

Heritage Lottery Fund

CEE 2014 (2) 7

Parks for People Case Paper

Recommendation	First Round Pass of £2,117,500, including Development Grant of £110,600
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Summary

Title of project	Bancroft Gardens: A Park for People		
Applicant	North Hertfordshire District Council		
Reference number	PP-13-20870		
Region	East of England	Case Officer	Deborah Milligan

Project costs

Total development costs		£138,200
Development grant requested	80%	£110,600
Total capital costs		£1,859,400
Total activity costs		£60,000
Total other costs		£589,200
Total project costs		£2,646,800
Total partnership funding	20%	£529,300
Grant requested	80%	£2,117,500

The Heritage

Heritage importance	Medium
Is the heritage at risk?	Yes
Case for investment	High

Outcomes

Heritage	High
People	Medium
Communities	Medium

Risk assessment

Delivery	Medium
Sustainability	Medium

Overall value for money	Medium
Priority development area	No

Officer's Recommendation

North Hertfordshire District Council aim to restore and enhance Bancroft Gardens in the centre of Hitchin to attract wider audiences through a range of new facilities and activities and tell the history of the site through restored features and new interpretation.

This is an application from an experienced applicant and is likely to meet all the programme outcomes. The project involves considerable redesign of the public space and new capital works.

There is evidence of public concern about some of the project proposals which would have to be

followed up during development.

Applicant's own description of the project

The project intends to deliver redevelopment of the 3.4 Ha Bancroft Gardens urban park located within the centre of the historic market town of Hitchin. The project aims to realise the park's potential by creating a park for people to play, learn, work and enjoy. A key element of the project will be to better reveal and preserve the site's heritage for future generations, including Bancroft Pavilion, the Bandstand, the gates and pillars, and the River Hiz. There is an emphasis on retaining and enhancing elements of the natural landscape which hold historical significance and contribute to communicating the history of Bancroft Gardens, such as the orchard, osier beds and lavender fields. The project will also ensure the park is better managed and maintains excellence for years to come by putting in place new locally employed staff and volunteers.

1 The Project

North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) are seeking a grant to enhance the heritage of Bancroft Gardens (3.4ha) situated in the centre of Hitchin. This would be achieved by the following redesign and restoration works and associated activities to celebrate the park's history and engage the local community:

- Appoint a new part-time Park Ranger as a permanent member of staff to be based on site.
- Refurbish Bancroft Pavilion with a new extension for public toilets, café, terrace and sports club house.
- Increase green space by removing the existing tennis club building, toilet block and tennis courts which are in a poor state of repair. Four old tennis courts would be removed and three hard courts rebuilt in a more appropriate area. (This is a contentious aspect of the project that does not have full public support at this stage).
- Carry out repair works to the roof and ceiling of the bandstand and provide an enhanced setting with new surfacing and lawn.
- Naturalise the river bed and banks, plant native flora and install information boards.
- Refurbish the boundary walls, gates and gate piers and replace those beyond repair.
- Revitalise the perennial beds with native plant species including lavender to reflect the historic lavender fields. Plant new trees to replace those reaching the end of their lives including orchard species and willow.

- Enhance the existing playground with new equipment such as climbing frames, a water play/feature that reinterprets the historic wading pool, and a natural play area adjacent to the river Hiz including willow to reflect the park's history.
- Install new lighting along paths to improve safety.
- Set up a Friends group to manage the involvement of existing and new volunteers and work with the Park Ranger to deliver new activities. In collaboration with the Friends Group, organise and promote a range of events including concerts, planting sessions, ecology walks, heritage walks and fun runs.
- Engage with local play groups and the 11 primary schools and 2 secondary schools to deliver initiatives to enable them to learn about heritage and ecology.
- Install heritage interpretation throughout the park.
- Promote a range of recreational activities including tennis, yoga, ball games, dog walking, skating, walking and bird watching.
- Deliver new skills development opportunities by involving the community in the restoration of the park through landscape schemes or workshops, such as mass plantings.
- A Parks Champion from Groundwork Hertfordshire would be engaged to deliver outreach including landscape training schemes in partnership with a local college or the Council's contractors, to a range of local people including the unemployed (including NEETS) and those in the North Herts Sanctuary homeless hostel. They would explore the possibility of working with pupils at risk of exclusion or attending the nearby education support centre, Youth Connexions, local schools, the football club and other third sector youth providers.

2 The organisation and HLF

- North Hertfordshire District Council are currently delivering activities following the completion of capital works at Howard Park and Gardens, Letchworth Parks for People project that was awarded £1,841,000 in 2009. In 2003 they completed the restoration of Broadway Gardens in Letchworth with a HLF grant of £820,000.

- The Council was awarded a second round grant of £914,000 in March 2014 to create a new museum in Hitchin Town Hall, combining the collections of Hitchin and Letchworth Museums (Unlocking the Heritage of North Herts, HG-10-01933).

3 The heritage

Heritage importance	Medium
Heritage at risk	Yes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Gardens are a designated public open space within a Conservation Area. They are identified as an important green space in the Conservation Area Character Assessment, and NHDC's Green Spaces Strategy identifies the site as in need of improvements. The park has a variety of trees and formal garden areas, a young children's playground, a bandstand, a river walk and public facilities including tennis courts, bowling greens, pavilion and community hall (although this 1960s pre-fab hall is being demolished in August 2015). • The site was first used as open space in the seventeenth century connected to the tenancies of the Grade II listed Skynners Almhouses. In the nineteenth century the willow grown in the osier beds supplied one of the town's main industries of basket making. At this time and in the early twentieth century the park was in use as an orchard, osier beds and nursery. • The land was purchased by Hitchin Urban DC in 1924 for public recreation. There are several structures that are considered to be of local interest and importance including the boundary walls, gates and gate piers, which are made of local Hitchin iron-slag, the Bowls pavilion c.1929 and the park bandstand. • A large number of organisations engage in activities within the park including the Bancroft User Groups and Supporters (BUGS), Hitchin Bowls Club, Hitchin Tennis Club, Hitchin Walkabout and Playbox. • The Gardens suffer from a lack of long-term investment. The resulting poor conditions include buildings and structures in need of refurbishment, decayed surfacing and substandard planting. The most significant risks include the bandstand which is in a poor state of disrepair with damage to the ceiling and drains, and graffiti evident on the paintwork, the Pavilion which requires urgent repairs to the cracks in the exterior walls to allow its continued use by the bowls club and the boundary walls which are unsafe, suffering large cracks and bowing due to movement from tree roots. • The River Hiz has been denaturalised with the introduction of concrete river banks greatly reducing the river's ecological value. The Gardens have a rich history as a functional 'garden' 	

producing raw materials for trade. The former presence of the orchards, nurseries and osier beds are no longer apparent resulting in the heritage remaining hidden.

4 Case for investment

High

- The Gardens are the main green space in the medieval market town of Hitchin. The site is 8 minutes walk from the main town square with an approximate catchment of 7,600 people living within 10 minutes walk of the site.
- The park currently serves a limited section of the community primarily focusing on young children's play, tennis and bowls. Due to the Garden's location, heritage and natural features there is an opportunity to attract a much wider audience and the project aims to reach children, young people, adults, the elderly and homeless.
- The natural environment is in poor condition as the River Hiz, the aging tree population and areas of planting suffer from poor maintenance and a lack of biodiversity. The majority of trees have reached advanced maturity and subsequently suffer from structural issues. Without intervention the Gardens would lose the majority of its tree cover within the next 25 years.
- Aging and neglected facilities including public tennis courts, bowls lawns, the pavilion and children's play space threaten the community's access to suitable facilities and their management requires reviewing. Some of the aspects such as the boundary walls have become unsafe. The park also has inadequate toilet and changing facilities. The toddler play equipment is in good condition but limited equipment is provided for older children.
- The council is planning to demolish the 1960's hall during the development phase and return the site to parkland. All the activities currently taking place there will be offered alternative venues in the town. Although demolition costs are not part of this application the re-landscaping forms part of the proposals.
- Most of the footpaths are in disrepair and links need to be improved between all the main elements such as the Bandstand, Pavilion and Play Area.
- The historical features are in varying degrees of repair and other features including the pool have been lost altogether. There is little sign of the traditional industries or commercial planting that once characterised the area.
- The site suffers from anti-social behaviour which the project would aim to address by making

the park more appealing and increase social well-being.

- The applicant has confirmed that nearby neighbourhoods have high levels of deprivation and would benefit greatly from the project.

5 Outcomes

Heritage outcomes	High
<p>The project would be likely to meet all four heritage outcomes well and in particular the weighted outcome of better management.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The park would <u>be better managed (w)</u> through the establishment of a partnership approach with the contractor John O'Conner, a dedicated Parks Ranger, a Friends Group, partner organisations and user groups. The project would employ one part-time Park Ranger and also appoint 5 volunteers as park champions to carry out regular maintenance and ensure that the improvements to the park are maintained. The provision of a café in the Pavilion would generate future income for the park.• The restoration and repairs to the historical structures, buildings, facilities and improvements to horticulture and ecology would ensure that the park is <u>in a better condition</u>.• The park would <u>better interpreted</u> through the workshop programme, guided garden walks, information boards and signage.• Selective materials and planting will ensure that the park retains a physical link to its history, contributing to better interpretation and ensuring the <u>heritage of the park is identified</u>.	

People outcomes	Medium
<p>The project plans to deliver people outcomes with a new Friends Group and opportunities for existing and new volunteers. However, the budget for activity costs is relatively low. Delivery would be largely subcontracted to Groundwork who are an experienced provider.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>People will have developed skills (w)</u> through the landscape training and apprenticeship scheme managed in partnership with the local homeless hostel, Youth Connexions and Youth Church Group to equip participants with skills to gain employment. A calendar of events including hands-on workshops would enable local people to develop skills such as basket-	

making and communicating the history of the Gardens.

- Learning about the heritage would be delivered through school visits, guided tours, workshops and new interpretation.
- The project would promote volunteering opportunities through the Friends Group to assist with raising funds, organising events, taking part in mass plantings or as individuals in a specific group activity such as species surveys.

Community outcomes

Medium

The Council is aiming to deliver a project that would increase the range of park users and benefit the community more widely.

- A restored park with enhanced recreational facilities in the centre of Hitchin would make the town a better place to live (w). The Gardens will accommodate a range of activities to engage residents with heritage, the natural environment and recreation encouraging healthy lifestyles, education and leisure.
- The Council will review the management of waste, water, energy and transport with the aim of reducing negative environmental impacts and produce a baseline from which to increase efficiency. The design aims to minimise negative impacts on the environment through the creation of new rich bio-diverse habitats to support local flora and fauna.
- The project aims to draw in a wider section of the community than the current user groups and attract individual residents of Hitchin to the park thereby ensuring that more and a wider range of people have engaged with their heritage. The project would be promoted through newsletters, websites and social media.

6 Risk assessment

Delivery risk

Medium

- The proposals are based on site analysis and investigation including an Engineering Conditions Survey of the pavilion, a Condition Survey of the Gardens, an Ecology Phase 1 Study, an Arboricultural Survey, a Conservation Plan, a demographics survey, policy appraisal (including NHDC Green Space Management Strategy) and public consultation.
- The role of part-time Project Manager (12 hours per week) would be taken on by Stephen

Geach, NHDC's Parks & Countryside Development Manager, who has experience of two previous lottery funded park restoration projects, Broadway Gardens and Howard Park and Gardens. His post would be backfilled by a combination of internal and external resources. A job description for the role has been submitted and includes a break clause for the second round assessment phase and the tender period.

- The Park Ranger post would be part time, based on a seasonal approach working near full time in the summer and with reduced hours in the winter months.
- Partnership funding for both phases is secured including £119,000 Section 106 funds.
- The budget for activities appears relatively low with minimal amounts for training, equipment and promotional events although this is compensated for by the inclusion of the Parks Ranger in the future management costs. The budget for new building works at £916,000 exceeds the restoration works budget which stands at £762,000.
- The applicant has carried out consultation and over 500 responses have been collected from a range of community groups. Although generally supportive of the project, the consultation reflects some concerns from the Tennis Club and other current park users with the proposals and there was some disappointment expressed about the removal of the community Hall.
- The applicant states that the public tennis courts have come to the end of their serviceable life and the applicant considers their number needs to be reduced as they overwhelm the park and prevent the Council providing a better balance of activities and reintroducing green space. Concerns regarding the renewal of the lease with the tennis club and the decision to close the community hall have been ongoing for some years and the applicant has submitted the Local Government Ombudsman's final decisions which support the Council.
- HLF has received letters from local residents outlining their concerns about the removal of the tennis courts, parking facilities and the provision of community space in the Pavilion. An online petition requesting that the Council reverses the decision to reduce the number of courts in the park has more than 500 signatures.
- Further consultations would be carried out to inform the final park designs and the Activity Plan. Councillors have acknowledged there are some user groups who have expressed their opposition to the development but consider that their research demonstrates that these are the best plans for the site and have stressed their commitment to work with the groups to identify practical ways of accommodating their needs.

- Outline evaluation plans include surveys and desk top analysis following the completion of each initiative within the project. Analysis will include annual visitor surveys, footfall surveys, crime statistics and condition surveys. Given the open nature of the park the Council has not provided an annual figure for the number of current visitors. They have started on-site head counts of visitors to establish a base line.

Sustainability risk	Medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The grounds maintenance budget currently stands at £36,000pa. Following renovations it would be increased to £73,500. This includes funding for the Park Ranger's post (£22,500pa) and the maintenance of the water feature (£15,000pa). These would be annually increased by RPI. • The costs of continuing to employ the Park Ranger would be incorporated into the park budget after project completion. • The applicant states that the additional maintenance costs of the Pavilion would be offset by earned income from the café. • It is anticipated that on completion of the project the management of the site would be carried out in consultation with the Friends Group including partner organisations and community groups. The Park Ranger would continue to be employed to deliver volunteer support and activities. 	

Appendix 1 Quantitative data

a) From applicant's submission

	Numbers	
	Current 0	After the project0
Visitors		
Trainees	15	
Volunteers	5	
FTE jobs created	1.3	

Appendix 2 Costs summary table

a) Development Phase costs

Development costs

Cost Heading	Description	Cost	VAT	Total
Professional Fees	Landscape architect to Stage D, QS, CDMC, Architect to Stage D	£74,700	£0	£74,700

New staff costs	Managing the project (NHDC staff transferred)	£30,000	£0	£30,000
Recruitment	Recruiting/transfer costs	£500	£0	£500
Other	Bat and habitat studies/Other survey costs	£10,500	£0	£10,500
Contingency	10% allowance	£11,500	£0	£11,500
Non-cash contributions	Rooms/Hall for meetings – Committee Rm 1	£5,000	£0	£5,000
Volunteer time	Volunteer help to develop second round – community input and design input from professionally skilled	£6,000	£0	£6,000
Total		£138,200	£0	£138,200

b) Development Phase income

Development income

Source of funding	Description	Secured?	Value
Local authority	NHDC Income	Yes	£16,600
Non cash contributions	To match above	No	£5,000
Volunteer time	To match above	No	£6,000
HLF grant request			£110,600
Total Income			£138,200

c) Delivery Phase costs

Capital costs

Cost Heading	Description	Cost	VAT	Total
Repair and conservation work	remove tennis courts, toilet block, hard surfacing, gates/low walls, trees, tennis club building, site clearance £95,000. New tennis courts £140,000, Paths, £100,000, entrance spaces £50,000. Planting trees £30,000, lawn £10,000, planting existing beds £20,000, river bank restoration £75,000, boundaries £15,000, Benches/bins £10,000, stone pillars/gates £30,000, relocate infants play £5,000. Band stand £25,000, refurbish Pavilion £75,000, Prelims 12% £82,000.	£762,000	£0	£762,000
New building work	Courtyard space £50,000, Play area surfacing £50,000, new lawn £15,000, new flower beds £20,000, new boundaries £10,000, water feature £200,000, natural play elements £80,000, equipment/markings new informal games area £8,000, pavilion extension to provide Café, community space & WCs £275,000. New shelter/tennis club £25,000, Prelims @ 12% £98,000	£916,000	£0	£916,000
Professional fees relating to any of the above	Design Team stage RIBA Stage E-K	£181,400	£0	£181,400
Total		£1,859,400	£0	£1,859,400

Activity costs

Cost Heading	Description	Cost	VAT	Total
New staff costs	Project coordinator: Groundwork Hertfordshire	£45,000	£0	£45,000
Training for staff	Conservation training, history of parks, training park ranger, maintenance staff	£3,500	£0	£3,500
Training for volunteers	Allowance	£1,000	£0	£1,000
Travel for staff	Allowance	£500	£0	£500
Travel and expenses for volunteers	Allowance	£500	£0	£500
Equipment and materials	Allowance	£4,500	£0	£4,500
Other	Promotional Events budget	£5,000	£0	£5,000
Total		£60,000	£0	£60,000

Other costs

Cost Heading	Description	Cost	VAT	Total
Recruitment	Managing the project – NHDC staff transferred to new post	£40,000	£0	£40,000
Publicity and promotion	Allowance	£10,000	£0	£10,000
Evaluation	Evaluation study fees / visitor monitoring	£15,000	£0	£15,000
Contingency	Allow 10% of capital cost	£167,800	£0	£167,800
Inflation	Assume 4.25%P.A. for two years – 8.5% on capital cost	£158,900	£0	£158,900
Increased management and maintenance costs (maximum five years)	New park Ranger, Increased maintenance on Water Feature- refer spreadsheet	£187,500	£0	£187,500
Non cash contributions	Room for meetings /Presentations/Events– Committee Rm 1	£5,000	£0	£5,000
Volunteer time	Professionally skilled design advisors, community liaison	£5,000	£0	£5,000
Total		£589,200	£0	£589,200

d) Delivery Phase income

Delivery income

Source of funding	Description	Secured?	Value
Local authority	NHDC investment. Includes £30,000 Hitchin Area Committee contribution	Yes	£185,200
Commercial/business	Section 106	Yes	£119,000
Increased management and maintenance Costs (maximum five years)	To match figure in 7f	Yes	£187,500
Non cash contributions	To match figure in 7f	Yes	£5,000
Volunteer time	To match figure in 7f	Yes	£5,000
HLF grant request			£2,006,900
Total Income			£2,508,600

Appendix 3 Expert advice

Comments from the BIG Lottery Fund, East of England:

Hitchin is a market town of approximately 33,000 inhabitants that in general scores well against the indices of deprivation. The local community is more diverse than the national average with significant Indian, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean populations, with the Fund having supported the development of the local North Herts Ethnic Minority Forum over a number of years. It is not clear whether these communities have been consulted although the suggested improvements are likely to make the park more attractive to a wider audience. Specific mention has been made of working with local homeless and young people to deliver skills training, which is a good fit with Fund priorities. We are however concerned about the low-level of the activity budget and would like to see a clearer engagement plan and more evidence of consultation. In its present form this project would be a low priority for the Big Lottery Fund.