

# Future Parks Accelerator Guidance for Applicants

October 2018

Do you have ambitions to maximise the value of your parks and green spaces to deliver wellbeing and prosperity in your city or town over the next generation?

*“...parks are a vitally important asset, not a liability; let’s make them even more useful and enjoyable for everyone...”*

Do you have a vision to work with your communities to grow the essential benefits they get from their parks and green spaces?

*“...people love their parks; they should have every opportunity to participate in how they are run...”*

Do you believe there are exciting opportunities to transform the funding and investment in urban greenspace to secure this vital public service long term?

*“...we need bold and brave new approaches that enable parks to receive more funding from diverse sources that is safe and resilient for the future...”*

Do you want to play a leading role in pioneering solutions for the future of urban green spaces that will benefit the rest of the UK?

*“...we can achieve better and faster results for our communities by working together; collaboration creates opportunities for us all...”*

**If this motivates you, we would really welcome your application to join the Future Parks Accelerator.**

## What is the Future Parks Accelerator?

The Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) is a new national initiative to enable 5-8 places to develop ambitious solutions to secure and enhance the future of public parks and green spaces in the UK.

Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and National Trust (NT) have teamed up to create the FPA as a joint venture, with £10million of resource to back the ambitions and plans of these 5-8 places and help make them a reality.

We understand how challenging it is for local government to make a seismic shift in parks funding and management alone. The FPA is designed to create a fertile and nurturing environment for rapid innovation and shared learning.

The FPA aims to give you vital headspace to do strategic thinking and development; practical support and know-how from experts and your peers; a creative catalyst to develop the bold solutions your place needs; and a chance to inspire and help other places too.

The £10m resources are half HLF grant and half NT expertise. There will be a dedicated team to support you at every step. This an exciting new way of working for HLF and NT; we will learn and adapt with you, as you progress.

## Who is it for?

The FPA is available to owners and managers of public parks and green spaces throughout the UK.

It is targeted at those who want to explore, develop and implement bold new approaches to managing a whole public green space portfolio in order to make it financially sustainable, inclusive and well placed to deliver the widest range of benefits possible to society now and for at least the next generation.

We are open in our definition of place; it could be a city, city-region, town, county, or a combination of these. Geography and scale influence your ability to effect change and deliver impact, but where you draw the boundary is up to you.

You can apply for financial support of between £250,000 and £1m. We are inviting Expressions of Interest to help match your ambitions to the aims of the Accelerator. This will be followed by a competitive application process by invitation only.

This guidance will help you decide whether the FPA is right for you, and provide you with the information you need to plan your application.

### What are the aims of the FPA?

The aim of the FPA is to transform the relationship between urban parks and their communities so that these places can deliver ever-greater levels of public benefit and become financially sustainable, through:

- Promoting a **step-change** in how people engage with their parks in order to maximise public benefit, local potential and innovation
- Enabling **new cross-sector partnerships** that bring together knowledge and expertise from outside of the traditional parks sector and fosters collaboration, embedding new skills
- Catalysing and blending new sources of funding to enable **diversified and sustainable business models** that are attractive to new donors, funders and investors
- Adopting a **systemic approach** so that a whole place's portfolio of public green space is protected and enhanced, delivering a fair, quality and free service to all

Ultimately, we're seeking to build the suite of tools, capability and finance to help local authorities and communities across the UK find effective long-term solutions for their public parks and green spaces.

### What do we mean by green space?

We define green space broadly as any public green and open spaces within an urban area accessible to people and managed for their benefit. This may include local play spaces, playing fields, nature sites, historic parks, amenity land, allotments, cemeteries and blue spaces such as canals, rivers, lakes and reservoirs. We also include heritage and civic buildings, sports facilities and other recreational infrastructure associated with public green space.

### What is a transformational solution?

There is no silver bullet here or one size fits all. We would encourage each place to develop a solution unique to its geography, opportunities and challenges.



By transformation, we mean a shift from a maintenance mindset to one of value creation and sustainability, where public

parks are valued as an essential asset and a shared civic responsibility. That's a journey of many paths, as illustrated in the diagram above.

Every green space portfolio will begin this journey from different points. You may already be well on the transformational path in one or more of these areas.

The FPA gives you the opportunity to build a bigger, more resilient and impactful solution across all these pathways, locking in the gains you have already made.

## What are we looking for in projects?

This is an accelerator fund aimed at supporting innovative projects and applicants that are:

**Forward thinking** – demonstrating a commitment to new ideas and innovation in a positive and proactive way; positioning green space as a long-term foundation of future city wellbeing and prosperity; willing and confident to be pathfinders for the rest of the UK.

**Collaborative** – sharing approaches, learning together and working as a cohort to enhance understanding of different models and solutions in an open and honest way; local authorities and partnerships keen to be leaders of change.

**Ambitious** – approaches that will put a whole green space portfolio on a sustainable and resilient footing with lasting impact; growing public benefit for all; increasing investment across the portfolio.

**Inclusive** – demonstrating a broad active engagement across society and

business; achieving a step change in community participation.

We will support:

- Places to **building partnerships** with community groups, businesses and other stakeholders
- Projects where the focus is on sites that are publicly accessible and **free to use** – though this could also include allotments, playing fields or visitor attractions that require charge/membership as part of a wider portfolio
- Projects where the intention is to **retain free and open access** to the public and not to diminish the overall estate
- Work focussed on **strategic development**, community engagement, governance and financial planning rather than capital investment in the restoration or development of sites
- Applications that can demonstrate the public benefit from natural and cultural heritage, the **need for National Lottery funding** and **National Trust expert advice** to rise to the challenge

## 10 questions to consider

We are deliberately not being prescriptive about the solutions or approach you take. However, we appreciate that this creates a pretty open world of possibilities!

Here are ten questions that might be helpful in provoking ideas, framing your ambitions, forming your proposal and identifying the significant and tangible changes you want to achieve in your green spaces and your readiness to make them.

1. If **local communities** were given opportunities to genuinely participate in the running of their parks, what might change to meet and support their needs and aspirations?
2. If your **Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise** (VCSE) sector organisations and **local business community** were active partners, how much more of the community would be encouraged to use and enjoy these spaces regularly?
3. How can your network of green spaces significantly boost **active travel** across your place, for school, work and leisure? How could your green infrastructure be better designed and connected to make walking and cycling more of the norm?
4. Are there key groups within your community that you want to target to boost **outdoor activity** in parks for mental and/or physical wellbeing, e.g. under 5s, young people, over 75s or those with certain conditions e.g. diabetes or depression?
5. What if the UK's **health services** were responsible for parks? From relocating services, creating 'therapeutic parks' to social prescribing and everything in between, what does your Public Health Director see as priorities?
6. What **other local government priorities** could be partially delivered through public parks? What opportunities might your Director of Education and Skills or Director of Economy identify?
7. If your public green space became a celebrated and trusted local cause, what contribution might **fundraising and philanthropy** make?
8. How can you translate some of the community passion for parks to active

**volunteering** support?

9. What are the most valuable **ecosystem services** your green spaces provide - from reduced urban flooding, to cooler and cleaner air? Who benefits from these and would they pay towards them?
10. What are your options to **ringfence your budget** to guarantee money earned, raised, donated and invested in parks is spent on them?

### Essential requirements

- One of the partners must be the current landowner or is about to assume legal ownership of the parks and green spaces portfolio
- All projects must demonstrate senior level buy-in at Board and Executive level. If you are a local authority we will expect evidence to show the submission of an expression of interest has been approved by a Director and Chief Executive.
- All projects must have a good asset inventory and account of expenditure and income for each green space site and across the portfolio
- If a new governance structure is proposed it must have clear and strong public accountability
- Costs of sharing knowledge and learning and evaluation costs must be at least 7% of grant award; this can be used creatively with other places in the FPA to achieve greater benefit
- All projects must demonstrate an appropriately resourced and skilled staff team, or plans to recruit one to deliver the project

## Your contribution

We ask you to make a contribution of at least 10% towards the costs of your project to demonstrate your commitment. We describe this as 'partnership funding' and it can be made up of cash, non-cash contributions including staff or volunteer time, or a combination of all of these. Some of your partnership funding must be from your own organisation's resources.

## The difference we want to make

We describe the difference we want to make to people, communities and natural and cultural heritage, including public parks and green spaces, through a set of outcomes.

These outcomes draw on HLF research and evaluation into the needs of the sector and what projects have delivered in the past.

### Outcomes for heritage:

With our investment, heritage will be:

- **better managed**
- **in better condition**

### Outcomes for people:

With our investment, people will have:

- **developed skills**

### Outcomes for communities:

With our investment:

- **your local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit**
- **your organisation will be more resilient**

Your project will need to contribute toward all of these outcomes. We will

consider the quality of the outcomes that your project will achieve and understand that you may contribute to some more than others depending on the nature of your project.

We will provide detailed descriptions of these outcomes in the full application guidance.

## Submitting an Expression of Interest

To be considered for the FPA, **we invite you to first submit a mandatory Expression of Interest form** to our project team by **midday Monday 19<sup>th</sup> November**.

Our joint team will review your EOI and provide feedback on your outline proposal. We may want to discuss aspects of your proposal further with you so please ensure that someone is available to do so.

*Please note, we will not invite or assess full application forms from everyone who submits an Expression of Interest.*

We will make an initial assessment on whether your idea demonstrates potential to meet the FPA criteria, achieve our outcomes and is in line with the published aims and aspirations of the FPA. We will then decide whether to invite you to fill in a full application form around 26<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

We recommend that you read this guidance thoroughly before sending us your Expression of Interest. We will be running a webinar in early November to answer any questions you may have relating to the EOI.

## How decisions are made

Your application will be in competition with other projects at all stages of the application process.

Our decision makers use their judgement to choose which applications to support, taking account of quality, value for money and the aims of the programme set out in prior sections of this guidance. They may also consider issues such as achieving a geographical spread of our resources and a diverse portfolio of projects and places.

We will invite shortlisted applicants to a **selection event in London w/c 4<sup>th</sup> February 2019**. This is your opportunity to pitch your proposal and team to our Panel and for you to quiz us on the support we offer.

The final decisions are made by a Future Parks Accelerator Board of HLF and NT senior staff. The first round decision meeting will take place on **21<sup>st</sup> February 2019** and we will inform you of a decision within two weeks of that date.

## Freedom of information and data protection

We are committed to being open about the way we will use any information you give us as part of your application. We work within the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998. When you submit your declaration with your application form you are confirming that you understand our obligations under these Acts.

## Complaints

If you want to make a complaint about HLF or NT, please follow the procedure outlined in *Making a complaint*, a document available on HLF's website. Making a complaint will not affect, in any

way, the level of service you receive from us. For example, if your complaint is about an application for funding, this will not affect your chances of getting a grant from us in the future.

## Background

### Why have HLF and NT set up the FPA?

The UK's parks and urban green spaces are a critical part of our natural and cultural heritage; they are where millions of people have access to nature and enjoy the outdoors; and they are vital asset in making our cities more liveable.

Public parks have received over £950m of National Lottery funding since 1994, which has led to a renaissance in their condition and increasing numbers of visitors.

However, HLF's 2016 [State of UK Parks reports](#) found that they are at serious risk. 95% of park managers surveyed expect further budget cuts on top of the significant budget reductions already experienced under recent austerity measures. Funding for many parks services is in crisis with the future of public parks uncertain.

The FPA is one of the ways HLF is protecting past investment by supporting local authorities and communities who face some fundamental and difficult challenges ahead.

Like HLF, the NT has identified that the essential public benefits that public parks give urban communities are at risk. In 2015 NT committed in its strategy *Playing our Part* to help find solutions to the funding crisis facing public parks and green spaces in towns and cities.

Finding solutions on the scale and at the speed necessary is beyond any single organisation in the UK. HLF and NT have therefore teamed up to set up the FPA as an open, collaborative platform. We look

forward to other strategic partners joining us to add value and impact.

We are realistic that this is a humble contribution to a much bigger challenge. We will also be working hard, together with other partners, to convince governments and other investors to play their part in securing the future of public parks.

### **Newcastle as the first pathfinder**

Newcastle is a founding city partner in the FPA. Over the last four years, Newcastle City Council have been developing a bold and long-lasting solution to protect and enhance public parks and green spaces across their city. HLF and NT have partnered with Newcastle on this journey, which has inspired us to set up the FPA.

Newcastle is actively transitioning to its new model – a City Parks and Allotments Trust - which will launch in summer 2019. Whilst this precise model will not suit every place, much of the thinking, approach and preparation has relevance to the challenges and opportunities in any city or town.

Newcastle has invaluable learning and experience to share with other places and with organisations seeking to support the future of parks like HLF, NT, central Government and other funders and investors. We are excited they are on board.

### **Acknowledgements**

We are really grateful to those partner organisations who helped us co-create the ideas and approaches behind the FPA. Their ideas and experience have been invaluable. We look forward to continuing working with them on this initiative as it develops. Big thanks in particular to Newcastle City Council, Social Finance, Environmental Finance, Nesta, Big Lottery Fund and Sport England.