

Extension Funding Application Form

Please answer the following questions as fully as possible, taking into account the word limits in brackets. Please provide as much detail and evidence as you can, as this will help us to build the case for your extension funding.

Future Parks Accelerator remains a strategic priority for our organisations and we very much hope for a positive outcome from our extension funding application, however it is important to note that your application will be entering a highly competitive funding environment. You must present a convincing case for investment that clearly demonstrates the progress you have made so far and shows that you have a clear plan in place to secure a healthy and sustainable future for your parks and green spaces.

A process map is attached to this document for your reference.

Please seek support from your Account Manager during this process, it is their role to help and advise you. If you have any questions or concerns, you can also contact Eleanor.Potter@futureparks.org.uk.

The deadline for submission is **Friday 7th August 2020**. Please submit your application forms and any attachments to Georgina.Harvey@futureparks.org.uk.

1. ***Please tell us about your FPA project to date:***

a. **What have you achieved so far? [500 words]**

Naturally Birmingham started with a strong vision (Appendix 1) to integrate the natural environment across the whole council; how this was planned and referenced is shown on the Bid on a Page (Appendix 2); to date Naturally Birmingham has achieved:

Box 1, 2 and 4

- We have completed our baseline for the current view of our ecological network using a ground-breaking national method of satellite capture technology.
- Through developing a good relationship with parks service data team, we have a good understanding of our current green estate (and associated costs) mapped using GIS.
- We commissioned a Natural Capital Account, which highlighted £11 billion worth of value from our parks and green spaces, over 25 years.

Box 3, 5A, 6, 7

- We have worked with partners TAWS to understand our community needs pertaining to our pilot sites. Our pilots have been testing interventions in a range of different community settings which is important for a city as diverse as Birmingham. Working across our partners we used this information together with an evidence review, intelligence on activity in green spaces to develop a full set of proposals in each of the four pilot themes (housing, children's, health and wellbeing, and employment and skills).
- Our achievements on the pilots are detailed in Appendix 3. What has been crucial here is building relationships and using the right opportunity to start a conversation. Working with education is a good example of this – we have been trying to engage them since Jan 20. Covid 19 has given the FPA director the opportunity to work more closely with them, build relationships and offer the perfect moment to help them realise that green spaces can offer a solution.
- We have undertaken a full engagement programme including 3 internal BCC conversations, 10 community conversations and 157 responses to an online survey which show good support for our thinking and have helped to inform our delivery of the pilots – see Appendix 4 for a summary of findings.
- We have commissioned a YouGov poll of Birmingham residents.

- We have agreement with Birmingham 2022 Games to co-develop a People's Movement and Digital Platform regarding the environment. This is a key success which allows us to secure a legacy for FPA by linking it to such a regional and national event.
- The Health Impact Assessment Team have been re-directed onto Covid preventing testing.

Box 8

- We have commissioned an external evaluation team who are developing our evaluation framework and baselining analysis has commenced

Box 9,10, 11, 13

We have seen corporate work aligning with our own FPA aims and objectives. Some corporate projects include -

- Review of planning process with respect to public open spaces, and initial engagement with the city's contracted land and asset valuers- over planning viability formulae
- Being approached by major developments in the City to apply the 'FPA lens' to live development processes (such as Edgbaston Reservoir Master Plan) and the East Birmingham Development Corridor.

These represent opportunities to embed FPA thinking in the long term. Importantly, approaches have been made to us rather than the other way around which suggests others are keen to see a different way of working embedded, and that departmental silos are being broken down. **(531 words)**

b. What difference has your FPA project made to date in your place? [250 words]

We are seeing real cross-Council directorate and cross-organisation working. Officers outside of the 'parks service' connecting green spaces to their roles e.g. our Employment & Skills pilot lead is bidding for ERDF/ ESF with a green spaces focus; and BCC planning colleagues and Birmingham Open Spaces Forum have now joined forces over green space – this has never happened before in the City.

Mindsets are changing in the Council. Our Inclusive Growth Director, Assistant Director and senior team are asking questions about the future of urban green space and wanting to be part of the solution. The Council's Executive Management Team recognise there is a convergence of agendas for climate/ ecological emergencies, impact of Covid-19, the levelling-up agenda and our FPA - environmental justice ties these all together.

There is greater recognition across Public Health and the wider Council that for the most vulnerable to Covid-19, quality urban green space and nature connectedness makes a difference. Digital engagement has provided the bridge to rebuild confidence and trust which we are seeing through our HWB pilot Parks@Home service.

The public are enthused by our work - we have had thousands of views on social media, capturing people's imagination across the City. This is also helping parks staff to reconnect to the original aims of their jobs e.g. through the Ranger Service supporting our pilots. **(248 words)**

c. Do you feel that your work to date has laid the groundwork for the systems change / transformation you are aiming for? If so, how? If not, why do you think that is? [250 words]

Yes – as described below:

A Citywide strategic policy review tests the effectiveness of the current system in relation to green spaces. This has started an overhaul of both the housing and planning processes in the City under the Director of Inclusive Growth. Engagement with the East Birmingham North Solihull Growth Corridor has meant they are seeking external funding to support a role to continue FPA thinking as part of their Rapid Policy and Delivery Unit.

The Health and Wellbeing Board is asking for FPA to be embedded within its 4 subgroups - mental health, inequality, physical activity and food. This links to the creation of an Environmental Justice Board (to be chaired by our Assistant Chief Executive), which will replace our existing Future Parks Board. This is important with respect to a legacy for our work; related to this is a language change from FPA to green spaces to see the impact of the programme lasting beyond its lifetime.

We can also now redefine the relationship between money and green space – our Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources will chair a finance working group we are setting up.

We recognise there is more work to do – the Parks service need more support to help reconnect them to the wider parts of the Council, and to improve their confidence in operating in a more digital world. We have made small steps in engaging procurement, the key to large businesses. More work is needed to win hearts and minds. **(249 words)**

d. What have you learnt so far? [250 words]

- Language, semantics and culture of different parts of the Council do vary and it takes time to learn this, and importantly, be able to talk to each other in a way that makes sense
 - We are re-directing a super-tanker, so this is less about strength and more about being fleet of foot. This means moving fast on opportunities as they arise; being bold about your vision; being convinced about your evidence; knowing you have overwhelming public support; and being flexible in your mindset recognising where and how multiple agendas converge; then going for it.
 - Don't get frustrated jumping through hoops; accept it comes with the task and build processes into your plan.
 - Good people are very hard to recruit but worth their weight in gold once you have them. Building a strong team has been very satisfying and demonstrated just what can be achieved.
 - Some partners are more committed or engaged than others. That doesn't relate to funding- but wider motivations and interests.
 - Momentum builds momentum.
 - Information and messaging need to be in different formats for different audiences – that's how you get engagement.
 - Flexibility is key – if your plan is not working well, change tack.
 - 'Steal with pride' - the cohort sharing, and background research has shown many good things already exist so don't reinvent them.
 - Perfection is the enemy of progress – good enough is by and large ok.
 - Be prepared to learn new things and have your own mind changed e.g. we weren't considering a Parks Foundation model at the start of the process but are now actively looking at how we bring in external finance through fundraising.
- (269 words)**

e. How have you shared what you have done so far with others? [250 words]

We have held over 13 conversations with both internal BCC colleagues and the Birmingham public. We have maximised attendance at full Cohort events and take an active part in smaller cohort events e.g. led the July 2020 mini Northern cohort and been active in virtual sharing such as setting up a cohort conversation employment webinar. We have positively contributed to the climate change and natural capital working groups. We have developed (and shared) a great international connection with Itai Palti of the Conscious City movement around Parks moving away from destination towards integration. We also communicate with project leads outside of 'official events' such as with Nottingham to support their evaluation work as well as regular communication with other programme managers. We have developed a good relationship with Bournemouth and Bristol regarding Parks Foundations, and they have really supported our journey on this. We have taken part in other LA conversations around green spaces and what we are doing as part of our FPA programme. We have also drafted some learning around digital engagement re green spaces to be published by our evaluators to start sharing our learning outside of the immediate FPA. We have played a full and active role in the rapid prototyping support from National Trust- our work with Hannah Davies on fundraising has really helped broker an honest conversation around alternative ways to resource green spaces; work with Casey Morrison has paved the way for us to try new ways of encouraging and capturing volunteering, which is now in train. **(254 words)**

2. Please tell us about your future plans:

a. How do you plan to embed your work to ensure that your project achieves lasting change? [250 words]

We are looking to develop leaders within BCC who will advocate and champion green spaces once the FPA programme has ended, (Appendix 8). We plan to achieve this through a roadmap (Appendix 5); some examples are:

- We will reconstitute our FPA Board into an Environmental Justice Board so that it is owned outside of the FPA programme - this will be a senior officer, system wide forum that focusses on the environment and green space, operating at a sub-Cabinet level to parallel the statutory Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Board
- We are developing a 25 yr. Nature Recovery and Green Infrastructure strategy (as a strand of Birmingham Development Plan) that is owned by Inclusive Growth
- Public Health have committed to developing a Healthy City Framework at a strategic level; green spaces will be embedded within this
- We are developing an environmental justice audit (Appendix 7) which will bring together key data across the City together with our green estate. This will be owned and updated by our council GIS team so that we are able to make decisions about green space availability and development at a neighbourhood level
- We will embed alternative funding models including corporate re-alignment of budgets through support of local academics and our BCC finance team and external finance including through a foundation model

We are working with Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022 and National Trust to develop a virtual platform for a one stop shop for citizens interested in environmental information. This will focus on how the community can access support for green spaces linking to housing, employment/ skills, children, HWB, and volunteering packages across all these areas. **(270 words)**

b. What are the main risks associated with your future plans? [150 words]

Birmingham's high ambition is to embed a new governance model for the natural environment across the whole council with 4 supporting frameworks (Appendix 6c). This connects with every cabinet portfolio and all directorates, so communicating the outcome benefits to everyone is a considerable task. Guiding BCC Finance through this journey will be key.

- As the programme comes towards the end this may decrease momentum which causing delay to reaching programme milestones
- Keeping people engaged and excited will be an issue, especially as there is uncertainty around what Covid 19 will bring (and what is the new Covid 19 'normal'). The scale of the task is enormous - internally, we are trying to influence at least 12000 staff members to reconsider their work (and personal) relationship with green spaces.
- Although we are developing a model of 'integration champions', (Appendix 8) the resource to keep driving the agenda once FPA finished still needs to be fully thought through, agreed and actioned
- Keeping FPA grant funded people in employment as we approach the end of our programme will be a challenge given the nature of funding and their contracts. **(186 words)**

c. What is your project leading for? What further plans do you have for influencing change in the wider sector? [250 words]

Our unique selling point for Naturally Birmingham is a complete rethink of the governance model surrounding green spaces, which we hope to achieve in two ways:

1. The focus currently is on parks being a 'destination', a place that people 'go' to. Our FPA is leading for 'integration' - whereby parks and green spaces are embedded into the different departments of the Council, and in turn, into people's lives. Unless they are integrated, they will always be a budget line that need to be paid for, rather than an asset that benefits a range of departmental priorities.
2. Residents currently have unequal access to green space in our City – this is largely related to deprivation. The minimum threshold of 2 ha green space /1000 residents is not achieved across the City – and is under threat with the loss of more public open space. Given we know the value that green spaces offer to health and wellbeing, this is an issue of injustice. Our FPA is therefore leading to restore environmental justice, and we will showcase this through a GIS solution. We will use this to highlight issues of inequality around green spaces, help address the issue and thus bring more equality to the lives of our residents.

By working with university collaborations (e.g. WM Air¹, SATURN² and REPLENISH³) and large development plans such as the East Birmingham Growth Corridor, and WMCA and B2022 Games, we aim to embed our FPA principles within these structures to help them continue our thinking in the long term. **(255 words)**

3. Please tell us more about your extension funding application:

- a. Please confirm the amount of extension funding you are requesting.**
£205,000

- b. Why do you need extension funding, and what difference would it make to your project? [500 words] (see Appendix 5)**

Led by our research, conversations and collaborations to date, the Naturally Birmingham FPA programme has evolved over the last 6 months.

We have had some key discussions with a range of finance experts which has led to setting up a working group – importantly BCC finance is fully engaged. The funding will allow us to fund some time from external consultants to develop a sustainable finance framework to rethink how we resource parks.

Our work on quality site audits has taken a more strategic focus. We are prioritising a City-wide approach to spatially map key data (deprivation, health and wellbeing, economic, children and the built environment) alongside our existing green space; to develop an environmental justice framework. This will allow the City to make key decisions on where to (or not to) grant planning permission for developments so that green spaces are protected and prioritised. We will use the funding from the extension to support an established collaboration with Birmingham City University who have expertise in combining large datasets within spatial mapping tools.

Embedding our FPA work into a healthy city framework is only just starting given the focus that Public Health has had on Covid 19. The extra time afforded by extension funding for our FPA Director, who is a Consultant in Public Health, will allow us to lead and advocate for why green spaces should be a key feature as part of this.

Most recently, we have developed a great relationship with the lead for the Conscious Cities Movement (CCM), Itai Palti. The work of FPA is becoming known throughout Inclusive Growth in BCC. We have recently agreed with the Assistant CEO that our extensive plans for the development of the East Birmingham Corridor is perfect for input from CCM to change how we tackle design issues for the built environment to include a focus on nature; so testing the new governance model.

Our HR processes for recruiting new staff as a Local Authority have led to delays in recruitment of FPA funded staff. For this reason, as well as due to Covid 19, this has impacted upon us starting our pilot delivery. The extra funding will mean the existing staff can focus on completion of pilot testing up until May 2021. The extra funding will give the Programme Director and Community Facilitator time to take learning from these pilots and start to embed them across wider BCC departments. We are also using the extension funding to employ our FPA employment & skills officer until March 2022; the world of business and employment is complex in a city as large as Birmingham, and we believe we will need this extra capacity to embed a green space legacy in this sector. Covid 19 has also meant we have delayed some internal engagement within the Local Authority due to other priorities for staff – the extra funding will give us more time for crucial advocacy work.

We have also just recruited a project officer post (a gap identified after our programme commenced) as we have some ambitious plans to embed new changes to volunteering and building a citizen involvement framework– this won't be achieved in the time scale we currently have left. **(530 words)**

c. What would happen to your project if you are not awarded a grant increase? [250 words]

There would be a severely diminished return on the significant investment already made as per below:

- We would have to cut our pilots short e.g. in Dec 2020 (meaning they may only be in delivery for a 4-6 month period) to then allow at least 5 months for some embedding of the findings.

- The FPA team would be released leaving all participating council departments short of human resource to change their processes and embed the necessary change. There would be a serious risk of reverting to type, bringing back silo divisions that the FPA had started to break down. This would leave just the Parks Board to oversee and implement the necessary changes we want to see made; however, a quarterly corporate Board alone could not undertake such a function if the departments had not converted to new ways of thinking and doing.
- An essential element of this FPA is growing organisational capacity (Appendices 6b & 8) across the organisation through the re-alignment of policy, metrics and working methods. This would also have led to the co-creation of new policy and strategy; by not getting the extension grant these changes would be far less likely or happen over a much longer timescale. The impetus from FPA would be lost and so the acceleration sought would not be guaranteed.
- We have ambitious plans to develop a virtual platform which will take a lot of time to gather input, data and find the right place for ownership. The content will rely upon successful proposals which require time to be tested.
- We would not have an alternative external financing mechanism in place to secure further funding for our green spaces. **(275 words)**

d. What are the long-term risks for your green space portfolio if your project is not awarded a grant increase? [250 words]

- Birmingham has recognised that the key risk affecting the future of green spaces in cities is one of governance. Birmingham's FPA therefore addresses this issue on behalf of all cities nationally and internationally.
- Without a fully funded extension Birmingham's new governance model for the natural environment would remain incomplete and not fully embedded. So, the fundamental risk will not have been ameliorated. This has inevitable consequences that as public sector budgets continue to come under greater pressure the green space sector will continue to be reduced.
- More importantly the city would be less able to respond to its 21st century challenges and people's lives and neighbourhoods could see continuous environmental decline. Leaving the city less able to address its climate emergency and Government less able to achieve its levelling-up agenda.
- We will take the risk of pilots staying pilots and thus risk of non-integration or long-term embedded change.
- The portfolio would be vulnerable to the winds of change and the drive for growth. The governance model would remain unchanged so leaving communities disconnected from their spaces and their latent enthusiasm remains untapped; so, losing vital resource for change. This would have serious implications for health and wellbeing across the city too; as highlighted through the pandemic. The full reverberations of environmental justice would not cut through leaving a parks service still focussed on horticultural excellence and grounds maintenance concerns- rather than driving the environment to the centre of the levelling up agenda. **(242 words)**

e. Why do you think we should support your application for extension funding? [250 words]

Birmingham has high ambitions - to integrate the natural environment across the whole Council. This is to grow organisational capacity and is vital to the reimagining of the future of green space in cities. This new governance model approach would then be transferable globally.

We are seeking to establish new working relationships or shared frameworks across 4 cross-cutting themes of environmental justice, sustainable finance, citizen involvement and co-creating a Healthy City Framework with Public Health. Each of these frameworks are based on nationally leading innovative working; all transferable to other places.

Environmental justice will politically reposition green infrastructure as a key delivery mechanism to address the levelling-up and climate emergency agendas together with post Covid Recovery.

The sustainable finance framework then recognises the contribution played by green space in addressing these city outcomes through baseline budget re-alignment.

The role and opportunity for local people to engage positively in addressing their own democratic deficit through their engagement in green space sits at the heart of the citizen involvement framework.

All these frameworks working together with the repositioning of green space provides the very conditions necessary to implement a healthy city framework, starting with those of greatest need. The future for the natural environment has been set by a 25-year vision based on the ecological potential informed through innovative satellite mapping techniques.

We have already made huge progress in breaking down silos in the Council with senior level buy in from our Assistant Chief Executive to work in a different way – an extra 10 months will allow us to cement the vision we have outlined. (263 words)

f. What have you done to minimise the level of additional grant you are asking for? [150 words]

- Re-profiling the existing budget which has released circa £27,000 pounds.
- £10K funding from the Arts Council's post-Covid fund to engage vulnerable young people in Birmingham over their Covid, climate and nature connectedness.
- Accessing support, resources and international perspective through the Biophilic Cities Network.
- BCC Inclusive Growth Strategic Planners have confirmed their willingness to lead and part-fund the future 25-year GI strategy development with the FPA contributing the evidence base.
- Working with Birmingham City University on a Climate KIC programme where Naturally Birmingham serves as an international case study linking climate implications of the fragmented natural environment; brings evaluation tools & funded resources.
- Agreement from 1 BCC department to jointly fund 1 post
- Agreement from BCC finance to offer £15,000 worth of their time in kind;
- BCC Parks agreed to finance the Natural Capital Account baseline £10,000 for Birmingham.
- WMCA grant funded the Ecological Satellite work from their natural capital fund £10,000 (151 words)

g. What sort of support package do you think you might need during the extension phase of your project? [150 words]

We would like to:

- access continued cohort access and sharing.
- access NT's position experience and delivery options around climate change for land and estate management and energy generation

- have ongoing support from NT re parks foundation models and options
- maintain the Account Manager support role & access to wider account managers & central team
- access bespoke support from NT on:
 - Parks @Home virtual communication & engagement in practice and strategy
 - Coaching for change, empowering team members to become change agents
 - Maximising income generation through commercialisation & alternative supporters, donors or sources
 - Building a digital platform for environmental engagement for the city's natural environment
 - Ongoing support around the adoption of the NT Volunteering model **(118 words)**

4. *Please tell us about your parks and greenspaces during the Coronavirus crisis, and your plans for recovery:*

a. Describe the role parks in your place have played in helping your community stay resilient and healthy during the Covid-19 crisis. What have you noticed about who and how parks are used? Has this resulted in any changes to your FPA project? [250 words]

We have seen a fascinating and nuanced response, reflecting difference and diversity across the city. Some popular sites have been inundated with visitors which has made social distancing at times a challenge. Small sites have been 'discovered' and much used. However, we have also seen others neglected, especially where we have high proportions of BAME groups due to community fear of contact with Covid. Naturally Birmingham has now developed a new city policy concept of environmental justice as key switch/focus, (Appendix 7). We are seeing a convergence of national and international agendas such as climate and ecological emergencies, Covid, 'levelling-up' all affect the same neighbourhoods; those suffering from Covid 19 are the same residents who suffer from poor access to good quality green space. Our FPA programme has therefore taken on a new focus whereby we are couching green spaces as part of the solution to Covid 19 recovery, resulting in the FPA Director being invited to join a senior steering group to drive this agenda forward. Suddenly FPA and its systems change approach (new governance model) becomes a point of council-wide focus. There is growing recognition across the top leadership team that green spaces are important in the response to Covid 19. This now is opening-up the way forward for embedding permanent change in this city- whilst potentially acting as a leading example nationally of how and where green infrastructure belongs in city thinking.(235 words)

b. What do you think your FPA project will contribute to recovery in your place? How would an extension help with this? [250 words]

Birmingham working with the West Midlands Combined Authority have draft economic and community recovery plans. Through their engagement with FPA- there's now a recognition for an Environmental recovery plan- and more importantly a revised delivery mechanism. Naturally Birmingham is part of both review teams now. Discussions have just begun on what is required to address the gap around environment. The systems approach of Naturally Birmingham has met with great support and interest. An extension will allow for this to be widely developed and integrated across the city and regional strategy and plans-locking-in the interests of parks and green spaces into all future thinking, policy and delivery; from green jobs to the Health & Wellbeing Board; and from the future housing to connectivity with young people and children.

The FPA will introduce a new linking approach of environmental justice to be addressed at every step, every scale and each decision (Appendix 7). To be critically built into future delivery models. Birmingham's largest development programme by far is the East Birmingham North Solihull Growth Corridor. They are to establish a Rapid Policy and Delivery Unit- and have requested an FPA Placement- to ensure a total integration of the FPA approach and that the environmental justice agenda, gets delivered, (Appendix 5).

Additionally, Naturally Birmingham is about growing organisational capacity for the natural environment (Appendices 6b,6c & 8) enabling all parts of the council to connect their recovery plans positively with the natural environment; achieving embedded integration. **(243 words)**

Please supply a workplan and budget summary for your project's extension period and grant increase.