

- by email

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Dear Sir / Madam

ADEPT response to the Government's consultation: '*Running Free*' on preserving the free use of parks

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) represents local authority county, unitary and metropolitan Directors. Operating at the strategic tier of local government, the members are responsible for delivering public services that primarily relate to the physical environment and the economy, but which have a significant impact on all aspects of the nation's well-being. ADEPT represents members' interests by proactively engaging central Government on emerging policy & issues, promoting initiatives aimed at influencing Government policy and through the development of best practices and responding to European and UK Government initiatives and consultations.

We welcome this opportunity to comment on the Government's consultation on preserving the free use of public parks.

Parks and Green Spaces

We would agree with the government's assessment that parks and green spaces are valuable community assets, which provide places for people to exercise, come together, enjoy nature and play sports in a pleasant recreational space. They are as important for enhancing mental wellbeing as physical health. Parks may be used by individuals for exercise and recreation, by families or groups to spend time together, or for community events. They are home to organised sport, fun runs or races organised by local clubs, where a fee may be charged. Parks are also the home of traditional businesses such as cafes, visiting funfairs and professional dog walkers or personal trainers.

Parkrun

Parkrun organise free, weekly five kilometre runs in local parks every Saturday, whilst junior parkrun is an associated event for children aged 4 to 14 taking place every Sunday. Parkrun and junior parkrun are organised by volunteers and are free to participate in. Parkrun is a not for profit company and relies on donations and sponsors. We wholeheartedly support the principles behind these events, which provide a great way to use parks, are excellent examples of communities organising events on a voluntary basis and enable individuals, families and groups to enjoy healthy exercise.

Charging for events or not

Local authorities legitimately charge for a variety of events and activities that take place in local parks. They are responsible for the stewardship and maintenance of public park. Where appropriate, it is not unreasonable to charge for exclusive use of a facility, such as a tennis court, or to charge for a ticketed event such as a concert held in the grounds of a park, in order to raise revenue.

We do not consider it appropriate for a local authority to charge a volunteer community seeking to provide a free weekly event for the use of a public park, overturning the long standing convention of free access to parks for their everyday use. It is right that the use of public parks by the public for everyday use is, and should remain, free. We are therefore supportive of the Government's proposal to legislate to ensure that local authorities cannot charge parkrun or junior parkrun.

Responses to Consultation Questions

Question 1: Do you agree that local authorities should not be able to charge parkrun or parkrun junior for the use of public parks?

Response: Yes

Parkrun and junior parkrun are organised by volunteers, are free to participate in, provide great ways to use parks, are excellent examples of communities organising events on a voluntary basis and enable individuals, families and groups to enjoy healthy physical and mental exercise.

Question 2: Is there any specific activity, in addition to parkrun or junior parkrun, that takes place in a public park, that does not require exclusive use of the park or a part of the park, that should be considered for inclusion in provisions to prevent local authorities charging for that activity, and if so why?

Response: No

It is accepted that the use of public parks by the public for everyday use is, and should remain, free. Therefore, there is no need to legislate to include any other specific activities.

Question 3: Are there any activities that involve a financial charge to a client or clients by a professional or business, but do not involve exclusive use of a public park or part of the park, that should be considered for inclusion in provisions to prevent local authorities charging for that activity, and if so why?

Response: No

Local authorities should be able to charge for activities that involve a financial charge to a client or clients by a professional or business, whether that involves exclusive use of all or part of a public park or not, in order to help support the ongoing stewardship and maintenance of the site and facilities.

If we can be of further assistance, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paula R. Hewitt .". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paula Hewitt

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