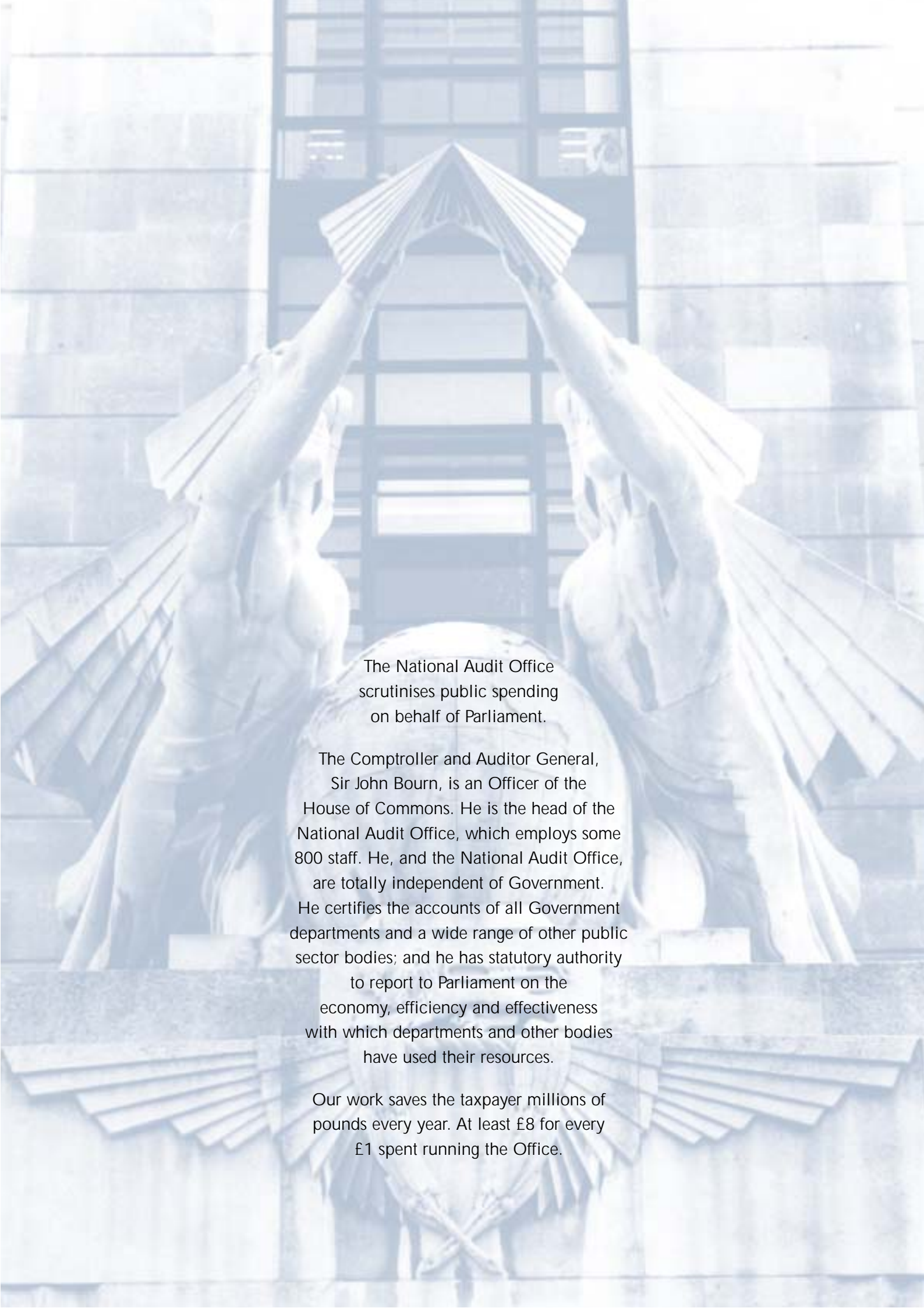


The Royal Parks

An Executive Agency

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL
HC 485 Session 2003-2004: 2 April 2004





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The Royal Parks

An Executive Agency



REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL
HC 485 Session 2003-2004: 2 April 2004

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This report has been prepared under Section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983 for presentation to the House of Commons in accordance with Section 9 of the Act.

John Bourn National Audit Office
Comptroller and Auditor General 1 April 2004

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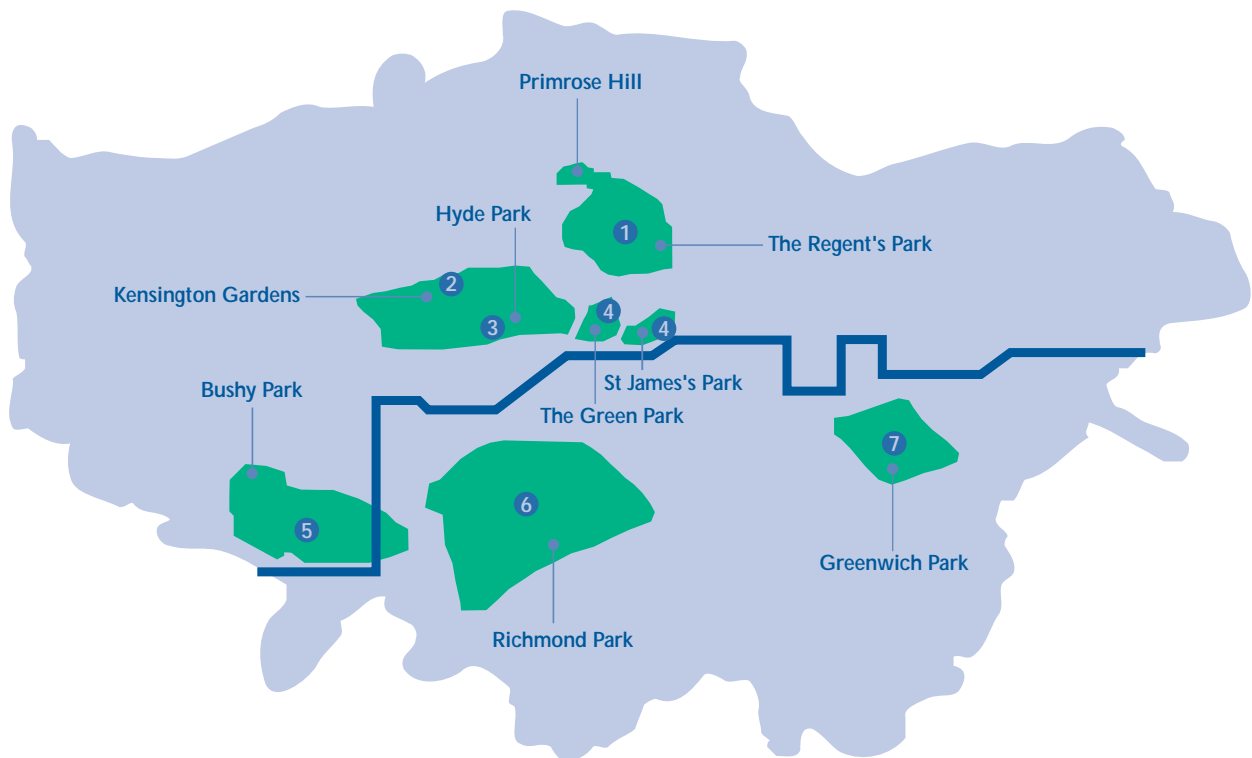
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1 The Royal Parks



| | |
|----------|---|
| 1 | The Regent's Park and Primrose Hill (338 acres and 54 acres respectively) |
| | The Regent's Park is mainly open parkland but it also contains a rose garden, with over 400 varieties of roses, and it is home to London Zoo and the Open Air Theatre. The Park has the largest grass area for sports in central London and this facility is currently being renovated and improved with lottery and partnership funding. To the north of the Park, Primrose Hill offers fine views of Westminster and the City. |
| 2 | Kensington Gardens (274 acres) |
| | The Gardens were formed in 1689 from land taken from Hyde Park. As well as natural features such as tree-lined avenues and the Flower Walk, the Gardens also offer much loved features such as the bronze statue of Peter Pan, the Albert Memorial and the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Playground. |
| 3 | Hyde Park (346 acres) |
| | Hyde Park is the focal point for public events of all sizes, from open air concerts to political assemblies or exhibitions. The Park is popular with joggers, cyclists, roller-bladers and horse riders and also contains the Serpentine, used for boating and swimming. The project to build the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fountain in the Park is currently underway. |
| 4 | The Green Park and St James's Park (47 acres and 67 acres respectively) |
| | These Parks, which contain The Mall, provide the backdrop for British ceremonial life. Popular with tourists and office workers, the Parks provide tree-lined avenues, flower displays and grasslands in the centre of London. |
| 5 | Bushy Park (1,112 acres) |
| | Bushy Park is a centre for wildlife, sport and education. The Park also has an important place in history, housing General Eisenhower's Headquarters during the planning and execution of the D-Day landings. The Park has recently started on a major restoration project with lottery funding. |
| 6 | Richmond Park (2,470 acres) |
| | This is the largest of the Parks and has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Nature Reserve. Features of this Park include the herds of free-roaming fallow and red deer, the woodland gardens of the Isabella Plantation, the protected view from King Henry's Mound to St Paul's Cathedral 10 miles away and Holly Lodge, which provides educational facilities for those with special needs. |
| 7 | Greenwich Park (180 acres) |
| | Greenwich Park is the oldest Royal Park, dating from the fifteenth century. The Park is part of the Greenwich World Heritage Site, with the Royal Observatory located at its centre. Each year, thousands of runners set off on the London Marathon from the Park. |

executive summary

- 1 The eight Royal Parks covered in this report are major historical and cultural resources, which cover some 5,000 acres and attract millions of visitors each year. The Parks are: St James's Park, The Green Park, Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens and The Regent's Park (with Primrose Hill) in Central London; Greenwich Park to the East; and Richmond Park and Bushy Park to the West. **Figure 1** shows the locations and the sizes of the Parks and highlights some of their individual features.
- 2 The Parks are managed by an organisation called The Royal Parks (the Agency), which is an executive agency of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (the Department)¹. The Agency is accountable to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport who sets the organisation's policy and key performance targets and determines its level of resources each year. Part 5 of this report discusses the way the Agency is organised, and its key targets.
- 3 In 2002-03, the Agency's grant from the Department was £23.7 million and its self-generated income amounted to £6.1 million, making a total income that year of £29.8 million. The average number of Parks staff employed by the Agency in 2002-03 was 87 together with 151 officers and administrative staff of the Royal Parks Constabulary.

The Agency's responsibilities are wide-ranging

The Agency is responsible for:

- the horticulture and landscaping of over 5,000 acres that comprise the eight Parks including 21 lakes and ponds and the 13 miles of the Longford River;
- maintaining 280 buildings (22 of which are listed), statues and memorials, which give an insight into the rich diversity of London's architecture, history and heritage;
- maintaining over 100 miles of roads and paths and 49 miles of boundary walls and fencing in the Parks;
- playing host to an average of 70 national or State ceremonies and commemorative events each year;
- accommodating a number of 'assemblies', rallies and marches each year, for example in 2002, the Parks hosted the Countryside Alliance assembly which over 200,000 joined and approximately one million people marched as part of the Stop the War campaign;
- staging around 12 major events each year and hosting national sporting events, for example the London Marathon.

¹ The Agency is responsible for a number of other areas, including Brompton Cemetery (Grade II listed), Victoria Tower Gardens and Grosvenor Square Gardens, and maintaining the gardens of Numbers 10, 11 and 12 Downing Street, Canning Green, St Margaret's Church Green, Poets' Green and the Longford River (the part within Hampton Court Palace Home Park comes under the management of Historic Royal Palaces).

- 4 This report looks at how the Agency is managing and developing the Parks, and its resources, to meet the needs of current and future users. In particular, we considered what the Agency is doing to:
- achieve a wider range of users and uses (Part 2);
 - manage its physical resources effectively (Part 3);
 - increase its own income (Part 4);
 - strengthen its management capacity (Part 5).

Our main findings

- 5 **On achieving a wider range of users and uses**
- The Agency has acknowledged the need to improve its information on users and potential users and to establish a more reliable basis for the visitor numbers figure (60 million) used in its annual report (paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3).
 - The current annual visitor survey lacks data on what motivates people to visit the Parks and the value they attach to them. This information would help the Agency to meet users' needs and plan for the future. The results of our own qualitative survey provide evidence for the view that users attach considerable value and importance to the Parks, and see them as vital to the well-being of London (paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5).
 - The Agency is developing a number of strategies aimed at encouraging greater access to the Parks but the strategies lack action plans or quantifiable targets for individual Parks, and the Agency's marketing material does not make the most of the strong selling points of the Parks (paragraphs 2.7 to 2.9).
 - The Agency is building on successful educational projects in some of the Parks and developing a more coherent programme for education, although the capacity of the Agency to deliver such a programme needs addressing along with the need for more information about the people participating in educational events in the Parks (paragraphs 2.10 and 2.11).
 - There are good examples of initiatives helping people with special needs in certain Parks, for example the partnership with the Holly Lodge Centre, an educational charity focussing on people with disabilities, based in Richmond Park. In seeking to make all the Parks more disability-friendly, the Agency could also learn from practice elsewhere (paragraphs 2.12 to 2.15).
 - The Agency is stepping up its efforts to engage the wider community in its work to encourage a wider sense of ownership in the Parks and as a way of minimising the tensions between the different uses of the Parks, for example, large scale entertainment on the one hand and quiet reflection on the other (paragraphs 2.16 to 2.18).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Agency should consult with under-represented groups, using methods such as consultation groups, to identify the main obstacles to more frequent use of the Parks.

The Agency should extend its annual visitor survey to generate information on visitors' attitudes to the Parks.

Without a reliable method of estimating visitor numbers the Agency should not include such numbers in its annual report to Parliament.

The Agency should strengthen its strategies for encouraging greater access to the Parks by setting action plans with targets for individual Parks and specifying systems for review and evaluation, and updating its marketing and public relations material.

The Agency should compile a comprehensive database on the people participating in educational events in the Parks, including information on their age, ethnicity and disabilities, and extend to all the Parks the work being done in some of the Parks to develop partnerships with key education stakeholders.

The Agency should consider working with The Sensory Trust² to make the Parks more accessible to disabled users, and undertake disability audits.



6 On managing the Agency's physical resources effectively

- The Parks are highly regarded for their horticultural standards and with few exceptions continue to meet their annual performance targets for soft landscape presentation, although in the last three years the Parks have not quite achieved their performance targets for overall quality and cleanliness. The process of assessing horticultural, quality and cleanliness standards has remained the same for almost a decade (paragraphs 3.2, 3.4 and 3.5).
- The Agency is taking action to assess its maintenance priorities and address its estimated £110 million backlog of buildings maintenance, but has yet to set clear priorities for action. Significant progress in reducing the backlog will depend on the Agency's ability to generate additional income (paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9).
- The Agency has made little progress in forming a 'benchmarking club' with national or international partners as a way of improving the physical environment of the Parks (paragraph 3.11).
- The Agency is reviewing its highly regarded horticultural traineeship scheme, which is currently operating below capacity (paragraph 3.14).

² The Sensory Trust is a national charity working in the field of social inclusion and accessible and inclusive environmental design. This work ranges from physical site design through to interpretation and policy issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS



The Agency should review its processes for assessing horticultural, quality and cleanliness standards in the Parks to minimise the risk of the targets no longer being sufficiently stretching. The Agency's performance should be subject to external comparisons.

The Agency should become part of a network of international parks, such as the International Park Strategic Partners Group³, to share best practice on all aspects of park management.

The Agency should set targets for increased take-up of the horticultural traineeship scheme.

7 On increasing the Agency's own income

- The Agency generates income to supplement its annual grant from the Department and has increased the amount raised from £4 million in 1999-2000 to £6.1 million in 2002-03, a rise of 53 per cent (paragraph 4.2).
- With the aim of achieving a step change in its self-generated income, the Agency has established an independent charity, The Royal Parks Foundation, which aims to raise an additional £5 million in 2004 (paragraph 4.4).
- Commercial events are a significant source of income for the Agency but the risks of commercial failure need to be better managed. The Agency is also conscious of the need to reduce the wear and tear caused by such events on the Parks and Hyde Park in particular (paragraphs 4.7 and 4.8).
- The Agency needs a more reliable basis for ensuring that it recovers its costs and makes a profit (paragraph 4.9).

RECOMMENDATIONS



To maximise its self-generated income, the Agency, working closely with The Royal Parks Foundation, should explore opportunities to learn from other parks.

In hosting commercial events, the Agency should take a more considered approach to the risks involved particularly where its expenditure commitments are dependent on the income from the events and also where the income is not received in advance.

The Agency should improve the information it holds about the cost and profitability of income generating activities so that it can develop a more reliable basis for assessing whether events are covering all the Agency's costs and maximising the potential profits.

³ The International Park Strategic Partners Group is chaired by Sydney's Centennial Parklands and consists of 12 international partners, who come together periodically to share best practice in park management. As of May 2004, this group will be known as Parks Forum.

8 On strengthening the Agency's management capacity

- A new Senior Management Team has improved the Agency's corporate management and decision making and is benefiting from expert financial and commercial advice from the re-launched Royal Parks Advisory Board (paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4).
- The Royal Parks Foundation has been established with the aim of generating more financial and public support for the Parks (paragraph 5.5).
- The Agency is introducing a new performance information system, has aligned its objectives with those of the Department and has set more measurable targets (paragraph 5.6).
- The Agency's new targets tend to be inward-looking both in their focus on internal management processes and because they are not subject to external challenge, for example, through benchmarking against other parks. And some targets are not cascaded effectively to the individual Parks (paragraph 5.7).
- The Agency is seeking ways of quantifying the economic contribution that the Parks make to London and the nation. This will be a complex task but we have identified research by other organisations which could help the Agency in its work (Appendix 3). In particular, CABE Space⁴ has commissioned research into this area (paragraph 5.7).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Agency should consider, as a priority, participating in the Green Flag Award Scheme. This would provide an opportunity to benchmark the Parks against a widely applied standard and receive an objective assessment of what the Parks offer visitors. This recommendation can be read across to the other recommendations above regarding benchmarking. The cost of participating in the Scheme would be approximately £3,400, although preparing for the assessment process would require management time and effort.

With reference to the publication 'Setting Key Targets for Executive Agencies: A Guide'⁵, the Agency should now work with the Department to set targets that are focussed on outcomes and these targets should be cascaded within the Agency where appropriate.

In seeking to quantify the economic contribution that the Parks make to London and the nation, the Agency should learn from research by other park organisations and develop links with CABE Space.



⁴ CABE Space is the national organisation that champions better parks and public spaces. It is a unit within CABE, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, and was launched in May 2003 with funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and support from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

⁵ 'Setting Key Targets for Executive Agencies: A Guide' is a joint publication by HM Treasury, the Cabinet Office and the National Audit Office produced in November 2003.



Part 1

Introduction

The Parks are one of Britain's major cultural amenities

1.1 The eight Royal Parks covered by this report (**Figure 2**) are an historical resource which provide opportunities for recreation and enjoyment for every nationality and age group, for tourists and locals alike. People use the Parks for many diverse reasons. Their activities range from the energetic (such as jogging, cycling, roller-blading, horse riding, swimming and other sports), through to attending public events such as exhibitions and concerts, to quiet relaxation and watching wildlife. The Agency provides a programme of activities, such as children's events, guided walks and musical events, most of which are free of charge.

2 The eight Royal Parks covered by this report

The eight Royal Parks covered by this report are:

- St James's Park, The Green Park, Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens and The Regent's Park (with Primrose Hill) in Central London;
- Greenwich Park to the East;
- Richmond Park and Bushy Park to the West.

1.2 In the eighteenth century the statesman, William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, described the Royal Parks as "the lungs of London", and in July 2003, in the context of the Mayor of London's spatial development plan, the Royal Parks were described as "cherished places", which should be given equal recognition as world class heritage sites alongside official World Heritage Sites⁶. Of the eight Royal Parks covered by this report, six are included at Grade I in the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest with The Green Park and Primrose Hill included at Grade II. Richmond Park is also designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Nature Reserve.

1.3 These Parks encompass over 5,000 acres of land and attract millions of visitors each year. They were enclosed by various monarchs during the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, primarily for hunting or as parkland gardens, and form part of the Hereditary Lands owned by the Sovereign in right of the Crown. In 1851 (by virtue of the Crown Lands Act 1851) the Sovereign entrusted to the Government the Royal Parks following a decision that they were no longer required for the use of the Royal Household.

1.4 The Parks are home to 280 buildings, statues and memorials, maintained at the Agency's cost, which give an insight into the rich diversity of London's architecture, history and heritage. They host national and State ceremonials and individual Parks border or provide the setting for significant national buildings, including Buckingham Palace, Kensington Palace, St James's Palace, the Palace of Westminster, Horse Guards Parade and the Whitehall complex of Government offices, and the Royal Observatory at Greenwich.

The Parks are managed by an executive agency of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport

1.5 The Royal Parks Agency (now known as The Royal Parks), which manages the Parks⁷, was established in April 1993 and is an executive agency of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Agency is accountable to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport who sets the organisation's policy and key performance targets and determines its level of resources each year. The Agency's Chief Executive is appointed by the Secretary of State, and is the Agency's Accounting Officer.

⁶ The Expert Panel Report on the Draft London Plan (July 2003). Greenwich Park already benefits from Greenwich's world heritage status.

⁷ The Agency is responsible for a number of other areas, including Brompton Cemetery (Grade II listed), Victoria Tower Gardens and Grosvenor Square Gardens, and maintaining the gardens of Numbers 10, 11 and 12 Downing Street, Canning Green, St Margaret's Church Green, Poets' Green and the Longford River (the part within Hampton Court Palace Home Park comes under the management of Historic Royal Palaces).

1.6 In May 2001, a fundamental review of the Agency commissioned by the Department recommended that the Agency should become a non-departmental public body guided by a Board of expert trustees. The change in status would have provided the Agency with the freedom to become a charity, making it more attractive to sponsors and benefactors and improving its ability to gain access to significant levels of private finance. The Agency planned to use these funds to revise and improve facilities and, in so doing, increase the diversity of park activities and users. Plans to establish the Agency as a non-departmental public body have not been implemented to date because it would lose its entitlement to reclaim VAT of approximately £3 million a year. In May 2003, a new body called The Royal Parks Foundation was established as a charity with the aim of promoting more financial and public support for the Agency (paragraph 5.5).

1.7 In 2002-03, the Agency's income totalled £29.8 million, including funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport of £23.7 million. The Agency generated £6.1 million itself, for example from concessions, licence agreements, events and donations. The average number of Parks staff employed by the Agency in 2002-03 was 87 together with 151 officers and administrative staff of the Royal Parks Constabulary. Work is in hand to merge the Constabulary with the Metropolitan Police Service. The work to maintain the Parks, as well as the provision of many services to the public, is currently undertaken through a range of contracts managed by Parks staff. The Agency's main contractors employ nearly 800 people during the summer, mostly to carry out grounds and works maintenance and in the catering outlets.



Parks and green spaces are on the Government's agenda

- 1.8 The Government sees good parks and green spaces as important for the delivery of a wide range of its priorities, including regeneration, renewal and housing programmes, supporting healthy living, and fostering neighbourhood pride and community cohesion. Interest in parks and green spaces was raised at a national level by the work of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce, established in January 2001 by the then Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, to take forward the development of proposals for improving the quality of urban parks and green spaces⁸.
- 1.9 The Government's response to the Taskforce's report was set out in 'Living Places - Cleaner, Safer, Greener', published in October 2002. In May 2003, CABA Space⁹ was established to champion the importance of urban public space, particularly green spaces, in improving quality of life. Working with partners that include Groundwork, GreenSpace, the Audit Commission and the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management, CABA Space is now responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Green Flag Award Scheme (paragraph 3.10 and Figure 10) and in addition is developing a new quality indicator for parks and green spaces. Representatives of CABA Space and GreenSpace (a national not-for-profit organisation established in 1999) were on the panel of experts who advised us as we did our work.

- 1.10 The Agency is contributing to this wider agenda as a founder partner in the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum. The Forum, consisting of a range of government and non-governmental stakeholders, was set up in 2001 and is the regional voice for London's green spaces.

This report looks at how the Agency is managing and developing its resources to meet the needs of current and future users

- 1.11 As stated in its latest corporate plan, the Agency's purpose is "to balance our responsibility to *protect, conserve and enhance* the unique landscapes, environments, heritage and vistas of the eight Royal Parks... with active and creative policies to *encourage wider access* to them and to increase opportunities for enjoyment, delight, sanctuary, information, education, creativity and healthy recreation for *everyone, now and in the future*". This report looks at how the Agency is managing and developing its resources to meet the needs of current and future users. In particular, we considered what the Agency is doing to:

- achieve a wider range of users and uses (Part 2);
- manage its physical resources effectively (Part 3);
- increase its own income (Part 4);
- strengthen its management capacity (Part 5).

The methods we used, and a list of the experts we consulted, are set out at [Appendix 1](#).

⁸ A need identified in the Urban White Paper, November 2000. The Taskforce's final report, 'Green Spaces, Better Places' was published in May 2002.

⁹ CABA Space is the national organisation that champions better parks and public spaces. It is a unit within CABA, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, and was launched in May 2003 with funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and support from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.



Reasons for visiting

"I wanted to get away from my office and the noise and everything." (*St James's Park*)

"For the beauty and serenity, particularly first thing in the morning and last thing at night. I treat it as my private garden." (*Hyde Park*)

"The last week I have run in it every morning, not run, I shall be modest, a power walk." (*Richmond Park*)

Feelings provoked by the Parks

"It takes me away from the urban feel of London basically. I don't feel like I'm in the city, it's so peaceful." (*Richmond Park*)

"The people that work throughout the day need somewhere to relax, or just tourists need somewhere to relax where they can just chill out and just take in the view." (*Hyde Park*)

"It's the sort of place where you can normally sit in without feeling that people are going to climb over you all the time. It's not a great, big, flat space which people use exclusively for playing football in. There is terrific visual variety in it." (*St James's Park*)



Importance of the Parks

"They're absolutely essential for Londoners and for visitors to London like myself. I think people would be far less happy unless they had such a park to visit." (*Richmond Park*)

"London is a big city and very crowded and places like this park which is very wide, and you can enjoy here, it is very important. Otherwise you would feel suffocated." (*The Regent's Park*)

"I think (if the Parks did not exist) the city would lose one of its major tourist attractions." (*Bushy Park*)

"I work in the city and I think probably if we didn't have this ability, as a family to come out, I would probably move out, I probably wouldn't work in it." (*Richmond Park*)

Source: MORI's qualitative survey of users' views about the Parks conducted for the National Audit Office

Part 2

Work is being done at the Parks to achieve a wider range of users and uses

2.1 This part of the report looks at what is being done by the Agency to acquire a better understanding of the Parks' users and potential users, attract more people from priority groups such as the young, provide education opportunities, and manage the tensions that exist between different uses and users of the Parks.

The Agency needs better information about users and non-users

2.2 The Agency has acknowledged that to plan for the future it needs more information about who its users are, what users and potential users want from the Parks, and, at a basic level, a more precise idea of how many people use the Parks currently.

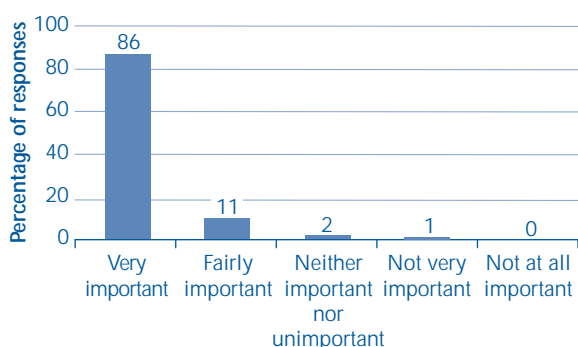
2.3 The most recent research into visitor numbers, commissioned from The University of North London (now London Metropolitan University) in 1994, put the figure for the total number of visits to the Parks at around 29 million a year. The Agency is considering ways of assessing visitor numbers regularly, but it will need to judge whether the additional information would provide sufficient management gain to justify the cost of collection. Meanwhile the Agency should be cautious about including figures for visitor numbers in its annual report to Parliament. While the latest annual report states that there are a total of 60 million visitors, we were unable to identify evidence-based calculations to support the figure.

2.4 Satisfaction surveys of Park users are carried out regularly by independent consultants, but the Agency recognises that to meet users' needs and plan for the future it needs a better understanding of what motivates people to visit the Parks and the value they attach to the Parks. Our consultants, MORI, suggested that questions on people's attitudes to the Parks could be built into future visitor satisfaction surveys, and to gain a sense of what people think conducted in depth interviews with a small number of users in each of the Parks. A selection of quotes from the interviews is shown opposite. While this provided a limited snapshot of park usage, the results suggest that the users interviewed attach considerable value to the Parks as a place of peace and tranquillity, see them as a major attraction for tourists to London, and compare them favourably with other Parks. Some residents amongst those interviewed said they would consider moving out of London if the Parks were not there.

2.5 The high value that the visitors interviewed place on the Parks is indicated by the fact that 86 per cent of the people questioned thought that it is very important that London has Royal Parks which can be used by Londoners and visitors (Figure 3). And the high regard in which the quality of the Parks are held is shown by the fact that 55 per cent of the people surveyed thought that the Park in which they were questioned was better than any other park that they had visited in the last 12 months (Figure 4).

2.6 The Agency recognises the need to research the reasons for infrequent and non-use of the Parks and intends to do so in 2004-05. Surveys and consultation meetings can be valuable tools in this kind of work. Milton Keynes Park Trust, for example, has held consultation meetings with under-represented groups such as disabled people, ethnic minority groups and people aged over-65 to identify the main obstacles to more frequent use. Centennial Parklands in Sydney, Australia, also uses consultation meetings, along with city-wide telephone surveys.

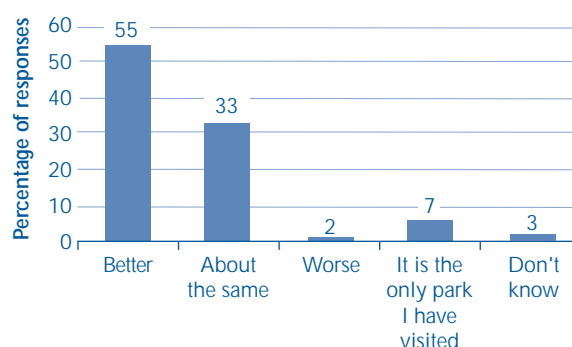
3 Responses to the MORI survey question: "How important to you is it that London has Royal Parks which can be used by Londoners and visitors?"



NOTE

This graph is based on responses from MORI's qualitative survey, which may not statistically represent users' views about the Royal Parks.

4 Responses to the MORI survey question: "How does this Park compare with other parks you have visited in the past 12 months?"



NOTE

This graph is based on responses from MORI's qualitative survey, which may not statistically represent users' views about the Royal Parks.

The Agency is broadening the ways in which the Parks are used

2.7 One of the Agency's main objectives is to encourage greater access to the Parks, particularly by children and young people. People from disadvantaged communities (primarily from deprived wards in the London Boroughs neighbouring the Parks) and those people under-represented amongst users of the Parks (for example ethnic minority groups, disabled people and disaffected young people) are also being targeted. During 2002-03 the Agency began to develop more inclusive strategies for educational activities, community engagement, volunteering, public events, sport and marketing. For example, as part of its first events strategy, the Agency is developing its cultural and entertainment programme to be more representative of the wider community.

2.8 The work being done to develop strategies in these and other key areas is symptomatic of the efforts being made to put in place more robust business management structures and processes (paragraphs 5.3 and 5.6). At present though, the strategies are broadly aspirational, stating what the Agency would like to achieve in the next five years given adequate resources. As they are developed the strategies could be strengthened by:

- making clear statements of what should be achievable within existing resources, and what the priorities should be within those resources as well as setting out longer term goals;
- setting out action plans, with target dates for delivery (currently there are aims in several of the strategies to set quarterly targets but no actual quantifiable targets have as yet been set);
- specifying systems for review and evaluation;

- ensuring that the strategies are not developed in relative isolation by individual senior managers in the Agency but are collectively exhaustive and mutually compatible across the organisation (for example, the Head of Education has produced three strategies covering education, volunteering and community engagement in Bushy Park, with much overlap and duplication between them but little integration with other strategies such as that for events).

2.9 The Parks have many strong selling points such as the varied landscape, wildlife, open space and opportunities for formal and informal recreation. The Agency's marketing strategy identifies the need to significantly improve its marketing and public relations material. This material, including pamphlets, news updates, signage, the website and the visitor facilities was either uninformative or outdated and not very accessible. For example, in most cases the reception areas of Park offices attempt to provide some of the services of visitor centres but are only open from Monday to Friday during office hours and are not in accessible locations, being often situated far from the entrances or exits of the Parks. An example of good practice in this area can be seen in Central Park, New York (**case study 1**).

CASE STUDY 1:

VISITOR CENTRES PROVIDED BY THE CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY, NEW YORK

The Central Park Conservancy operates three visitor centres which are open six days a week (Tuesday to Sunday) from 10 am to 5 pm. The centres are staffed by full and part time paid staff and also volunteers. As well as providing general information about Central Park, such as maps or directions to famous landmarks, each centre offers something different for its visitors, including:

- Educational, environmental and historical exhibits about the park
- Binoculars for visitors who wish to bird watch
- A 'catch and release' fishing programme
- A gift shop
- Weekend workshops and after-school activities
- Guided walking tours of the park

Source: Central Park Conservancy, New York

The Agency is seeking a more coherent programme of educational activities, but its capacity to deliver such a programme needs to be addressed

2.10 All the Parks provide some form of educational activity ranging from occasional guided walks to structured programmes such as those at Bushy Park and Richmond Park. Volunteers at the Stockyard Environmental Centre at Bushy Park run an educational programme attended by an estimated 1,500 primary school children a year. The Holly Lodge Centre, working in partnership with the Agency, has run an educational centre in Richmond Park since 1994, and has held charitable status for the last eight years. And, in partnership with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Agency is currently involved in an outreach education programme entitled 'Wildlife for All' (Figure 5).

2.11 To develop its educational activity, in May 2002 the Agency appointed its first Head of Education. As a result an education strategy has been drawn up and an education programme to cover all the Parks is being developed. At present though, a number of factors are standing in the way of a fully effective and co-ordinated programme.

- Although the Agency has appointed a further two new staff members with responsibility specifically for education, more generally the Agency needs to assess the capacity of its staff to deliver educational programmes. Several of the Park managers tend to see educational programmes as ancillary to their main responsibility of maintaining the Parks.

5 Wildlife for All project

In April 2002, the Agency, in partnership with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, secured a grant of £323,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to fund a three year environmental education programme. The project started in the winter of 2002. It is based in the Parks and, working closely with others, such as the Black Environment Network and the Peabody Housing Trust, it aims to make the wildlife within the Parks relevant, interesting and inspiring to everyone, regardless of circumstance.

The project has three key elements:

- An ongoing activity programme that has something for everyone, including lunchtime strolls, family fun days and art and crafts.
- A volunteer programme with a wide range of opportunities.
- A schools programme offering activities and field studies free of charge to local schools which, in the first year of the project, centred on The Regent's Park, Bushy Park and Greenwich Park.

The project's achievements to date include:

- Establishing feeding stations and watch points in six of the Parks.
- Organising the Parks' contribution to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' annual Big Garden Bird Watch in January 2003 and London Heron Weekend in April 2003.
- Setting up a mobile information unit to promote the project.
- Compiling a database of potential volunteers.

Source: Wildlife for All progress reports

- Most of the education-related events in the Parks are currently undertaken by unpaid volunteers, and the Agency lacks comprehensive information about the age and ethnicity of the people participating, and whether it is reaching those with disabilities.
- The Agency recognises that the Parks have a low profile as an education provider. There is a lack of information for the public about the educational provision available in the Parks, there is scope to make better use of the Agency's website, and the current system of mail shots is targeted principally at primary schools in only two Boroughs, Westminster and Camden.
- While the programmes at Bushy and Richmond Parks (paragraph 2.10) are examples of success through working in partnership with others, there is no clear plan for developing partnerships with other key education stakeholders such as the local education authorities. Relationships with neighbouring local authorities and schools are managed on an individual Park basis, and there is no overarching planning and co-ordination of this activity.

There are initiatives aimed at those with special needs, and opportunities to learn from practice elsewhere

- 2.12 One of the Agency's priorities is to make the Parks more accessible for people with disabilities or other special needs, and there are many examples of initiatives to achieve this end (Figure 6).

6 Initiatives in the Parks aimed at helping people with disabilities and special needs

- The Holly Lodge Centre, a charity which works in partnership with the Agency, has a specific focus on people with special needs. More than 1,800 people used the Centre in 2001-02, and two thirds of these had special needs or were from disadvantaged groups.
- With financial support from the European Year of Disabled People and in partnership with the Agency and Mencap, the Holly Lodge Centre is currently leading a 'countryside in the city' project. The education project aims to improve access to the natural environment for people with a variety of disabilities. A user forum has been established to help tailor the project to individual needs.
- The Liberty Drive programme in Hyde Park, staffed by volunteers, allows elderly and disabled people to be taken round the Park in one of four electric buggies. Over 12,000 people benefited from the scheme in 2002.
- The companion cycling scheme in Bushy Park is a charity run entirely by volunteers, which allows people with special needs to cycle on specially adapted bicycles around the Park.

- 2.13 There are however areas of concern:

- Richmond Park is difficult to access by public transport. The Agency is considering the prospect of providing suitable transport for those with special needs or no transport of their own;
- major policies and procedures in the administration of volunteer programmes are not yet in place;
- the Agency has yet to complete disability audits of the Parks.

- 2.14 The Agency could gain an objective assessment on how welcoming and inclusive the Parks are by applying for Green Flag status (paragraph 3.10 and Figure 10). It could also look at the work being done by other park authorities to enhance physical and social access. The Milton Keynes Park Trust, for example, is recognised by the Sensory Trust¹⁰ as an exemplar of good practice in this area in that their parks are generally disability-friendly, and the Milton Keynes Park Trust consults regularly with disabled user groups and hosts many inclusive activities from accessible bird hides to water sports. The Sensory Trust publication 'Making Connections - A Guide to Accessible Green Space' identifies examples of good practice from around the country and explores the views and experience of disabled and older people and green space managers.

- 2.15 Internationally, the sensory garden in Oizumi Ryokuchi Park in Osaka, Japan, provides an excellent example of how the recreational and sensory experiences can be enhanced for all visitors to the park (case study 2).

There are tensions between the different uses and users of the Parks

- 2.16 People use the Parks for many diverse reasons (paragraph 1.1) and the Agency aims to balance these various uses so that "no one's enjoyment of the Parks is at the unacceptable expense of others". There have, however, long been tensions between the different uses and users of the Parks, with problems highlighted by the Jenkins Review¹¹ in the early 1990s. Possibly the most obvious tension is between efforts to bring in more people and generate income through, for example, hosting large-scale public events while trying to minimise the damage to the fabric and character of the Parks (paragraph 4.8). This was also a concern to the Park managers and the Chair of all the Friends of The Royal Parks groups.

¹⁰ The Sensory Trust is a national charity working in the field of social inclusion and accessible and inclusive environmental design. This work ranges from physical site design through to interpretation and policy issues.

¹¹ The Royal Parks Review Group, under the Chairmanship of Dame Jennifer Jenkins, was appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment in 1991, initially to review Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. The review was subsequently extended to cover all the Royal Parks. The final report was published in 1996.

CASE STUDY 2:

OIZUMI RYOKUCHI PARK, OSAKA, JAPAN



The sensory garden in Oizumi Ryokuchi Park evolved from concepts of integration and universal design and was completed in 1997. It was thoroughly user tested before implementation. As many as 500 people with a range of abilities were consulted on the features to be included in the park. The garden invites exploration through the senses of sight, sound, smell, and touch with features such as an integrated way-finding system, raised plant beds and walks that take visitors into seating areas surrounded by water. A variety of tactile displays and audio information, as well as opportunities to touch and smell flowers and to feel the water and sculptures, enrich everyone's experience in the garden.

Source: The Sensory Trust

2.17 The Agency has, therefore, been stepping up its efforts to involve a more diverse range of people from the wider community in the decisions about the Parks, focussing initially on people living in boroughs bordering the Parks and those within easy travelling distance, and has undertaken consultations with local stakeholders as part of its lottery funded flagship projects in Bushy Park and The Regent's Park.

- In Bushy Park a local stakeholder forum, made up of a cross-section of local representatives including current non-users of the Park, will feed into the steering group for the Park re-development project and will be the main method for involving the community in decisions.
- In The Regent's Park a community sports officer has been recruited through The Regent's Park sports project to ensure community involvement in sports in the Park. Also as part of the project, extensive consultations were undertaken with the local community, schools and interest groups to gain their views on the plans and to find out what are the current barriers to access.

2.18 A five year Community Engagement strategy has been prepared for Bushy Park, with a view to the approach being extended to all the Parks in the future. The strategy identifies the need for the Agency to increase the involvement and engagement of the community in more of its work, as a way of generating a wider sense of ownership in the Parks and helping to minimise the tensions. At present though the strategy sets out broad and non-prioritised aims, and needs to be developed further to address the capacity of the Agency and external partners, particularly voluntary groups, to be able to deliver the aims.



Part 3

Horticultural standards in the Parks are high, but more needs to be done to address a backlog of building maintenance

3.1 This part of the report considers how well the Parks are maintained, in terms of both the 'soft fabric' (such as grass, trees, and flowers) and the 'hard fabric', including the many buildings and roads in the Parks.

The Parks are highly regarded for their horticultural standards

3.2 From our discussions with a range of leading figures in parks management, it is clear that horticultural management in the Parks is widely viewed as being of a high standard. And with few exceptions, the Agency has met or exceeded its annual targets (which are agreed with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) for soft landscape presentation, as judged by an independent horticultural expert. The presentation of the soft landscape was also viewed positively among many visitors interviewed by MORI (Figure 7).

3.3 In 2002, the Agency achieved for the first time the International Standards Organisation's certifiable standard (ISO 14001) status for environmental management. Through the achievement of targets, including the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions and the recycling of waste streams, the Agency is keen to consolidate its commitment to environmentally sustainable practice in future years.

7 Visitors' views on horticultural standards in the Parks

"The main reason we are coming to the Park is to enjoy the environment. We choose the Park, which has lovely flowers." (The Regent's Park)

In response to a question on the difference, if any, the Royal status of the Parks make:

"Maybe it wouldn't be so well kept, maybe if it weren't a Royal Park it might not be so nice." (St James's Park)

When asked to compare the Royal Parks with other parks:

"I don't know if it's because of the wildlife but you feel it is better looked after, lovely parkland." (Richmond Park)

"It's better definitely. It's got more variety. I'm talking about plants, trees, water and cafés. It caters for most and a nice bandstand and various memorials. Variety I suppose." (Hyde Park)

Source: MORI's qualitative survey of users' views of the Parks conducted for the National Audit Office

There are, however, some areas of concern

3.4 MORI did, however, identify some concern about what visitors perceived to be increased litter and deterioration in the quality of the grassed areas, particularly in the Central London Parks. This is a view echoed by the Chair of the Friends of the Royal Parks groups, and is consistent with the results of the Agency's user satisfaction surveys. Although user satisfaction with the overall quality and cleanliness of the Parks has been consistently high (all the Parks were rated at 80 per cent or more in 2002-03), in the last three years the Parks have not quite achieved the targets set by the Department (Figures 8 and 9).

The assessment processes for horticultural, quality and cleanliness standards could be strengthened

3.5 The same process has been used to assess horticultural standards in the Parks since the Agency was established in 1993, and the process is closed in that it does not involve external comparisons. Several of the Agency's Park managers we spoke to confirmed that they would welcome more rigorous assessment processes.

3.6 There is also scope for more searching assessments of user satisfaction. For example, the surveys could go beyond overall quality and raise questions relating to specific aspects of the Parks such as grassed areas, sports pitches, gardens, walks, refreshments and parking. If accurate data on visitor numbers were available (paragraph 2.3), data from the surveys could be weighted to give extra prominence to the views of users interviewed when the Parks are busy, which would make the results more representative.

Many of the structures and roads in the Parks are in a state of disrepair

3.7 In addition to taking care of the soft landscape, the Agency is responsible for maintaining the many historic buildings within the Parks (including 22 listed buildings), the facilities such as toilets, the walls and gates, and some 105 miles of roads and pathways.

8 The overall quality of the Parks (average score in visitor satisfaction survey)

| Year | Overall target | Overall outturn | Range across the Parks |
|---------|---|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2000-01 | 89% (no less than 83% for each Park) | 86% | Actual scores ranged from 82% to 90% |
| 2001-02 | 89% (no less than 85% for each Park) | 85% | Actual scores ranged from 79% to 90% |
| 2002-03 | 89% (no less than 85% for each Park) | 86% | Actual scores ranged from 80% to 89% |

Source: The Royal Parks Annual Report and Accounts 2002-03

9 Cleanliness in the Parks (average score in visitor satisfaction survey)

| Year | Overall target | Overall outturn | Range across the Parks |
|---------|---|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2000-01 | 89% (no less than 80% for each Park) | 85% | Actual scores ranged from 79% to 88% |
| 2001-02 | 89% (no less than 85% for each Park) | 85% | Actual scores ranged from 79% to 88% |
| 2002-03 | 89% (no less than 85% for each Park) | 88% | Actual scores ranged from 81% to 91% |

Source: The Royal Parks Annual Report and Accounts 2002-03

- 3.8 Much of this hard fabric has fallen into disrepair over decades and a substantial backlog of work has now built up. Following the fundamental review in 2001 (paragraph 1.6) the Agency has taken action to assess the scale of the problem and its maintenance priorities. The Agency has previously estimated the backlog to be some £110 million, but in light of condition surveys carried out in 2003 it is reassessing the extent of the backlog and the level of investment required. Priority will then be given to work to meet health and safety requirements, and after that to restore and improve the natural and historic environment. Currently there are two areas on the English Heritage 'at risk' register¹²: the Brew House at Bushy Park and Brompton Cemetery (for which the Agency has responsibility but which falls outside the scope of this report) where work is needed on the catacombs.
- 3.9 The Agency currently spends some £6.9 million a year on works maintenance, so significant progress in reducing the backlog will be dependent on the Agency's ability to generate additional income, which is considered in Part 4 of this report.

The Agency should benchmark its performance against national and international practice

- 3.10 As highlighted in the 2001 fundamental review (paragraph 1.6), the Agency recognises it could do more to compare its Parks with other national and international park authorities. We suggest that applying for Green Flag status would be a way of ensuring that the Parks are assessed against a widely applied standard for parks and green spaces (Figure 10).
- 3.11 But benchmarking goes beyond standard setting and is a way of sharing best practice and learning. The fundamental review of the Agency in 2001 (paragraph 1.6) recommended that it form a 'benchmarking club' with national or international partners. Little progress has been made in developing such a network although the Agency intends to carry out work in this area in 2004-05. As **case studies 3 and 4 on page 20** show, the Agency could be missing out on valuable opportunities to learn from others as well as to share its own ideas. The International Park Strategic Partners Group, chaired by Sydney's Centennial Parklands and currently consisting of 12 international partners, would provide an excellent networking opportunity for the Agency¹³.

¹² The register, published annually, brings together information on all Grade I, II* and II listed buildings, and scheduled ancient monuments known to English Heritage to be at risk through neglect and decay, or vulnerable to becoming so.

¹³ As of May 2004 the International Park Strategic Partners Group will be known as the Parks Forum.

The Agency's highly regarded approach to horticultural training is being reviewed

- 3.12 The experts we spoke to identified declining horticultural and landscape management skills as a problem for the parks sector generally but were encouraged by Agency's proactive approach to horticultural training.
- 3.13 The Agency is keen to take a lead in raising standards of training in conservation and maintenance of public parks and the Government's publication 'The Historic Environment: A Force for our Future' in 2001 saw an explicit role for the Parks in horticultural management. The Agency has tentative plans to develop under-used buildings in The Regent's Park into a centre of excellence in horticultural training and land-based skills development perhaps in partnership with a horticultural and agricultural training college. The Agency has stated that it intends to develop a master plan for the site in 2005-06.
- 3.14 The Agency is currently also undertaking a review of its contribution in 'Careership', which is a national traineeship scheme run by the National Trust in partnership with the Agency, English Heritage and the Corporation of London. The traineeships based in the Parks have been described in the Government's 2002 'Green Spaces, Better Places' report as the "Rolls Royce" of horticultural training. There are presently four Parks-based trainees on the scheme. The Agency considers the ideal number to be around 14 trainees.

10 The Green Flag Award Scheme

The Green Flag Award, a scheme managed by the Civic Trust, is an independent award that aspires to give voice to public expectations about what parks can and should offer. It aims to set standards for management and to promote the value of parks and green spaces as social places as well as places for walking, play, informal sports and for contact with the natural world. CABE Space is the main funder of the Green Flag Award Scheme and sets the strategy for its development.



Applications will be assessed against the Green Flag Award criteria as follows:

- 1 A welcoming place - how to create a sense that people are positively welcomed in the park
- 2 Healthy, safe and secure - how best to ensure that the park is a safe and healthy environment for all users
- 3 Clean and well maintained - what people can expect in terms of cleanliness, facilities and maintenance
- 4 Sustainability - how a park can be managed in environmentally sensitive ways
- 5 Conservation and heritage - the value of conservation and care of historical heritage
- 6 Community involvement - ways of encouraging community participation and acknowledging the community's role in a park's success
- 7 Marketing - methods of promoting a park successfully
- 8 Management - how to reflect all of the above in a coherent and accessible management plan or strategy and ensure it is implemented

The above criteria are not prescriptive but allow for the distinctness of each park and green space. Judging is done on a points system covering a desk assessment and site visit and any entry that reaches the benchmark standard will be eligible to fly a Green Flag. It would cost the Agency approximately £3,400 to apply for the award for all the Parks, although preparing for the assessment process would require additional management time and effort.

Source: Civic Trust

CASE STUDY 3:

THE CORPORATION OF LONDON'S EUROPEAN INFORMATION EXCHANGE PROJECT ON WOODLAND MANAGEMENT

The Corporation of London is one of four European partner organisations that have organised the Nature Conservation Experience Exchange project, which has involved participants from all over Europe including many from Eastern European countries. The project aims to produce a comprehensive web-based information exchange site on woodland management. The Corporation hosted a conference as part of the project, which was attended by 26 participants from 12 countries who discussed special conservation techniques for the management of ancient trees.

Source: Corporation of London

CASE STUDY 4:

NEW YORK'S APPROACH TO SOFT LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

In 1995, the Central Park Conservancy introduced a zone-based management system by dividing the park into 49 zones, each maintained by at least one zone gardener. The zone gardener is trained in horticulture and responsible for all aspects of the management and maintenance of his or her zone. The zone gardeners are assisted by specialised staff for tasks such as graffiti removal, storm water management or playground care.

The Conservancy has found that zone-based management brings back accountability to specific geographic areas of the park. It is easy to monitor the performance of individual zone gardeners and to reward good work or provide additional support if needed for zones that fall short of park-wide standards. Zone management also provides for a continual presence in an area and enables the public to interact and get to know the park staff, developing a sense of community and shared stewardship for the zone.

The Conservancy has recognised that over-use of grass areas for sport or events affects their physical quality and can spoil the park experience for people who are there to enjoy the horticulture or for quiet contemplation. They have therefore adopted a field rotation/flag system. For heavily used areas of the park, a red flag is employed to indicate that a field should not be used and the flag is rotated from field to field every few weeks. This rotation system allows the fields to recuperate and allows the Conservancy to perform necessary maintenance.

Source: Central Park Conservancy, New York

Part 4

The Agency is looking to generate more income

4.1 This part of the report considers how the Agency is developing its self-generated income. In particular it looks at how the level of self-generated income has increased over the past four years; how the Agency is seeking ways to develop existing and new income streams; the challenges and risks associated with commercial events; and how the Agency recovers costs.

With government funding declining in real terms, the Agency has increased the level of self-generated income over the past four years

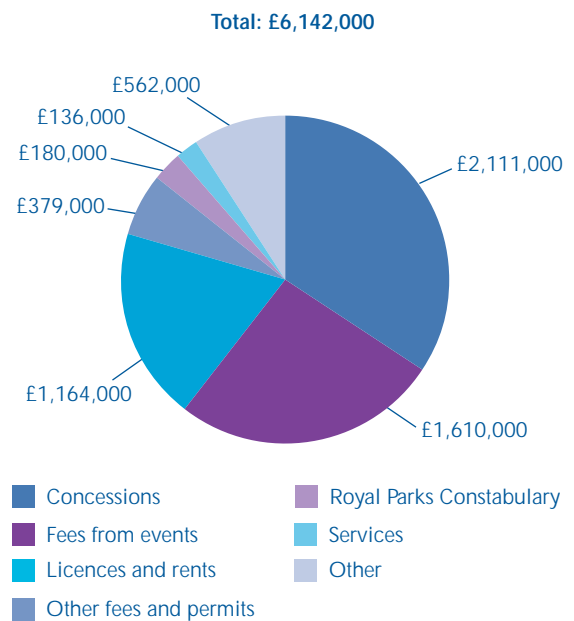
4.2 The Agency's grant from the Department, £23.7 million in 2002-03, has been set at £24.2 million for 2003-04 and the following two years. With decreasing public funding in real terms (the grant in 2003-04 is worth 81 per cent in real terms of what it was in 1993-94, the first year of the Agency's inception), the Agency has to increase its income from other sources. **Figure 11** shows the main sources of income for the Agency and how much money they generated in 2002-03. Between 1999-2000 and 2002-03, the Agency's self-generated income increased from £4 million to £6.1 million, a rise of 53 per cent. The main increases are: concessions (primarily for catering and car parking) increased from £1.5 million to £2.1 million, income from fees and permits (including event fees) increased from £1.0 million to £2.0 million, and income from licences and rents increased from £0.9 million to £1.2 million. In 2005-06 the Agency's target is to generate income totalling £7 million, equivalent to 29 per cent of its grant.

The Agency is seeking ways to develop existing and new income streams and there is scope to learn from other parks

4.3 In seeking to increase its self-generated income over the next few years, the Agency intends to give particular attention to:

- re-designing The Royal Parks website;
- developing merchandising opportunities, such as selling images of the Parks;

11 Self-generated income achieved by the Agency in 2002-03



Source: National Audit Office

- improving the quality and range of catering services in the Parks;
- joining forces with retail partners to reach a larger market;
- showcasing merchandise in Park cafés;
- actively promoting filming in the Parks;
- developing a Parks space for functions and private hire;
- licensing The Royal Parks logo.

4.4 The Agency, however, needs to achieve a step change in its self-generated income and, working with the recently established Royal Parks Foundation (see paragraph 5.5), is looking afresh at income-raising opportunities. The Foundation aims to raise £5 million in 2004 and, working

together, the Agency and the Foundation are starting to develop adoption, membership and legacy schemes as well as considering the scope for marketing horticultural products and bringing in corporate sponsorship.

4.5 There may also be scope for the Agency to learn from other national and international parks. **Case study 5** shows the range and success of private sponsorship opportunities in Central Park, New York, although there are differences in terms of their funding and accountability arrangements¹⁴.

4.6 In seeking to capitalise on the revenue-earning potential of its assets, the Agency will be operating within the following constraints.

- Under the Crown Lands Act 1851 (paragraph 1.3), the Parks must be free and accessible to all. This places limitations on the type of events which can be held in the Parks. Corporate and other private events such as weddings are a potentially lucrative market and the Agency is considering how best to pursue these opportunities.
- As the Parks are Crown Land, the Agency has no power to grant third parties an interest in land on any part of a Park¹⁵, which means it is restricted to granting only short-term licences. This makes it difficult for the Agency to attract long-term capital investment from commercial partners.

- Although the Parks currently have Crown immunity from planning and development control¹⁶, the Agency consults local planning authorities before proceeding with certain developments.

Commercial events are a significant source of income for the Agency but there are risks which need to be managed

4.7 Commercial events in the Parks raised £1.6 million in 2002-03 (26 per cent of total self-generated income). The Agency's policy is that fees for large events, as well as performance bonds to pay for any resultant damage to the Park, should be paid in advance of the event taking place. However, in the case of the Star Trek exhibition and another recent major event, Pride in the Park, the Agency did not receive up-front fees. In both cases the promoters were ultimately unable to pay the agreed fees and as a result the Agency's income is some £500,000 lower than it expected. As well as agreeing a daily rental fee for the Star Trek exhibition, the Agency also negotiated an additional profit-sharing arrangement with the organiser, which increased the risk to the Agency. What was missing in these cases was a well thought through approach to the risks the Agency was taking before it agreed the financial arrangements. Details of the Star Trek case are shown in **case study 6**, which also shows that in planning expenditure

CASE STUDY 5:

METHODS ON OFFER FOR INDIVIDUALS OR CORPORATIONS TO SUPPORT CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY, NEW YORK

In 2002, the Central Park Conservancy in New York received contributions totalling \$18,659,000 (approximately £12 million) from individuals and corporations representing 88 per cent of total revenues, gains and other support for the financial year. The Conservancy makes use of the following methods:

Membership and annual gifts - There are different levels of membership and gifts ranging from \$35 to \$25,000 or more for members of the Chairman's circle. There are a range of benefits for donors depending on the level of the contribution, such as newsletters about events in the Park, gifts of maps or photographs of the Park, invitations to exclusive social events or a listing in the Conservancy's annual report.

Planned giving - There are a number of possibilities for individuals to include the Central Park Conservancy in their wills.

Women's Committee - This association offers programmes to support the Park in many ways such as adopting a bench or a tree, or attending children's parties specifically to raise funds for playgrounds.

Corporate partnerships - There are opportunities to sponsor a number of programmes or events in the Park or to support the annual care and maintenance of the Park.

Source: Central Park Conservancy, New York

¹⁴ The Central Park Conservancy was set up in 1980 as a private not-for-profit organisation with the aim of raising funds and undertaking restoration programmes for Central Park. In 1998, the Conservancy agreed an eight year public-private partnership contract with the City of New York. Under the contract, the Conservancy manages Central Park on a day-to-day basis and the City of New York retains overall policy responsibility.

¹⁵ The Regent's Park is an exception to this rule. An Order in Council (on 19 October 1979), made under the Crown Land Act 1936, grants powers of leasing to the Secretary of State in respect of certain land within The Regent's Park, subject to the consent of the Crown Estate Commissioners.

¹⁶ The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill, currently before Parliament, proposes to remove Crown immunity from planning controls.

commitments predicated on future income the Agency did not make sufficient allowance for the uncertainty attached to the income.

- 4.8 Another risk to the Agency's income is that it is heavily dependent on the income from major commercial events in Hyde Park, with over 80 per cent of all the event income in 2002-03 raised from this source. The Agency is concerned about sustainability as Hyde Park is suffering from substantial wear and tear caused by the increasing number of events and has become a particular focus for the tensions highlighted in paragraph 2.16. To reduce the dependency on Hyde Park, over the period 2003-06 the Agency aims to hold two commercial events a year in Greenwich Park, The Regent's Park and Kensington Gardens with an annual commercial event on Horse Guards Parade. By 2005-06, the Agency hopes to increase income from such events in the Parks other than Hyde Park from just under £275,000 in 2002-03 to around £475,000 in 2005-06.

The Agency needs a more reliable basis for ensuring that it recovers its costs and makes a profit

- 4.9 Under the Government's Wider Markets Initiative¹⁷, the aim of income-generating activities should be to recover the full cost of providing the service or product (including direct costs and overheads). When selling into competitive markets, prices should recover the full cost plus an element of profit. We noted, however, that the Agency did not have readily available information about the costs and profitability of individual events and other income-generating activities. It tends to set fees on the basis of past experience rather than on calculated full costs and profit margins.

CASE STUDY 6:

THE STAR TREK EXHIBITION IN HYDE PARK

The exhibition was not as successful as hoped and the Agency has received much less money than expected as a result

The Agency agreed a deal with event promoters Triple A for a Star Trek exhibition to be held in Hyde Park. The Agency was to receive £300,000 from daily rental fees, along with a share of profits and £60,000 for damage caused to the fabric of the Park. The exhibition ran for five months from mid-December 2002 until the end of April 2003, but visitor numbers were much lower than anticipated, its run was shortened and it ended up making a loss. As a result, the income due to the Agency from Triple A in respect of the daily rental fee reduced to £260,000. Subsequently Triple A went into administration with the Agency having received only £86,000.

The failure of the exhibition has had a major impact on the Agency's budget

The Agency committed the £300,000 of income it expected to receive from daily rental fees (which the Agency regarded as guaranteed) as partnership funding for the lottery supported sports renovation project at The Regent's Park. As a consequence of the shortfall in income from the exhibition, the Agency had to take remedial action to make up this deficit from its internal budget, sacrificing other planned expenditure.

Moreover, as Triple A were the promoters for other commercial events in Hyde Park, their collapse led to the cancellation of six other major events in the Parks and the consequent loss of income from them. The Agency estimates it has lost £420,000 of anticipated income, in addition to the shortfall in income from the Star Trek exhibition. This will make it difficult for the Agency to meet its £1.6 million target for events income for 2003-04.

Source: The Royal Parks

¹⁷ The Wider Markets Initiative was launched by HM Treasury in July 1998 and encourages public sector bodies to undertake commercial services based on assets they own (both physical and knowledge assets) where it is sensible to do so.



Part 5

The Agency is strengthening its management capacity

5.1 This part of the report looks at what the Agency has done to strengthen its corporate management capacity and considers the further progress that is needed for the Agency to develop its core management information.

The Agency has strengthened its management capacity at senior levels by bringing in external expertise

5.2 One of the recommendations of the fundamental review of the Agency in 2001 (paragraph 1.6) was that corporate management and decision making at the Agency should be improved. As a result, the Agency has recruited a new Senior Management Team, re-launched The Royal Parks Advisory Board, and established The Royal Parks Foundation. **Figure 12** shows the new organisational structure of the Agency.

The Agency has recruited a fundamentally new Senior Management Team

5.3 The Agency, together with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, has made a concerted effort to strengthen its Senior Management Team. Following the appointment of a new Chief Executive at the end of 2000 and the 2001 fundamental review, new directors were recruited to most senior management positions to provide a more business-like approach to managing the Agency. The Agency's Management Board was also extended in 2003 to include two non-executive members with expertise in strategic and financial management.

A new Royal Parks Advisory Board has been appointed

5.4 Ministers and the Chief Executive are supported by an Advisory Board, which provides independent advice on strategy, plans and performance of the Agency, and helps to raise the profile of the Parks. The membership of the Advisory Board changed in February 2003, and the new Board members, appointed for four years, have been recruited for the commercial expertise and

experience they can bring to the Agency (**Figure 13**). The members of the Advisory Board receive expenses but are not paid.

The Royal Parks Foundation has been established to raise the profile of, and generate income for, the Agency

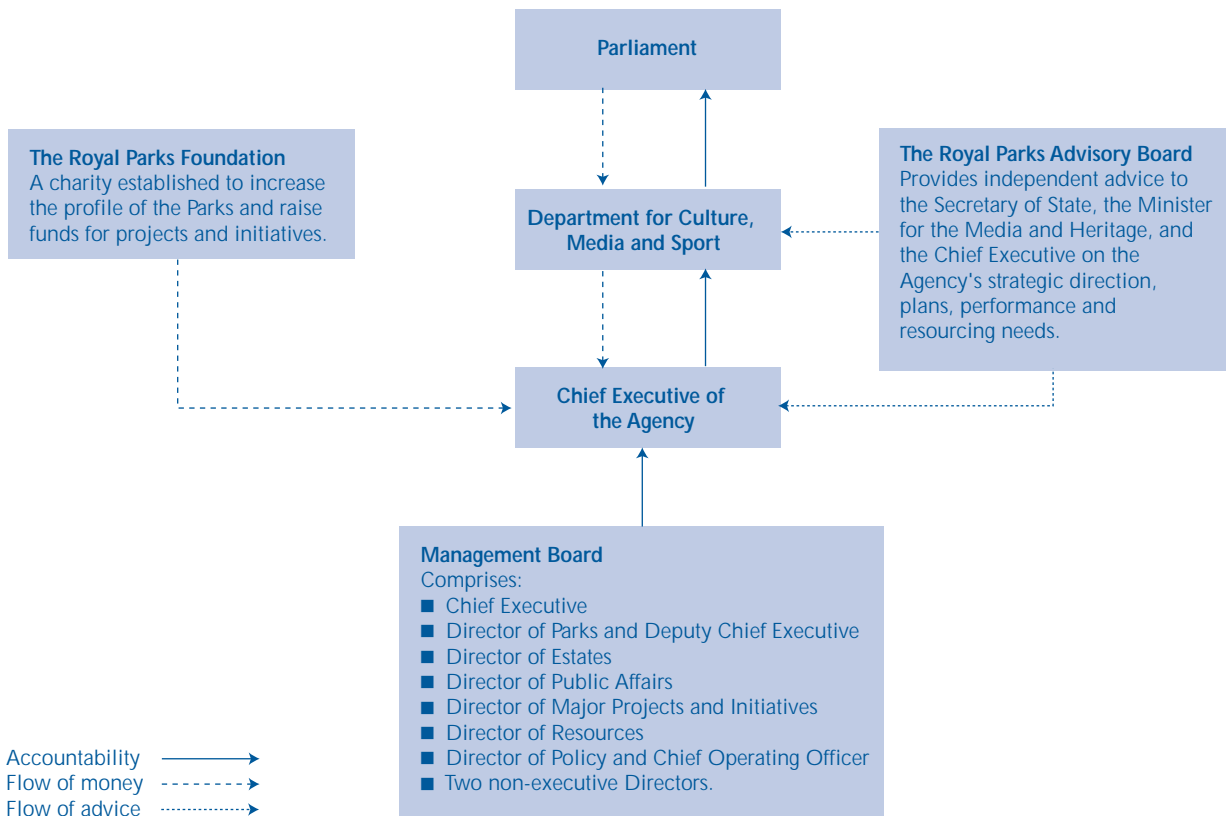
5.5 In May 2003, a new body called The Royal Parks Foundation was established as a charity with the aim of promoting more financial and public support for the Agency through corporate sponsorship and other fundraising schemes. The Foundation was set up following the decision that the Agency would not become a non-departmental public body, which would have enabled it to establish charitable status as a way of attracting external funding. The Chairman and seven trustees of the Foundation are shown in **Figure 14**. They are not paid for their work with the Foundation.

Further progress is needed in developing core management information

5.6 The fundamental review of the Agency in 2001 (paragraph 1.6) recommended that target setting should be strengthened. Consequently, in October 2002 a senior official from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport was seconded to the Agency to oversee the introduction of a new performance information system. The objectives of the Agency and the Department have now been aligned, with a focus on children and young people, communities, the economy and delivery. And all targets relating to these objectives have been allocated to directors who are responsible for monitoring and reporting progress. When reviewing its targets and setting new ones, the Agency should ensure that it refers to the recently published guidance¹⁸ for Executive Agencies. **Appendix 2** sets out the Agency's purpose, vision and objectives and its key targets for the next three years.

¹⁸ 'Setting Key Targets for Executive Agencies: A Guide' is a joint publication by HM Treasury, the Cabinet Office and the National Audit Office produced in November 2003.

12 Organisational structure of the Agency



Source: National Audit Office

13 Members of The Royal Parks Advisory Board

Chairman
Peter Ellwood CBE, Chairman ICI; Chairman, The Royal Parks Foundation

Members
The Hon. Apurv Bagri, Group Managing Director, Metdist Limited; Trustee, The Royal Parks Foundation
Sir Terry Farrell CBE, Architect and Town Planning Consultant; member of the Jenkins Review of The Royal Parks 1991-96
Emir Feisal, FMCA, Head of Finance, The Sunday Times
Ylva French, Communications and Public Relations Consultant

Source: The Royal Parks Annual Report and Accounts 2002-03

14 Trustees of The Royal Parks Foundation

Chairman
Peter Ellwood CBE, Chairman ICI

Trustees
The Hon. Apurv Bagri, Group Managing Director, Metdist Limited
Andrew Fenwick, Finance Director, Brunswick Group Limited
Stuart Corbyn, Chief Executive, Cadogan Estates
Charles Dunstone, Chief Executive, Carphone Warehouse
Jilly Forster, Managing Director, The Forster Company
Zac Goldsmith, Editor, The Ecologist
Lord Rothermere, Chairman, Daily Mail and General Trust

Source: Memorandum of Association of The Royal Parks Foundation

- 5.7 The new system is in its early days and as the Agency continues to develop its performance information system the following aspects will be key.
- The targets tend to focus on internal management processes, such as the launch of a new website, rather than final outcomes related to the Agency's key objectives.
 - The Comptroller and Auditor General's report 'Improving Service Delivery: The Role of Executive Agencies' (HC 525, 2002-03) recommended that targets should be subject to some external challenge, for example through benchmarking with similar organisations, independent review, or by involving organisations representing customer interests. And the 2001 fundamental review of the Agency recommended that its performance should be compared with other bodies. One area where this would be particularly relevant is the Agency's assessment of quality and cleanliness, as gauged by its visitor satisfaction surveys. The Agency could benchmark its visitor satisfaction against the results obtained by similar parks, such as those run by the Corporation of London. One way of making comparisons would be via the Agency's participation in the Green Flag Scheme run by the Civic Trust (paragraph 3.10 and Figure 10), since this is awarded on the basis of public expectations about what parks can and should offer and a number of Corporation of London parks are members of the Scheme.
 - More needs to be done to ensure that staff throughout the organisation, and particularly at the individual Parks, are focussed on the Agency's new objectives. And some targets need to be cascaded within the Agency. For example, the Agency has a target to increase the income it generates to £7 million by 2005-06 but the Park managers were uncertain about how this target had been broken down between the eight Parks and what each Park's contribution to achieving the target should be.
 - In line with the Department's objective to maximise the contribution the United Kingdom's cultural assets make to the economy, the Agency intends to quantify the economic contribution the Parks make to London and to the nation. The Agency could also use this data to promote and raise the profile of the Parks. Such quantification would be challenging but there is already some international research available which looks at the different ways in which parks contribute to their local and regional economies. This research may be a useful starting point for the Agency and details are shown at [Appendix 3](#). CABE Space, for example, has commissioned research into the economic value of good green spaces. The results will be published by May 2004.



Appendix 1

The methods we used

| Interviews and expert panel (informed the whole report) | |
|--|--|
| <p>We met and interviewed senior staff at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Agency. We also conducted interviews with key stakeholders.</p> | <p>We conducted interviews with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ officials at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport ■ the Senior Management Team at the Agency ■ all the individual Park managers ■ the Chairman of The Royal Parks Foundation ■ the Chair of Chairs of The Friends of The Royal Parks groups |
| <p>Before drafting our report we held an expert panel to provide advice on our study approach, to comment on our emerging findings, and to identify what the major challenges are facing the Agency and urban parks more generally today.</p> | <p>The expert panel members were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Jennifer Adams, Director of Open Spaces, Corporation of London ■ Chris Baines, freelance writer and broadcaster ■ Alan Barber, Commissioner, CABE Space ■ Paul Bramhill, Chief Executive of GreenSpace ■ Tony Curson, Associate Head, Department of Business and Service Sector Management, London Metropolitan University ■ Julia Thrift, Director of CABE Space |
| Comparator research (informed the whole report) | |
| <p>We identified a number of international and national comparator park authorities, which we used as case studies to highlight good practice. They were identified primarily through web-based research as well as e-mail and telephone based interviews.</p> | <p>The comparators we used were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Centennial Parklands and Moore Park Trust, Sydney ■ Central Park Conservancy, New York ■ Oizumi Royokuchi Park, Osaka ■ Milton Keynes Parks Trust ■ Corporation of London ■ Minnesota State Park |

| Analysis of the Agency's market research and community engagement activities (informed Part 2) | |
|--|---|
| <p>We commissioned the market research company MORI to undertake a critique of the Agency's annual visitor satisfaction survey as well as to carry out a limited qualitative survey of users of the Parks.</p> | <p>The MORI critique consisted of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ a critique of the current annual visitor satisfaction survey undertaken by the consultancy firm W S Atkins; ■ recommendations of how the Agency can improve its survey work and capture the most relevant data; ■ recommendations of how the Agency can improve its general consultation with the wider public, particularly infrequent and non-users; ■ provision of costs for MORI's recommended approach. <p>For the qualitative survey, MORI undertook 162 in depth interviews held on-site at the eight Royal Parks (on average, 20 interviews per park). The interviews were a random sample. In close conjunction with the National Audit Office, MORI drew up a questionnaire which consisted of pre-coded questions with open-ended questions aimed at encouraging interviewees to give their own opinions.</p> <p>The survey was primarily qualitative in nature so findings should be read and interpreted with an air of caution.</p> |
| <p>We reviewed the Agency's strategies and initiatives in relation to broadening access to the Parks.</p> | <p>Documents examined included the Agency's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ education strategy ■ community engagement strategy for Bushy Park ■ volunteering strategy ■ events strategy and events policy guidelines |
| Analysis of the maintenance of the Parks (informed Part 3) | |
| <p>We examined the methods used by the Agency to manage and assess the Parks environment.</p> | <p>Documents examined included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ individual Parks' management plans ■ biannual soft landscape assessments ■ the annual visitor satisfaction survey |
| Analysis of income generation activities (informed Part 4) | |
| <p>We analysed the methods used by the Agency to generate its own income.</p> | <p>Documents examined included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts ■ individual Parks' income and expenditure sheets ■ the Agency's events strategy and events policy guidelines ■ the Agency's marketing strategy |
| Review of the Agency's performance management (informed Part 5) | |
| <p>We examined key funding, reporting and policy documents of the Agency and of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.</p> <p>We also commissioned consultants, vivas ltd, to undertake preliminary research for the study including a historical review of the Agency's performance management and targets.</p> | <p>Documents examined included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the Agency's Corporate Plan 2003-2006 ■ the Agency's Funding Agreement ■ the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts ■ Senior Management Group minutes ■ The Royal Parks Advisory Board minutes |

Appendix 2

The purpose, vision and objectives of The Royal Parks

Purpose and vision of The Royal Parks

Our **purpose** is to balance our responsibility to *protect, conserve and enhance* the unique landscapes, environments, heritage and vistas of the eight Royal Parks in London, with active and creative policies to *encourage wider access* to them and to increase opportunities for enjoyment, delight, sanctuary, information, education, creativity and healthy recreation for *everyone, now and in the future*.

Our **vision** is to try to achieve the perfect balance, where all understand and value the Parks, where everyone finds something in the Parks for them, and where no one's enjoyment of the Parks is at the unacceptable expense of others, now or in the future.

| Objective | Key targets |
|--|--|
| 1 To improve the quality and range of services for visitors to and users of the Parks. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase numbers benefiting from education activities by 10 per cent each year. ■ Each Park to score at least 85 per cent for quality and cleanliness as assessed by visitor satisfaction survey. ■ Visitor research: scoping study by October 2003, new measures by December 2003, new survey in 2004-05. ■ Achievement of targets in policing plan. |
| 2 To protect, conserve and enhance the natural and historic environment of the Parks. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Each Park to score at least 85 per cent for soft landscaping, as assessed by independent expert. ■ Maintain ISO14001 status for environmental management. ■ Complete audit of works priorities by autumn 2003 and in the light of this make any necessary adjustments to our forward maintenance plan. |
| 3 To develop policies and initiatives to encourage wider access by priority groups and explore and remove barriers to non-users of the Parks. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enhanced summer entertainment 2003-04 with at least four new events extending reach to target groups; other seasons later. ■ Research into non-users in 2004-05. |
| 4 To raise the profile of The Royal Parks, increase understanding of the role and value of The Royal Parks to London and the nation and consolidate our role nationally and internationally at the forefront of park management. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Produce new identity guidelines by June 2003 to ensure clearer and consistent projection of the Parks' vision and key messages. ■ Establish an international parks network during 2004-05. ■ Launch new website by December 2003. |
| 5 To manage The Royal Parks efficiently and effectively, particularly by improving its financial base and developing partnerships across the public, private and voluntary sectors. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase self-generated income by £1.1 million to £7 million by 2005-06 (equal to 29 per cent of grant-in-aid). ■ Reduce dependence on Hyde Park events by increasing income from events in other Parks by £200,000 by 2005-06. ■ Human resource strategy in place by end 2003-04; obtain Investors in People accreditation during 2004-05. ■ Launch Patron, Corporate membership and Adoption schemes in 2003-04; Legacy schemes in 2004-05. |

The highlighted targets are the ones which are included in The Royal Parks' Funding Agreement with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2003-04 to 2005-06).

Source: The Royal Parks Corporate Plan 2003-2006

Appendix 3

Measuring the economic benefits of the Parks

In order to measure the economic benefits of the Parks for London and the United Kingdom, the Agency will need to consider the variety of ways in which parks make a contribution to their local economy, such as:

- a. Tourist spending whilst in the parks or surrounding area, which includes the contribution that this makes to local business sales and jobs for residents.
- b. The environmental benefits of trees in parks which lead to economic savings such as:
 - shade from trees can reduce energy costs
 - trees improve air quality which in turn reduces the cost of health treatment
 - trees reduce storm water run-off and therefore reduce the need for engineered controls for rainwater.

- c. An increase in property values due to being adjacent to a park or green space and the corresponding increase in taxes raised from these properties.
- d. Savings made on the provision of public sector community service programmes due to the availability of public open space.

There is some research available which may be helpful to the Agency in measuring the economic contribution the Parks make to their surrounding areas. The table below highlights some examples of useful research and outlines the type of economic contribution that the research covers with reference to the alphabetical list above.

| Research carried out by | Details of the research | Research covers | | | |
|---|---|----------------------------|---|---|---|
| | | a | b | c | d |
| Minnesota State Park | This research uses an input/output modelling approach. The inputs are annual spending by park visitors and the annual expenses of operating the park system. The model represents the linkages in the local economy that translate these inputs into annual economic outputs such as business sales, income and jobs for residents. | ✓ | | | |
| Center for Urban Forest Research | This research uses benefit-cost analysis to contrast the net expenditures associated with tree planting and stewardship with the benefits provided by trees, modelled over a 40-year time period. Scientists at the Center developed models assigning dollar values to the benefits provided by trees. An ecologist who studied street trees in Davis, California found that "For every dollar spent on trees the city gets \$3.80 back." | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| American Forests | This research produced a software application called CITYgreen. The process begins with site analysis which combines aerial photographs and data from field surveys to create a detailed map and inventory of the neighbourhood. The CITYgreen software then synthesizes the data to produce an analysis of environmental and economic benefits, attaching dollar values to tree cover benefits. | | ✓ | | |
| US National Park Service | The National Park Service uses a 1990 'Money Generation Model', an Excel application, to provide a fast and virtually zero cost estimate of the economic consequences of a park on the economy of the surrounding local area. The model estimates how tourism expenditures, Federal Government expenditure and expenditure by other outside parties on parks benefit the local area economy through new sales of goods and services, increased sales tax and income tax revenues and the creation of new jobs. | ✓ | | | |
| Urban Parks Forum | The Urban Parks Forum's report entitled 'Your Parks' outlines the various ways in which parks can make an economic contribution to their neighbourhoods and has references to research on this subject. For example, it highlights a statistical analysis of data for two neighbourhoods in Ontario which showed that there was an increase in property values of around \$8 per foot closer to green space, equating to an increase in property tax revenue of 8 per cent. | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Sydney Urban Parks Education & Research Group (SUPER) | The report entitled 'The Value of Public Open Space for Community Service Provision' assesses the benefits of public open space for the provision of community services through the concept of 'avoided costs'. The benefits are estimated as the savings of the amounts that government agencies would have to pay for their programmes to be delivered if the public open space were not available. The research demonstrated that in 1999-2000, the provision of public open space provided an economic benefit in the form of an avoided cost of between AUS\$10.6 million and AUS\$14.6 million for the Sydney metropolitan area for selected community service organisations. | | | | ✓ |
| CABE Space | CABE Space is in the process of commissioning research into the economic benefits of parks in the United Kingdom. | Research not yet published | | | |