



Trustees' Annual Report for the period

From	Period start date			To	Period end date		
	28	November	2019		30	November	2020

Section A Reference and administration details

Charity name Midlands Parks Forum

Other names charity is known by

Registered charity number (if any) 1186863

Charity's principal address

186 Alcester Road South
 Kings Heath
 Birmingham
Postcode B14 6DE

Names of the charity trustees who manage the charity

	Trustee name	Office (if any)	Dates acted if not for whole year	Name of person (or body) entitled to appoint trustee (if any)
1	Liz Stuffins	Chairperson	28 th November 2019 to 27 th November 2023	Existing Trustees
2	Sally Orton		28 th November 2019 to 27 th November 2022	“
3	James Dymond	Vice Chairperson	28 th November 2019 to 27 th November 2021	“
4	Sam Village		28 th November 2019 to 27 th November 2021	“
5	Ishrat Karimi Fini		28 th November 2019 to 27 th November 2021	“
6	Angela Lewis		28 th November 2019 to 27 th November 2021	“
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Names of the trustees for the charity, if any, (for example, any custodian trustees)

Name	Dates acted if not for whole year

Names and addresses of advisers (Optional information)

Type of adviser	Name	Address
Independent examination	Graham Jones Dudley CVS	7 Albion St, Dudley DY5 3EE

Name of chief executive or names of senior staff members (Optional information)

Alison Bate, Partnership Manager

Section B Structure, governance and management

Description of the charity's trusts

Type of governing document (eg. trust deed, constitution)	Constitution
How the charity is constituted (eg. trust, association, company)	Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Trustee selection methods (eg. appointed by, elected by)	The appointment of founding trustees was made following an open meeting of all Midlands Parks Forum subscribers. The trustees were all nominated and seconded at the inaugural meeting.

Additional governance issues (Optional information)

You **may choose** to include additional information, where relevant, about:

- policies and procedures adopted for the induction and training of trustees;
- the charity's organisational structure and any wider network with which the charity works;
- relationship with any related parties;
- trustees' consideration of major risks and the system and procedures to manage them.

Trustees were provided with induction and training at a meeting in January 2020 by Dudley Council for Voluntary Services.

Trustees have also been provided with electronic training documents from Small Charities Coalition.

A Forward Planning meeting took place at Nottingham on 20th July 2020 with four trustees attending the meeting in person, and 2 trustees attending virtually. The purpose of the meeting was to update the organisation's business plan following the Covid-19 impact.

The trustees continue to develop partnerships with green space organisations and value the support of non-voting volunteers from the green space sector.

Partnerships have been developed with the Landscape Institute and Association for Public Service Excellence with whom joint events and training have taken place. The Trustees have also been supported with mentoring from Greenspace Scotland representatives.

Section C Objectives and activities

Summary of the objects of the charity set out in its governing document

1. To provide and enhance, and / or assist in the provision and enhancement of, the physical and natural environment for the use and enjoyment of the public in the area of benefit (including, but without limitation, the provision and maintenance of facilities and equipment, and the promotion of biodiversity) and shall include but is not limited to public parks, gardens, landscaped areas, woodland, playing fields, playgrounds, nature reserves and recreational spaces;
2. To advance the education of the public in the area of benefit including (but without limitation) with regards to the horticulture, arboriculture, ecology, geology, archaeology, sustainability, heritage and local history; and
3. To provide or assist in the provision of facilities, for recreation and other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare, with the object of improving the conditions of life of the public by the improvement of parks and green open spaces in the area of benefit. In furtherance of these, the charity will provide an umbrella group for other interested organisations. In these objects, the area of benefit means the local authority areas within the East and West Midlands.

A range of learning and training activities have taken place to enhance the environment for the public, including the promotion of biodiversity, parks, nature reserves, playgrounds, and heritage.

Due to Covid restrictions, the charity held 11 interactive 'learning experiences via Webinar, along with a conference and vocational workshops during this financial year, which included numerous 'webinars', some of which attracted up to 47 Midlands green space organisations, such as trusts, local authorities, charities and community green space forums. All webinars are recorded and freely available on the web site. 84% of members say these are helpful to their role. However over 80% say they will welcome future face to face meetings when they are allowed.

The information gained from the aforementioned interactive learning sessions has enabled participants to transfer the knowledge, skills and learning from the topics covered into their parks and green spaces. It has enabled members to understand and react promptly to implement management techniques related to the management of parks during Covid, and the risks and benefits of enabling children's play areas to re-open swiftly post lockdown.

Sharing vital information during Covid-19 and having debate and discussion on the opening of green spaces was essential for parks management. Through regular liaison with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and leading parks authorities, the Forum provided guidance and information on all Covid-19 related topics such as events management, managing parks and play areas, cleansing, opening cafes and the cleansing of parks buildings and other facilities.

A range of learning topics have been provided to enable members to better manage the land in their locality for nature, including carbon reduction, and opportunities to increase biodiversity, such as creating naturalistic planting, green corridors for nature, and sharing information on how members have created natural flood management, slowing the flow for people and wildlife. Natural England provided guidance on how organisations will be required to manage projects for biodiversity net gain (policy, metric & standards), with examples that can be replicated by members in the future.

Other webinars have included allotments management, the benefits of protecting green spaces through Fields in Trust, and exploring a barometer of Green Space Access, to ensure that local authorities are

Summary of the main activities undertaken for the public benefit in relation to these objects (include within this section the statutory declaration that trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit)

aware of whether they provide sufficient green space access for residents.

Webinars during Covid welcomed organisations such as the National Federation of Parks to share best practice in supporting volunteers in green spaces, which is vital to the ongoing management of spaces.

During Covid-19, the charity also contributed to a key document 'Managing Parks during Covid-19', which was accessed by hundreds of organisations. Working closely with the Association of Play Industries enabled the charity to share vital information across the Midlands regarding the re-opening of play areas for the public.

The charity has partnered with leading training organisations to deliver high-quality training on Parks Management to participants, and has partnered with the Landscape Institute to run a two-day virtual conference: Future of Parks: Skills, Innovation and Creativity for C21st Challenges, which was free for charitable/voluntary members. The conference attracted over 112 delegates and included Keynote speakers such as Neil McCarthy, CEO, World Urban Parks and Sue Manns, President of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

The charity has prepared Case Studies demonstrating best practice in Midlands green space, including studies of heritage features, events management, geology, and developing a country park. All the case studies are freely available to download from the web site.

The charity has developed a web site, monthly newsletters, and a Twitter account to regularly share information, and help raise skills, knowledge in and around green spaces.

Applications have been made to trusts, foundations and National Lottery for funding to sustain the charity's work.

Business planning support from the Heritage Trust Network enabled the charity to update its business plan to include a Covid impact assessment and begin a visioning activity for the charity post heritage funding.

Additional details of objectives and activities (Optional information)

The contribution made by volunteers during the year has been a vital part of our first year as a charity.

Community First Partnership have offered business advice, and individuals, organisations and Friends of Parks have assisted in preparing case studies, contributing to presentations and webinars and providing responses to members' enquiries.

The valuable 'in-kind' contribution has provided over 500 hours of volunteering to the organisation, with a value in excess of £26,000.

You **may choose** to include further statements, where relevant, about:

- policy on grantmaking;
- policy programme related investment;
- contribution made by volunteers.

Section D

Achievements and performance

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Summary of the main achievements of the charity during the year

Since its formation in November 2019, the charity has provided the following, which has been wholly funded from the National Lottery Resilient Heritage Grant:

Monthly Newsletters, Frequent bulletins and Covid-19 Parks Management Guidance; nine Webinars with a range of partners including Green Flag, National Allotment Association, Association of Play Industries, Natural England, The Tree Council, and a wide range of other organisations to share best practice.

Subsidised training from national body APSE (Association of Public Service Excellence) to members based on 2 levels, Introduction to Parks Management and Advanced Parks Management.

Partnership working with The Landscape Institute resulted in a joint conference: C21st Skills in Parks, looking at skills, equality, access to training to improve community facilities. We also provided access for members to the LI's learning portal which contains a range of presentations on green spaces and landscape management.

A website has been created where all webinars and case studies will be accessible.

The charity contributed to a National Document 'Managing Parks During Covid-19', which has been downloaded over 6000 times.

Collaboration with six green spaces in the Midlands resulted in Case Studies on heritage, geology, managing events in parks, improving biodiversity, developing a country park and a parks restoration programme.

Expansion of the charity into the East Midlands, and gaining a small increase in membership from West Midlands organisations, has increased overall membership in 2020 by 67%. This contributes towards the charity's sustainability goal of becoming sustainable, and has enabled the charity to support more organisations throughout the Covid challenges; sharing good practice and engaging with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, and helping prepare practitioners for the challenges post lockdown. The charity's first staff member was employed through a third party on a fixed term contract to deliver the Resilient Heritage project, and to undertake the charity development.

The charity is currently undertaking an evaluation of the National Lottery Resilient Heritage funding with members, which is focusing on how the organisation has promoted a greater understanding of the heritage of parks, and how the organisation has become more resilient.

The charity's aims for 2021 are to publish research on accessibility of quality green space along with six case studies which help improve knowledge, skills and competencies around green space; to provide mentoring, meet ups, policy and newsletters and to collaborate and develop partnerships to help improve and promote the green space sector and green space facilities

Section E

Financial review

Brief statement of the charity's policy on reserves

The charity's reserves policy requires unrestricted funding to cover six months of costs, which the charity holds.

Details of any funds materially in deficit

Further financial review details (Optional information)

You **may choose** to include additional information, where relevant about:

- the charity's principal sources of funds (including any fundraising);
- how expenditure has supported the key objectives of the charity;
- investment policy and objectives including any ethical investment policy adopted.

The principal sources of funding are a National Lottery Resilient Heritage Grant and annual membership fees.

All expenditure during 2019/20 has been targeted towards improving the skills and knowledge gaps identified by members, to enable them to better manage and develop their green spaces for public benefit.

The key priorities of learning identified are heritage, biodiversity/climate change, community and volunteering and identifying sources of income/commercial opportunities. In addition, sharing information on inequality of provision, and health and safety during Covid.

Gaining skills and knowledge in these areas enable green space practitioners to replicate learning from peers enabling them to improve parks and green space facilities within their local area.

Having a supportive network of learning from green space sector practitioners enables costs to be kept at a minimum.

The charity has selected an ethical banking organisation, which supports community activities.

The charity now directly employs a part time member of staff, who has been TUPE'd over to MPF. The employee is based at home, to reduce future overheads.

Section F

Other optional information

Throughout the first year, the organisation has received mentoring from Julie Proctor CEO at Greenspace Scotland, from Dudley CVS and received Heritage Trust Network funding to undertake an update of the business plan. The charity has become a member of the Small Charities Coalition and the Foundation for Social Improvement, both of whom offer free or low-cost training and support. Pro bono legal advice was also provided by K&L Gates LLP through the Law Works Charity.

Section G

Declaration

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature(s)		
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Full name(s)	LIZ Stuffins	
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Position (eg Secretary, Chair, etc)	Chair	
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Date	29.03.21
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