



Briefing 18/46 – December 2018

## **Pocket Parks Plus Fund – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) - December 2018.**

### **This funding applies to England only**

#### **Key issues**

- The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has announced a £1 million fund for the development of pocket parks and the refurbishment of areas within existing parks.
- The funding is available to community organisations partnering with their local authorities to develop new or improved parks and greenspaces.
- It is expected the community organisation will prove a need for such spaces in their area and be responsible for creating and managing the new development in the future.
- Key criteria have been developed as part of the bidding process to enable government to evaluate the community submission.
- The timescale for submission, evaluation and spend is very short - 25<sup>th</sup> January 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019.
- Concerns are raised by APSE about the sustainability of such spaces, the value of the grant in its ability to make any real impact and the timescale involved.
- A final comment is the concern over the possibility of local authorities having to take on these sites if community management struggles, at a time when parks and wider greenspace budgets are consistently being reduced.

#### **Background**

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has announced a £1 million fund for the development of pocket parks and the refurbishment of areas within existing parks. The aim of the fund is to develop new green spaces in those areas where there is a lack, but also provide additional funding to existing parks which need some degree of refurbishment.

This has come about as a result of Government acknowledging the health benefits of greenspaces but also recognising the wider benefits of delivering quality local natural environments, reducing isolation by enhancing community cohesion

Application forms can be found at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/761602/Pocket\\_Parks\\_Plus\\_Application\\_Form.docx](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/761602/Pocket_Parks_Plus_Application_Form.docx) will need to be submitted by Friday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

The Pocket Parks Plus Fund will require a significant input from local communities who will be expected to submit the application and create and maintain these areas and thereby reap the health and well-being benefits for years to come.

## Funding Details

**Pocket Parks** are defined pieces of land up to 0.4 hectares, although most pocket parks tend to be around 0.02 hectares – the size of a tennis court. Government has stated that it will be looking for innovative designs for such facilities as well as traditional pocket park designs.

With regards to **refurbishing exiting parks**, this could include improving access for those with limited mobility, refurbishing a children's play area or enabling a park to become a focal point for young families.

The fund will not be able to be used to carry out general maintenance or repairs which will remain the responsibility of the local authority.

The aim of the fund is to create tailored green spaces, which meet the needs of the local community, which has applied for the grant and importantly, has provided evidence of a local need for such facilities. Not only will the green spaces be created or refurbished, but evidence will be required to show that these spaces will be safe, usable and that there will be a long-term support for the work carried out.

The grants themselves will be provided to a community-led body working in partnership with their local authority.

Grants will be allocated as follows:

£15,000 for a new pocket park  
£25,000 for the refurbishment of existing parks split between capital and revenue.

Grants will be paid to the local authority supporting the grant application so that they can release funding as needed to the community to deliver the project.

Key to a successful bid is to prove how the new green space or refurbishment will help deliver:

- better quality spaces
- increase social mixing
- promote or contribute to healthy living
- provide relaxation and play opportunities

- promote food growing and contact with nature

An important point to consider when applying for the grant is site ownership. Ownership can rest with the community, the local council, or other public or private sector bodies or even a trust including housing associations. All bids must have the landowners agreement regarding the works proposed.

Government acknowledges that community groups may need help to create and maintain sites and therefore should look to gain support from other organisations such as local authorities, or relevant networks who have previous experience in delivering such works. This can be done by becoming part of an existing network or using some of the revenue funding to invite expert contributions.

Funding will form two parts:

- Capital – supporting the preparation of the site
- Resource – securing support from relevant experts e.g. landscape architects, lawyers, horticulturalists etc.

Funding will not be provided for any schemes which would have occurred without the Pocket Parks Plus funding.

Successful applicants will be encouraged to share any learning, innovation and best practice back to the green space sector.

A programme criteria has been developed against which projects will be evaluated. Key criteria include:

- Evidence of need
- Applicant – a group constitution will be essential
- Site
- Nature – habitat opportunities and opportunities to connect with nature
- Match-funding – a minimum of 30% is required
- Deliverability and value for money
- Sustainability
- Evaluation

Further details on the above criteria can be found at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/761603/Pocket\\_Parks\\_Plus\\_Prospectus.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/761603/Pocket_Parks_Plus_Prospectus.pdf)

The final point to consider is that one of the key requirements is that those successful in acquiring funding are likely to receive it in early March 2019 and be expected to have **spent it by the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019.**

## **APSE Comment**

Once again Government is offering additional funding to create pocket parks as it did in 2015/6. This funding may well be welcomed by those authorities who have active and well-organised community groups who are willing to take a 'hands on' approach to

maintaining these types of facilities once they have been created. However, at a time when local authorities parks and wider green space budgets are continuing to shrink a great deal of care needs to be taken when considering the creation of new facilities which may well fall back on local authorities to maintain if the community group management fails.

APSE is certainly in favour of creating new green spaces and improving existing parks which have community benefit, particularly in areas of deprivation where access to green space may be limited. However, APSE is equally cautious about the potential for such sites if not managed properly to become attractants for vandalism, fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour, thereby adding further to the problems of the area and a further drain on already overstretched council greenspace budgets.

Other concerns include the level of funding being allocated, which even with match-funding seems very limited bearing in mind its objectives. Previous discussions with parks managers on the fund have shown that the view was that quality rather than quantity should have been the approach taken, particularly when considering the work required to access the funding. But the speed at which the funding must be spent may have precluded larger grants being spent in time.

APSE therefore feels that this fund is rather rushed and may not have the impact, both short and long-term, it is intended to achieve. If government is serious about increasing local greenspace and refurbishing existing parks, then perhaps a slightly longer time scale with a wider degree of consultation would have been more appropriate.

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