

The Levelling Up Parks Fund -Announcement of funding applications.

To: All Chief Executives, Senior Policy Officers, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England.

The briefing note is for information with regards to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Key issues

- Government announced on 1 August 2022 a list of 85 English local authorities who would benefit from the Levelling Up Fund for Parks which has allocated £9 million pounds to 85 authorities to create or significantly revamp existing parks in neighbourhoods most deprived of outdoor space and who rate highly on the Index of Multiple Deprivation
- The £9 million will include £2 million for supporting tree planting in parks to help combat carbon emissions, improve air quality and offer opportunities for wildlife. A further £1 million will be allocated to fund devolved administrations to help to consider how they can help support green spaces.
- The local authorities identified, will be able to opt into the scheme from the 1 August with a deadline of 5 September to register. From 3 October project proposals will be confirmed and funding allocated.
- Whilst welcoming and additional funding APSE questions the usefulness of the grants being allocated in achieving anything more than a few small-scale repairs / refurbishments and a few dozen trees being planted in a local authority park.
- APSE would be interested to receive details of any Levelling Up Funds for Parks projects and their value to local communities to be able to assess the value of this type and size of funding both to local authorities and their residents.

Introduction

Government announced on 1 August 2022 a list of English local authorities who would benefit from the Levelling Up Fund for Parks which has allocated £9 million pounds to 85 authorities to enable them to;

'create new or improved parks in urban areas, helping communities to come together and enjoy the outdoors'.

The cash will be given to councils to create or significantly revamp existing parks in 85 neighbourhoods most deprived of outdoor space and who rate highly on the Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is felt that the new parks will:

'significantly increase access to quality green space for those who need it the most, particularly supporting people without a garden to spend time with friends and family in the natural world'.

Councils will be able to create community gardens to formal greens and town parks and will be able to choose the nature and location of the new or improved parks in their local area, meaning that each green space will be as unique as the community it serves.

The £9 million will include £2 million for supporting tree planting in parks to help combat carbon emissions, improve air quality and offer opportunities for wildlife. A further £1 million will be allocated to fund devolved administrations to help to consider how they can help support green spaces. The remaining funding will be available for grants of up to £85,000 amongst the 85 English local authorities identified.

The local authorities will be able to opt into the scheme from 1 August with a deadline of 5 September to register. From 3 October project proposals will be confirmed and funding allocated.

Eligible councils that opt in will receive an equal grant of £85,000 consisting of :

1. Up to £47,500 capital for creation or improvement of the park
2. Up to £18,500 revenue for project preparation, creation and maintenance
3. Up to £19,000 tree uplift' for tree planting and related costs.

It should be noted that even if councils are not eligible for the grant, Government is still interested to gather ideas to kickstart an urban green space project.

Further details about the Levelling Up Fund for Parks can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-parks-fund-prospectus/levelling-up-parks-fund-prospectus>

APSE Comment

Whilst any new money to improve the country's parks and green spaces is welcome, APSE does question the usefulness of the grants being allocated in achieving anything more than a few small-scale repairs / refurbishments and a few dozen trees being planted in a local authority park.

From estimates gathered the cost of a small to medium sized community playground catering for up to 13-year-olds (play equipment only) costs between £70,000 - £160,000 depending on the number of pieces of equipment installed. Tree planting depending on whether whips or mature trees can cost between £1 - £1,000 per tree.

The idea of creating a new park or significantly refurbishing a park in the true sense of the word is simply unachievable with the funding available.

However, on a more positive note the Levelling Up Fund for Parks does mention 'parklets' which are defined as *'old parking spaces that have been transformed into something for people to enjoy'*. Parklets can take many forms and are aimed at bringing communities together by allowing them to design them and thereby develop a greater sense of ownership, providing adults and children alike with some much-needed local green space. <https://www.wearepossible.org/parklets>

Although it is recognised that parklets may be an opportunity they will achieve little environmentally beyond perhaps housing a few trees and some basic planting, or at best an option for small scale community food growing.

What is concerning is that the Levelling Up Fund for Parks is raising expectations with the public by highlighting a wide range of exciting projects, which in reality are unaffordable with the funding being offered. This offer, will no doubt lead to those local authorities identified feeling pressured to take advantage of the grants and then having to support some of the projects from already overstretched budgets, certainly the money available for revenue will be spent within a very short time and once again local authorities will have to pick up the ongoing costs.

The Levelling Up Fund for Parks is yet another example of 'sticking plaster funding' in that it is holding together some of the cracks caused by ongoing austerity measures and the resultant insufficient parks and greenspace funding. This is despite every political party and environmental experts acknowledging the importance of these assets to public health and well-being and the wider climate and ecological emergency the UK and the rest of the world is facing.

Interestingly, the whole idea of the wider Levelling Up Fund is to support investment in places where it can make the biggest difference to everyday life, including ex-industrial areas, deprived towns and coastal communities. The Levelling Up Fund for Parks has the same aim but aimed at those areas with reduced levels of access to green spaces. Part of the £9 million fund is to increase tree planting in parks in the 85 local authorities identified as most in need. This 'tree uplift' has equated to **up to** £19,000 per authority. It has just been announced by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, that he will be spending over £3 million on a tree planting package to protect and future proof London in response to the impacts of climate change.

The Mayor of London stated:

'The climate emergency is the biggest global threat we face today and we know that it doesn't impact all Londoners equally, with communities suffering poverty, deprivation and health inequalities more likely to experience the worst effects of flooding, overheating and poor-quality air.'

To counter this approach APSE would be interested to receive details of any Levelling Up Funds for Parks projects and their value to local communities, in order to gauge whether the funding available will make a difference, or as is feared, is simply a relatively small-scale initiative, with no impact on the real problems facing the financial sustainability of our parks and greenspaces.

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