical of official reasons for cutting down trees
  - Perception that councils & individuals use excuses to cut down trees when actually they just want to save on maintenance costs
  - Perception that developers are given permission to cut down established trees on the basis that they plant new ones, but that the new ones often do not survive
- Across the LES research, tree planting was hugely popular, and emotions over the cutting down of trees ran high
  - Even those who favour house-building over GI were in favour of increased tree cover in London
  - There was real anxiety amongst some at the vulnerability of London's trees to the various pressures around them

*"I seem to see more trees being taken out, especially as there's a lot of developments in my area and they often take out trees and put paving over. So I think it's going the other way if anything."*

TL Member, Homeowner

*"Wandsworth council are facing so many cuts. They just killed 200 year old Chestnut trees on Tooting Common. They say they had some disease but I think it's about whether they have the money to maintain them. Money is forcing councils to cut down trees."*

TL Member, Homeowner

# ‘Greening’ of buildings seen as an exciting opportunity area

- Relatively high spontaneous awareness of green roofs/ green walls
  - Many participants had heard/ seen examples of this in other cities
- Seen as an innovative approach, which makes efficient use of city space
  - Main benefit seen to be impact on air pollution
  - Some also thought it might help with flooding
- Not something that London is currently seen to be capitalising on
  - Participants felt they had observed very few examples of this in London
  - The Barbican held up as an example of what the ideal looks like
- Seen as a real opportunity area for London, and one that could re-frame the debate around house-building vs GI
  - Participants really interested in the idea and wanted to know more about the potential benefits
  - Assumption that this would be expensive to do/maintain

*“I heard that in Paris a part of every roof has to be green. But in London if you look from the top of the Shard you can hardly see any green roofs at all.”*

TL Member, Homeowner

*“It might help mitigate flooding if it soaks up some of the storm water. And you get insects and birds. It might also have a moderate effect on air quality I guess.”*

TL Member, Renter

*“I think utilising that sort of roof space is a great idea. If it’s for solar panels or bee hives. It makes sense to use that space.”*

TL Member, Renter

# But 'green buildings' not seen to offer the same benefits as space on the ground

- Having a green roof/ green walls on a housing development seen as a very different proposition to having a pocket park
  - Not as accessible and so don't encourage the same sense of community as pocket parks
  - Do not offer the same mental/ physical health benefits as space on the ground
  - Do not offer the same freedom to children/ young people to be outside
- Participants accepted there needed to be some element of compromise, but did not feel green roofs/walls should wholesale replace provision of green space on the ground
  - Acceptance that something along these lines would need to be done to square the GI/ housing circle, but that there should still be some provision for outside space on the ground for housing development

*"If you're looking at it as a community asset then having something growing on the roof isn't much good. If you're looking at it from an air pollution point of view then that's different."*

TL Member, Homeowner

*"On housing estates parks bring a feeling that you're not just a person living in a city but a person living in a community. A place where people can go to celebrate, for teenagers to chill out. Not having these spaces means you live more in seclusion."*

TL Member, Renter

*"I think there should be something. A triangular area of grass, benches, a few trees. Just somewhere that people can sit outside on a sunny day if they want to and have a picnic."*

TL Member, Homeowner



# ‘Greening’ streets seen as a good idea in theory but scepticism as to feasibility

- Unanimous support for planting more trees, and strong support for measures which discourage car use
  - Across the LES research these were two areas which were consistently well supported- seen to be key to tackling air pollution
- Most were in favour of changing layout of residential streets to give more space to pedestrians/ cyclists
  - Felt that this would make streets more pleasant and help with air pollution
  - Some had concerns that cyclists would cause a danger to pedestrians
- All found it hard to visualise how this would work
  - Participants could not imagine how this would work in their neighbourhoods, where often streets were narrow and cars were parked on either side

*“Yes it makes sense. We need fewer cars in London. It’s the only way to get rid of this air pollution problem.”*

TL Member, Homeowner

*“I’m not a fan of cyclists and I don’t think cyclists and pedestrians should mix.”*

TL Member, Homeowner

*“Given what our roads are like and the pressure on them and the fact that cyclists are already riding on the pavements, I really don’t see this happening.”*

TL Member, Homeowner