

Brand proposition development brief: Nature Cities & Towns

Organisations	National Trust, Natural England, National Lottery Heritage Fund
Team	National Trust (Urban Green)
Brief description of supply	Brand development including market research, delivery and testing of name, narrative and visual identity
Estimated value of tender	£80k
Estimated duration	April 2024 – Jan 2025
Name of NT contact	Rachel Jeffcoat Comms & engagement lead, Nature Cities Rachel.jeffcoat@nationaltrust.org.uk

Overview

We are looking for an agency to develop a name, narrative and visual identity for the Nature Cities & Towns (working title) partnership initiative.

Nature can hold the answers to so many of the challenges facing our urban places and communities today, from the effects of climate change to entrenched health and wellbeing inequalities. Nature Cities and Towns is a new ambitious initiative designed to help urban places across the UK to realise nature's benefits for people and build thriving green cities and towns of the future.

The initiative brings together 3 founding partners – the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Natural England, and the National Trust. Together, the partners will offer cities and towns across the UK the tools and support that they need to take ambitious action for nature, and for their populations. It is our intention to grow a network of key partners, starting with Natural England's sister agencies in the devolved nations.

Working together with local authorities and cross-sector partners, the programme aims to make sure everyone has access to quality natural spaces a few minutes' walk from home and is able to spend time outdoors in nature every day¹. Community needs and engagement will be at the heart of the changes made to achieve this. And the towns and cities emerging will be better connected, more resilient to climate change, naturally flourishing, growing greener economies and jobs.

This partnership builds on, and expands, the [Future Parks Accelerator](#) partnership between the National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Trust. This programme worked across 8 places in the UK to rethink the role urban green space can play in building a sustainable future for towns and cities.

¹ Targets from the UK's Environmental Improvement Plan 2023: [Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

It's a long term vision, and we're just getting started on this journey. Over the first 3 years, the programme will:

- Bring together a collaborative network of ambitious places
- Equip the network with tools and support to make change happen
- Run a capacity-building grants programme for ~20 recipient places
- Launch an accreditation scheme so places can verify their progress and assure funders and investors
- Attract external investment in places and develop wider incentives for long term change

Each partner brings its own specialisms and rationale for being involved and will lead on different areas of the initiative. But as a truly joint endeavour that is more than the sum of its parts, it needs a standalone brand proposition.

This contract will be delivered in two stages:

- Stage 1: April to July 2024 - research and development of the brand name and narrative, to bring us to a "soft launch" moment planned for July
- Stage 2: July 2024 – Jan 2025 - developing and testing visual identity routes including logos, alignment with existing partner identities, graphics etc

Brand objectives:

We're looking to develop a proposition that our key stakeholders, partners and wider public audiences can get behind, and which will feel relevant now and in 10 years' time. More specifically, we're looking for a solution which will:

- be able to clearly communicate and unite distinct elements of the programme as a coherent package, focussing on the ambition and benefits that the whole programme will bring about
- establish a narrative that will be relevant now and for the long term, in a time of heightened political disruption and sensitivities.
- identify the universal values, framing and language which can resonate across the political spectrum (left – right and local – national), with mass and niche audiences, and to corporate stakeholders and potential funders
- provide the programme and partners with the means to communicate effectively and consistently about the programme, feeling relevant to their multiple target audiences and stakeholders.

- align with each partner’s existing brand identity, and be able to accommodate multiple branding including additional future partners (e.g. devolved statutory agencies)
- be applicable across different scales, geographies, and to different markets: and specifically, as a UK-wide initiative will need to work across all UK nations in terms of language, political context, etc

Project Indicative Timings

The programme launch will be phased over the coming 18 months, roughly as follows. Stage 1 takes us through the Design phase to Soft Launch, with Stage 2 following in the lead up to full Launch.

Programme activity	Brand development activity
Design – Jan to June 2024	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-design with a cohort of local authorities • Wider consultation on programme • Consultation and engagement with high priority stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief 1: Conducting research and producing insight with key stakeholder groups • Develop and test brand name and narrative: proposition, framing and messaging • Deliver/inform delivery of programme prospectus
Soft launch – July to December 2024	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July: Launch programme prospectus through holding website, communicating the overall programme vision and inviting people to be part of it • September: Expressions of Interest for grants open through Heritage Fund grants platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch brand narrative through prospectus (this will be housed on a holding website). Note: look and feel will likely be neutral/partnership branded at this stage, holding off on full launch until Jan 2025 • Brief 2: Develop and test brand identity: logo, look and feel • Deliver brand templates including website skins, stakeholder comms materials, etc
Launch – Jan 2025 onwards	

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ~Jan 2025: Full launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full brand identity goes live – branding project ends
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Brand development considerations:

Phasing:

External factors mean we need to manage the project launch in two stages, as detailed above. We will look to the appointed agency for advice on how to manage this:

- Managing the transition from working title to new title, if applicable, internally across the three partners
- Launching the brand narrative and proposition without launching a full visual identity
- Creating a wide launch moment in Jan 25, having already launched the proposition with targeted stakeholder audiences in Jul 24

Opportunities:

- Developing a unifying, positive narrative which will stand out in the current political/societal context and start to build a movement, neutral and relevant across political parties and based on optimism and possibility
- Reflecting the post-pandemic shift in attitudes towards green space, nature, and understanding of the benefits it brings to people and place
- Building on the above, to increase understanding of the much wider benefits that nature and green infrastructure can bring when viewed holistically (nature-based solutions)
- Communicate the concept that action for nature can drive outcomes for people (particularly health and wellbeing) and planet (mitigating effects of climate change) – not just nature for nature’s sake, but something much broader with wide-ranging benefits

Risks:

- With public discourse divided on issues such as net zero and perceived choices around prioritising nature recovery in a time of economic pressure, there’s risk of this becoming divisive – in the same arena as Low Traffic Neighbourhoods
- Brand narrative subject to opinion/alignment with three different organisations – risk of dilution or losing neutrality
- Easy to fall down trap of “nature for the sake of nature” – this must above all reflect “nature for people” to chime with audience priorities, concerns, and last for the long term
- Becoming mired in complexity – keep it simple, positive and universal in appeal

Key Audiences

The overall programme is seeking to address inequalities in access to quality green space. Those groups who lack access to green space are often marginalized in other ways too. Whilst the programme communications will be first and foremost B2B, considerations around reaching, reflecting, and being relevant to diverse audiences should be considered throughout.

Local government:

Local government will be our core audience as members/participants in the programme. This includes both executive and political leaders of local government, and extends across a broad range of services, both those traditionally invested in parks and greenspace, and wider departments such as health, transport, children etc who could stand to benefit from improved green infrastructure.

National political parties:

To secure cross-party support in election year, we need the brand proposition to appeal across the political spectrum, in particular taking into account long and short term policy agendas and narratives of the main 3 UK political parties. It also needs to be sensitive to political parties in devolved nations.

Community leaders and community organisations:

Perhaps in partnership with local authorities, or perhaps working at a more hyper-local level, community organisations need to be considered, as they're key to achieving lasting change on the ground and could be hugely important voices in building a movement. They will be key to ensuring the programme can reach diverse audiences – so will be important to consult with, including organisations working with young people, and with marginalised groups.

Investors/funders:

The credibility of the programme to this audience is crucial: there's likely to be a pipeline of investment-ready projects coming from the members/participants and leverage funding from third parties will be vital

General public:

Though not a key initial target audience for communications, the brand will need to resonate with the general public: there's risk of it being divisive, which we need to navigate carefully. Where we are communicating with the public, we'll be seeking to reach the same diverse, cross-cutting audiences that the programme is designed to benefit.

Expected process and outputs

We're open to proposals in terms of process. However, we will need to be confident that the brand development work is based on solid, bespoke research with our key audiences as laid out above. And we'll need assurance that the proposition and creative direction has been tested with them, too.

All outputs delivered will need to demonstrably follow high accessibility requirements, equal to those required by public sector organisations.

We're open to partnership bids from agencies who want to collaborate to bring appropriate breadth of expertise and experience.

Stage 1 outputs:

Research:

This will need to be conducted with all our key audience/stakeholder groups. Any approach considered, but we anticipate this might include in-depth interviews, focus groups, market research, qual and quant methods.

Insight report:

We'd like the above research to inform the brand development itself of course, but we'd also ask for a report summarising actionable insights to feed into and inform our stakeholder engagement and comms strategy work.

This should include recommendations on how the supporting brands can flex to support this programme: respective strengths and weaknesses including audiences, voice, reach, engagement, partnerships

Brand narrative:

A simple, positive, appealing brand narrative designed to appeal across our target audiences. Able to be expressed succinctly and more in depth in different applications. With guidance as to the best ways for us to express this narrative throughout our comms across the programme.

Tone of voice (and name):

We're not tied to our working title, if it comes out through research that a different approach would be better. Building on the brand narrative, for full launch we'd expect tone of voice guidance to inform all of our communications.

Stage 2 outputs:

Visual identity research:

Development and testing of different routes – for example to include logo lockups and name only, through to full brand visual identity. As with the narrative, we need confidence this has been tested with target audiences.

Visual identity and assets:

Exact outputs will depend on the outcomes of the research – however we know we will need a number of specific assets including website graphics, document templates, etc.

Brand guidelines:

Guidelines to using all above outputs for the programme teams across the partner organisations

Budget

The budget available for this work is c£80k incl. VAT.

We'll consider cost/value in awarding the commission, this will form 30% of the overall score.

25% of the budget will be paid upfront, 25% on completion of Stage 1, and 50% on delivery of Stage 2.

Timescales

1. Tender: by 12 April 2024
2. Interviews held: week commencing 15 April
3. Appointment and onboarding: w/c 22 April
4. Name, Research & Insight report delivered: 3 June
5. Brand narrative delivered: June 2024
6. Visual identity options tested & development of visual identity: from July 2024
7. Delivery of visual identity: Oct 2024
8. Contract end and washup: Jan 2025

Submission process

The tender response should include details of the following (scoring in brackets):

- Outline of your proposed approach to brand development – including how you would approach the phasing, and partnership aspects (35%)
- Description of your relevant experience, including examples of at least two pieces of similar work (35%)
- Proposed budget breakdown (30%)
- Details of any matters or concerns not covered by this brief.

Proposals should not exceed 10 pages in length. Submitting a proposal more than 10 pages will automatically result in the rejection of the proposal.

Please submit proposals by email before the deadline of 12 April 2024 to the following contact:

Rachel Jeffcoat, rachel.jeffcoat@nationaltrust.org.uk