

Pocket Parks: Frequently Asked Questions



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

What is a pocket park?

Pocket parks are considered to be small areas of inviting public green space where people can relax, exercise, socialise and play. We welcome proposals that provide a pocket park that the community welcomes, needs and values in any shape and form. They must be openly accessible for the communities they will serve, and ideally offer open access for anyone wishing to use them.

The definition of a Pocket Park is:

“a piece of land of up to 0.4 hectares (although many are around 0.02 hectares, the size of a tennis court) which may already be under grass but which is unused, undeveloped or derelict”.

They can be both natural and more formal in character (and perhaps ideally a blend of both) on the basis that they either will provide a green open space that also offers habitat opportunities and opportunities for people to connect with nature.

Why are you being so prescriptive about the size of Pocket Parks?

We want to support the development of small plots of derelict land situated as close as possible to the communities who can benefit from it. Evidence shows that these small plots of green space can create a valuable asset for communities that might not otherwise be able to benefit from being close to nature.

Where can a pocket park be located?

They can be anywhere where there is a local need from a new or improved local green space that will deliver benefits to communities e.g. in a housing estate, adjacent to a canal, in a high street, in the ground of a local community facility such as a library or community centre

Can I renovate a park?

Yes. Providing you meet the criteria set out in the prospectus.

Can I use this money to establish a new park?

We are inviting applications from communities to apply for funding to support them with establishing new pocket parks, creating safe and usable green spaces, and for helping to restore and renovate existing parks which have fallen into disrepair, bringing them back into public use.

If I received funding through the 2018 Pocket Parks Plus scheme can I apply for the current scheme?

If, as an organisation, you were successful in obtaining funding through Pocket Parks Plus you can still apply to create a new park or renovate an existing park or part of a park in this scheme.

Please note however the principle aim of this funding is to create new parks or renovate existing parks that have fallen into disrepair. As projects funded under the Pocket Parks Plus

scheme are less than a year old, we would not expect them to have fallen into disrepair within a short time period. The new scheme can support applications for extending renovations of a park funded through Pocket Parks Plus provided it was for a new area of a park. It cannot be used to top up funding for an existing renovation projects.

How much funding is available?

MHCLG have announced £1.35m funding for Pocket Parks in 2019/20. Grants of up to £15,000 are available for new pocket parks and up to £25,000 for renovation of existing parks or parts of a park.

Why is MHCLG focusing on local needs?

In order to help build stronger communities it is important to address local needs such as loneliness, health issues and integration. These issues can be prevalent in areas of varying levels of deprivation. Applications that can clearly set out a clear local need are likely to receive a higher score.

Are all parks eligible for renovation?

Yes. The scheme allows applicants to renovate an existing park or part of a park (these can be any size).

What do you define as a community group?

By community group we mean a group of people who have come together for a shared/common purpose – this might include friends’ groups, tenants or residents’ groups, community gardeners’ associations, town teams, coastal community teams, voluntary and community organisations, town and parish councils or even Business Improvement Districts and Community Interest Companies (CiC). The group must have a formal constitution. If you are not part of a group, then you will need to either form one or partner with one.

Registered charities and non-profit organisations are also eligible. There needs to be a demonstrable strong track record of involvement in the community. Selected bidders should be credible organisations and should not already be receiving grant funding for the same or similar purpose.

Can a school be classed as a community group?

Schools are not classed as a community group. However, a school may wish to work in partnership with a local community organisation to deliver a new pocket park or renovation of an existing park that could benefit the school and the local community. Any new or renovated area would not be for the exclusive use of the school. We would expect it to be available to the local community out of school hours.

Can more than one community group apply for funding in this scheme?

Yes. Having applications from several communities in one local authority area is acceptable, as long as the local authority is willing to partner them all. A separate application form must be completed for each park.

Can we submit bids for more than one site?

Yes. One application per site but you can submit as many applications as you wish

Can we develop a park that is not publicly available at all times?

Ideally parks should be accessible to the public at all times but there are cases where, for example, a pocket park may be created in the grounds of a school to address a local need. This would result in access to the public being limited to outside school hours but would benefit the young people throughout the school day. The key issue is to demonstrate that a local need will be addressed through the new or renovated park.

Why are we expected to work with a local authority? What level of local authority are we expected to work with?

MHCLG funding will be provided via the principal level (i.e. county, district or unitary) local authority to which we will make the grant under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. We are unable to provide funding through town and parish councils. By making an application to MHCLG for funding, communities agree to be willing to accept the local authority's terms and conditions for the provision of grant. Should you wish to see these terms and conditions before applying for a grant from MHCLG, please discuss them with your local authority partner. Working with the local authority comes with many benefits. It is essential that they are supportive of proposals as the body responsible for local green space planning and strategies and as leaders of the local planning process whenever change is proposed. They will also be able to signpost communities to others in their local area who can offer relevant support.

Details of those local authorities which are eligible to hold grants are as follows

Bodies that are defined as local authorities for the purposes of section 31 are as follows (see section 33(1) of the Local Government Act 2003.

- a) a county council;
- b) a county borough council;
- c) a district council;
- d) the Greater London Authority;
- e) a London borough council;
- f) the Common Council of the City of London, in its capacity as a local authority, police authority or port health authority;
- g) the Council of the Isles of Scilly;
- h)

Bodies that are not defined as local authorities for the purpose of section 31 include:

- a) Parishes;
- b) Local authority bodies which are not themselves local authorities such as the Local Government Association, London Councils or Improvement and Development Agency;
- c) National Park authorities (grant can be paid to these authorities under section 72 of the Environment Act 1995); and
- d) the Broads Authority (grant can be paid to this authority under section 15 of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988); and
- e) partnerships and groups that local authorities belong to such as Local Strategic Partnerships and Regional improvement and Efficiency Partnerships.

Which other partners do you think might be able to help?

We encourage communities to work with and join up with local partners and networks in order to draw support from them. For example, MHCLG's 'MyCommunity' website provides a wide range of support and advice for communities. We also know a range of networks dedicated to the green space sector exist that bring together communities interested in green spaces to share knowledge and good practice and help communities grow their skills. The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces (<https://www.natfedparks.org.uk>) is a key organisation to contact and they can put you in touch with groups in your local area. You could also visit the parks community website which will help provide information:

www.parkscommunity.org.uk/.

There are also businesses that can support communities with developing and managing sites and growing the skills to do so. Supporters might also include local town teams, Business Improvement Districts or Traders' Associations looking to support their local high street through a new shared space for customers and communities to enjoy. Where resource is required to access this support, communities can propose covering that cost through use of a

portion of the revenue funding component of their grant. Procurement of any paid services will need to follow the requirements of the local authority holding the grant for you – please discuss these with your partner authority.

What can MHCLG’s funding be used for?

A grant will comprise of ‘capital’ and ‘revenue’. The capital element is for any physical works required to develop the site, to put it into a condition the community can manage in the future and to add features (such as pathways or benches) The revenue element is for communities to invest in managing the site going forward and/or to secure the skills and advice they need to deliver the project. This may include;

- a) Securing professional help to develop a plan for how to sustain park delivery
- b) Gaining access to networks that can connect communities with other groups who are experienced in managing spaces to share advice, good practice and skills.

We appreciate our funding will not support everything a community may want in a pocket park. MHCLG’s funding is envisaged as being used to establish the site as a pocket park and to be restored into a condition where the community and their partners can maintain it and add to it as they secure further funding (including the match funding required).

Can we apply for a grant for a suitable project that is already under way?

The grant is for new schemes or those that would not happen without MHCLG’s money. We will not support the implementation of projects which are well under way or work that would happen anyway.

What does “making use of natural features” mean?

Sites must meet the criteria for size and nature (please refer to the prospectus for further details). These features can be both natural and more formal in character (and perhaps ideally a blend of both) on the basis that they will provide/enhance a green open space that also offers habitat opportunities and opportunities for people to connect with nature.

Can we use the grant for play equipment?

Playground furniture requires a significant level of resourcing for on-going maintenance, for safety reasons. Many designers working in small spaces now look instead to incorporate ‘playful features’ into the landscape such as climbing rocks, grass mounds etc. which are more natural and therefore have added value as habitat for nature that people can connect with, enjoy and requires very little maintenance. Our criteria places more weight to proposals that promote more natural, playful features. While proposals which request funding for off the shelf equipment will not be precluded, schemes that value and make use of existing landscape features are likely to score more highly.

Does the match funding need to be in place at the time of application?

Yes. MHCLG will look for communities to explain in their applications what match funding they plan to secure, how and by when, and have demonstrated their commitment to securing it by end of the 2019/20 financial year. Match funding should be for at least 30% of MHCLG funding; if communities believe they cannot secure this in full, they should still submit their applications and tell us how much they believe they can secure.

What would be considered suitable as match funding?

This can take many forms and we are open to any proposals from the community. Options might include (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Other grants schemes offered by local authorities, charitable foundations or trusts
- Lottery or business providers
- Direct fundraising amongst a local community, individuals and/or business
- Newer forms of funding such as Crowdfunding

Does match funding have to be cash support?

No. We are happy to accept in-kind support such as time or materials. Applicants will be expected to set out the monetary value of the support they are receiving.

How do I value voluntary labour time? Is there a formula?

No there is no formula. It is for you as the applicant to set out how you have calculated the value of voluntary labour. You could, for example, use the national minimum wage as a measure.

Does the grant include VAT?

It is for you as the applicant to ascertain whether costs are subject to VAT or not. The grant is a one-off payment that will include payment of VAT where applicable.

Is the match funding in addition to the grant applied for?

Yes, it is. So, for example if you applied for a £15,000 grant, we would expect you to provide evidence of at least £4,500 match funding.

How will my application be assessed?

All applications will be scored against the same criteria as set out in the prospectus. Following the closing date, applications will be sifted against these criteria by MHCLG, with those considered a good match undergoing a robust, objective assessment process.

When will I know if we have been awarded a grant?

MHCLG will contact all successful applicants directly once the assessment panel has confirmed its decisions. All applicants will be informed by February 2020.

The prospectus says the budget needs to be spent by the end of March 2020.

Ideally, we would like to see all resource grants provided spent within the financial year. Given the timescales of when this grant will be paid though we understand the pressures for LA's and community groups to be able to implement the whole project within a month. Many of the projects are subject to planting schedules and weather dependent. Once the grant has been paid to the LA you should work with them to agree how the funding is spent.

Something that demonstrates that the receiving body has already spent the funding or can still utilise the funding i.e. that work has started to take place, or the undertaking has been fully committed to, should be sufficient in this instance. It is then up to LA's discretion about how to account for this.

What sort of uses could a new or renovated park support?

Parks can be used from anything from children's play areas, vegetable patches, community orchards, green gyms or delivering community events.

Will there be further funding round next year?

No, MHCLG funding is only available this financial year.

How can I contact a group that has benefitted from previous pocket parks schemes?

Many organisations have social media sites which you will be able to access. Alternatively, you could contact MHCLG parks team who may be able to provide contact details if publicly available

Is this scheme available in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland?

No. This is an England-only scheme.

Why isn't MHCLG extending the deadline for applications during purdah to help applicants secure the required match-funding?

We know that some applicants will find it difficult to secure the required match-funding as a result of purdah. Where applicants feel they would be affected by the impact of purdah, they should explain their match funding plans and tell us where purdah has caused very specific difficulties and we can take that into consideration – but only if any delays in securing match-funding can be directly attributable to purdah, not as a general exception or rule.

MHCLG Pocket Parks
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