

**P-05-893 Save Our Parks In Wales, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee,
01.06.20**

FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE PETITIONS COMMITTEE, JUNE 9 2020

Petition: Save Our Parks In Wales

This petition was originally launched in response to two matters. Firstly, the nationwide 'Save Our Parks' campaign appeal and petition launched by the Mail On Sunday in the autumn of 2018. And secondly, in response to a campaign that a group of dedicated local residents here in Gorseinon had been running, to protect our one and only recreational park in the town, namely Parc y Werin ('The Peoples' Park') from a development by Swansea Council; as the chosen site for a much needed replacement primary school.

Despite there being a far superior site for this school, and one that was and still is existing Education land, Swansea Council's plans have won through; a narrow one vote majority on the Planning Committee December 2015, two failed village green applications November 2015 and October 2017, and a failed Common Land Application May 2019. School construction started within two weeks of the Common Land application being filed with the Commons Registration Authority, Swansea Council, and was not halted for the duration of the consideration of this application by the Planning Inspectorate.

In the light of the current coronavirus emergency, and the lockdown restrictions that we in Wales, as well as everyone across the whole UK have had to live in these past ten weeks (and counting), the benefit of our parks and green open spaces is self evident. Who amongst us has not taken a walk in a park or an open space in these past weeks? And consequently, who has not appreciated the benefit of these facilities? Wonders of our urban and wider environments! Physical health and mental health providing benefits, contact with nature, and some peace and tranquillity.

It might be the case the case that national governments and some local authorities are now recognising the existence, value and benefit of these resources. But this in itself is not sufficient to ensure that we as a nation, indeed the whole of the UK, strive with positive vigour to safeguard the very existence of our parks and open spaces.

With all the good intent of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015, the Environment Act 2016, both from Welsh Government, and the Biodiversity Protection Policy from Swansea Council, these laudable statements of intent and policy projection lack teeth when they run up against economic development. As with Parc y Werin, it appears all too easy for an authority to go with the lowest cost/easiest solution, and skew the argument to suit. Such developments do nothing to safeguard our biodiversity, our natural and tended green

open spaces. Spaces which NHS and other commentators define as the lungs of the community; and our 'natural health service'.

It is therefore a necessity that Government seeks to put flesh on the bones of these protective measures, to ensure that they have a chance to succeed in their stated aims of safeguarding these gems of our natural environment. For today, and for future generations. For once these sites are lost or developed on, they are lost for ever. It's a one way street!

To enable this safeguarding in Wales, it is essential that Welsh Government adopt a proactive strategy of financial support for our parks and open spaces.

The Mail on Sunday's campaign asked for the following:

1. a statutory requirement for councils to ring fence funding for parks at £30 per household per year,
2. there be a legal duty for all green space to be managed to a good standard,
3. new rules banning the development on, or the inappropriate use of, parkland,
4. a new central Government fund to provide emergency help for parks most at risk and ensure the long term future of Britain's green spaces.

These are also the aims of the 'Save Our Parks In Wales' petition. And I commend them to the Committee.

In conclusion. I strongly urge the Committee to give favourable and positive consideration and to recommend that this petition be referred to the Assembly for inclusion as official policy. Such a move will be seen a clear recognition that Welsh Government is serious about safeguarding the wonderful assets that our parks and open spaces are. For today's generation, and for the foreseeable time while we remain under some form of covid lockdown. Together with the benefit in following years and for future generations, who will still be able to use, enjoy and have all the health benefits from our parks and open spaces.

Yours sincerely,

Crispian Huggill
Gorseinon,
Swansea