**Bristol wins share of multi-million pound parks fund**

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Bristol has been awarded almost £1 million to help transform the future of the city’s parks and green spaces. Bristol City Council fought off tough competition to be one of only eight places across the UK selected by the National Trust and The National Lottery Heritage Fund to take part in its ground-breaking Future Parks programme. The council’s proposal was chosen from more than 80 other projects submitted by councils and communities across the UK to receive a share of more than £6m of funding and £5m worth of advice and support from some of the country’s leading experts in conservation, fundraising, volunteering and green space management.

In the first project of its kind in the UK, Future Parks is designed to help councils find sustainable ways to manage and fund parks and open spaces across entire towns and cities. Last year, Bristol City Council submitted its plan to the The National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Trust, to put together a ‘Bristol Parks Prospectus.’ The prospectus will outline Bristol’s green spaces, setting out areas of opportunity to enhance health and wellbeing and sustainability. It will also explore the potential of parks and green space to accommodate business activity, including pay-to-use services considered to be compatible with the character, role and use of a particular site. There is no intention to use this process to ‘sell off parks’.

Councillor Asher Craig, Deputy Mayor with responsibility for parks and green spaces, said: “Bristol has great ambitions for our parks and green spaces, but as a council we recognise that we cannot realise these without working closely with our partners.

“In facing the challenge presented by budget cuts, we need to explore new ways to generate income to support parks.

“The opportunity is to find partners who can add value to the parks experience within a service which is free to use and of benefit to all. “Visiting a park, whether to exercise, meet friends, or simply relax, is good for our health and wellbeing.  But not everyone can access a park easily, and consequently too many people are missing out.  The Parks Prospectus will identify the potential of parks to deliver health benefits matched to areas of greatest need and invite partners to provide health-based programmes from parks including mental health and physical exercise programmes.”

Bristol, and the other seven selected places will now join Newcastle, a founding city of Future Parks, which has successfully developed a new parks and allotments trust to look after the city’s green spaces. Over the next two years Bristol will work to develop tools, approaches, skills and finance to create new way of managing green space as well as sharing their experience with other councils.

Hilary McGrady, the National Trust’s Director General, said: “Today is a landmark moment for the nation’s urban parks. This is not just about new ways to fund and support these much-loved community spaces, but completely re-thinking the role green spaces play in our lives and how we can ensure they thrive for generations to come. “We need to give parks a reboot and start thinking about them as essential elements of our communities in the same way we think about housing or transport. Future Parks is the beginning of something really exciting. What these eight places achieve will help guide how other councils and communities can really make a difference to securing the future of their parks too.

“Ensuring everyone has the opportunity to enjoy green spaces is nothing new to the National Trust; nearly 125 years ago one of our founders, Octavia Hill, created the National Trust so that green spaces could be ‘kept for the enjoyment, refreshment and rest of those who have no country house’.” Ros Kerslake, The National Lottery Heritage Fund’s CEO, said: “Our urban parks and green spaces are essential to the health and well-being of the nation and yet in some areas they are facing a very insecure future. Future Parks isn’t simply patching-up a few problem parks. It is enabling local authorities and communities to take a longer-term, strategic approach to managing, funding and maintaining them, so future generations will be able to enjoy their many benefits in hundreds of years from now.

“Developing strategic approaches and championing innovation are key elements of our new five-year funding strategy. Future Parks allows us to maximise our resources and to work with key partners to accelerate progress and share learning.”