

Pocket Parks Plus: Frequently Asked Questions



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

What is a pocket park?

Pocket Parks are envisaged as small areas of inviting public 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. 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. They must be openly accessible for the communities they will serve, and ideally offer open access for anyone wishing to use them.

Where can a Pocket Park be?

They can be anywhere where there is a local need that can benefit from a new or improved local green space

How much funding is available?

The Secretary of State announced £1m funding for the Pocket Parks Plus scheme. Grants of up to £15,000 are available for new pocket parks and up to £25,000 for refurbishment of existing parks or parts of a park.

Why is MHCLG focusing on local needs?

The previous scheme focussed on deprived areas and communities with less access to quality green space. However local needs such as loneliness, health issues, integration and immigration are not just in deprived areas, so the scheme is now targeting areas that have identified a specific local need. Those areas setting out how a clear need can be addressed through their application are likely to receive a higher score.

Are all parks eligible for refurbishment?

Yes. The scheme allows applicants to either create a new pocket park or refurbish 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 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 CiCs. The group will have a constitution. If you are not part of a group, then you will need either to form one or partner with one.

Registered charities and non-profit organisations are 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 community apply for grant for more than one Pocket Park?

Yes. Having applications from several communities in one local authority area is fine, 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

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. 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?

Communities are encouraged to identify in their application any partners and networks they wish to draw support from. 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.

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 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 'capital' and 'revenue'. The capital element is for envisaged as being for physical works to develop the site, to put it into a condition the community can manage it going forward and to add features (such as pathways or benches) and interpretation. 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. 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 also managing spaces to share advice, good practice and skills.

We appreciate our funding will not support all 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 put 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? Can we use the grant for play equipment?

Sites must meet the criteria for size and nature. They can be both natural and more formal in character (and perhaps ideally a blend of both) on the basis that they will provide a green open space that also offers habitat opportunities and opportunities for people to connect with nature. Playground furniture requires a significant allocation for continuing 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. Our criteria would place added value on 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 gain more favour with assessors.

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

Yes. MHCLG will look for communities to have explained 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 2018/19 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 in that how much they believe they can secure.

What would be 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 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 going forward a panel of green space experts drawn from MHCLG's partners.

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 the end of February 2019

The prospectus says the budget needs to be spent by the end of March 2019. This is a very short period of time following the announcement of successful bids?

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, it seems unreasonable for LA's to be able to implement the whole project within a month.

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.

Will there be further funding next year?

No, MHCLG funding is only available this financial year.

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

No. This is an England-only scheme.