Got an innovative idea to make your local park financially fit?

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Through a new £1m programme, *Rethinking Parks*, Nesta, Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund will support the most innovative and promising new business models for public parks.

The *Rethinking Parks: Exploring New Business Models for Parks in the 21st Century* report published today reflects on how public parks have been the centre of both urban and rural communities since the turn of the nineteenth Century, delivering multiple social, environmental and economic benefits for local communities. Today, 90 per cent of people regularly visit their parks and green spaces.

But with public sector funding for discretionary and non-statutory services like parks projected to fall by 60 per cent or more over the next decade, ambitious new business, management and partnership models are needed to create a more sustainable future for UK public parks.

Through grant funding of up to £100,000 per project and a package of non-financial support, the Rethinking Parks programme will back organisations and partnerships to develop, test and scale new approaches to help local parks thrive. The programme will help park managers and those responsible for park funding and maintenance to test new options for generating income and managing their park.

The report looked at the promising areas for UK park innovation that will make-up the four broad themes within the Rethinking Parks programme:

- **Support changes in park management and maintenance systems**, for example what if communities took on the maintenance of parks or real-time user data from smartphones was used to inform maintenance regimes
- **Encourage new organisational partnerships** that can adopt more locally focused and collaborative approaches to the long-term care of parks
- **Identify more diverse sources of funding and resources** to supplement those from local councils - for example, what if parks made the most of temporary installations to generate income – like open air cinemas, food festivals and art showcases?
- **Explore new uses and activities within parks** from carbon capture to work spaces and more

Anyone with an idea can apply for their stake of the £1m pot. To help people develop their ideas the programme is holding workshops around the country and online in January 2014. The best ideas will be chosen to receive funding in early summer.

Vicki Sellick, Director of the Rethinking Parks programme, said: "Parks have an inherent value in providing space for rest, relaxation and to connect with nature. But with public subsidy diminishing, public parks could easily become overlooked. We need new ways of generating income for parks, new ways of getting communities involved and new ways of getting under-used green spaces used again. We need to Rethink Parks."

She added: “Inspired by the Victorians, the UK has an amazing legacy of public parks. We need to ensure they remain vibrant and resilient for future generations to enjoy. This is an opportunity not to simply maintain the status-quo and

bridge a growing funding gap, but to provide the impetus to rethink in an ecologically and financially sustainable way, parks and parks services that can be better equipped, more attractive and of higher quality in the future."

Organisations interested in attending the Rethinking Parks innovation workshops should register their interest at Rethinking Parks website. A copy of the *Rethinking Parks: Exploring New Business Models in the 21st Century* report is available to download free of charge from the Rethinking Parks website.

Notes to editors

About Rethinking Parks: A joint Nesta, Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund £1m programme to fund and support parks innovators to develop, implement and spread new approaches to sustaining and making the most of UK public parks.

About the partners

- **About Nesta:** Nesta is the UK's innovation foundation. Nesta website.
- **About Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF):** Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) aims to make a lasting difference for heritage, people and communities across the UK and help build a resilient heritage economy.
- **About Big Lottery Fund:** The Big Lottery Fund, the largest distributor of National Lottery good cause funding, is responsible for giving out 40% of the money raised for good causes by the National Lottery. The Big Lottery Fund is committed to bringing real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need and has been rolling out grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK.

Lottery funding for parks

Heritage Lottery and Big Lottery Fund has jointly invested more than £640 million across the UK to transform and regenerate more than 700 parks and public spaces.

The *Rethinking Parks: Exploring new business models for parks in the 21st Century* report explored a diverse range of successful parks business models to surface examples of new management approaches for parks including the establishment of a successful parks trust in Shenley, Hertfordshire; a creative social enterprise that manages a large network of green spaces in one of Sheffield's most deprived neighbourhoods; an independent charity responsible for a number of country parks in Fife, Scotland; and, a cemetery in Bristol that is now managed by a local friends group. It also looked abroad for inspiration of new business models and methods for generating income including innovative funding of both traditional and modern parks in New York, a city wide parks foundation in Los Angeles; a parks service in Freiburg, Germany that adopts strict environmental principles and for cost effective management; and, an intensively used park in Perth, Australia, that maximises its income though programmed events and facilities.

Further information

For media enquiries please contact Natalie Hodgson at Nesta on 020 7438 2614, email: media@nesta.org.uk.