

Public Realm Innovation Lab: Open Call Handbook



The River Roding Health Corridor consortium













The Public Realm Innovation Lab sees Connected Places Catapult working in partnership with the River Roding Health Corridor consortium: ARUP, Be First (London Borough of Barking and Dagenham's wholly-owned regeneration delivery agency), Care City, Makower Architects, and NHS North East London. The River Roding Health Corridor Consortium have identified the River Roding as one of London's most undervalued natural corridors. They believe there is vast potential for this space to support community health, yet it remains largely invisible and inaccessible to most local people. The consortiums diversity of organisations places them in a unique position, bringing together NHS health data to public realm development, with the community at the heart of the project. CPC are excited to be in partnership with this group.

The Programme



Overview

Summary

The Public Realm Innovation Lab will provide you with the opportunity to trial your innovations across the River Roding sites that have been identified by our partners. This document will give you detailed information about the identified challenge for the trial and the test site. Information from this document will be useful when designing your trial for your application.

Funding

This competition will provide you with pre commercial funding to address the competition challenge. The funding amount for this trial is up to £25,000 incVAT for up to 4 applicants.

For full information please see our Application Guidance.

Overview

Application Process

The application process will be divided into two stages:

- 1. Interviews 45 minute interviews where you will be asked to present your solution and proposed trial plan. Up to 12 applicants will be selected for an interview
- 2. Trial design Up to 6 successful applicants will have the opportunity to develop their trial plan with a focus on ensuring its feasibility. The applicants will have access to our partners, local stakeholders, community members and the Catapult trial support team, alongside access to the specific trial sites. We ask that applicants commit 3-4 days split across the trial design time period to develop the trial plan. Up to 4 applicants will be selected at the end of this stage to progress to the trial stage. This is part of the application process and will be unpaid but will provide a great opportunity for product refinement with local stakeholders.

Contracts will be issued to up to 4 successful applicants post trial design stage.

Trial Delivery

Up to 4 solution providers will be selected for the trial delivery stage.

This stage will be focused on delivering the trial as set out in your trial plan. Applicants will be expected to create a project team, with support from the place partners and the Catapult trial support team. Please see the relevant slides in this pack for a detailed breakdown of what is expected for the trial stage.

Who can Apply

To apply for this open call, you must:

- Be a UK-registered public, private, or third-sector organisation considered to be of **SME size** (to see how an SME is defined, please use the <u>link here</u>), meaning smaller than 250 employees, less than £44m in turnover and a balance sheet of equal to or less than £38m.
 - Charities can apply for this opportunity, however the funding provided is pre-commercial funding which means you must be able to conduct this project on a commercial basis. You must decide for yourself whether this is suitable.
- **Consortia are welcome**, but only a single organisation may act as lead, and you must distribute the funding accordingly to your consortium partners.
 - Consortia partners can be of any size.
- Applicants must submit proposals which are considered novel either by implementing in a new environment, targeting a new audience or incorporating new elements into their solutions
- Demonstrable alignment of the proposed solution to the programme challenge, with a solution of TRL 6+
- Commitment to create a full trial plan between and 1st and 12th
 December as part of the application process for up to 6 chosen
 applicants, which will be unpaid work. There will be an
 expectation to attend workshops and the site visit day
- Commitment to undertake travel to the River Roding when required, including the initial site day on Wednesday 3rd December 2025 in Barking, London.

Timeline

Application Process	
Competition opens	9am, 1 st October
Application support webinar	10am, 15 th October
	Link to webinar booking to be provided
Competition closes (application deadline)	3 rd November , 10am.
Interviews	24 th – 26 th November
Trial Design stage	1 st December - 12 th December
Site Visit	2nd December (single day)
Contracting	15 th – 17 th December

Trial delivery	
Trial commences	5 th January 2026
Trial ends	16 th March 2026
Final report due	17 th March 2026
Payments and project close	16 th March – 31 st March 2026

The Test Site



The River Roding

An undervalued natural asset in the Heart of Barking

The River Roding is London's third-longest river, flowing from rural Essex through Redbridge and Barking & Dagenham into the Thames at Barking Creek [1]. The River Roding Corridor is in the **London Borough of Barking and Dagenham** (LBBD), located in the north-east of Greater London

A Hidden Sanctuary at the Heart of Barking

- The River Roding is one of London's most undervalued natural corridors—a space where, remarkably, "the noise of the city disappears." Along its banks lie tidal reed beds, rare bird species, and underused public spaces with vast potential to support community health and nature recovery.
- Yet it remains largely invisible and inaccessible to most local people. Many local residents reference the riverside as being neglected or are not aware that the river is there.
- This natural and public realm asset has a huge potential to be transformed and enhanced to improve the residents' health and well-being, and sense of belonging in the place.



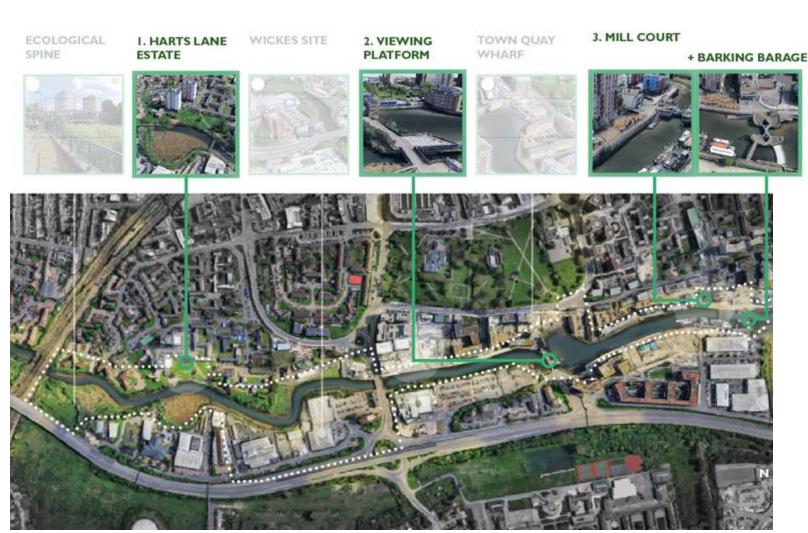
River Roding Health Corridor

The Roding Health Corridor, developed by the Roding Health Corridor Consortium, spans seven sites along the river in Barking & Dagenham, as shown in the diagram.

Three sites have been selected for the trials this year:

- Harts Lane Estate
- The Viewing Platform
- Barking Barrage & Mill Court

Proposed trials may take place on a **single site or across multiple sites**, depending on the solution.



The River Roding - Site 1

1. Harts Lane Estate & Gardens

Harts Lane Estate, in Barking, sits next to the River Roding and close to Barking town centre and station. The estate comprises two 17-storey towers - Colne House and Mersea House - built in 1971. Its location near Barking Barrage and Town Quay Wharf positions it as a key anchor site for green infrastructure and public realm improvements.

Regeneration Opportunity

The estate is earmarked for regeneration, presenting an opportunity to embed preventative health strategies into placemaking. Increasingly, elements like green spaces, play areas, active travel routes and access to food and nature are recognised as drivers of healthier behaviours and stronger community cohesion.







The River Roding - Site 1

1. Harts Lane Estate & Gardens

Spatial and environmental features:

- Proximity to River & Wild Ecology:
 The estate sits next to the River Roding and its reedbeds and wetland habitats among the few remaining tidal reedbeds in London offering an opportunity to
 - among the few remaining tidal reedbeds in London offering an **opportunity** to connect residents with nature and support biodiversity-led health.
- Connection to River Communities:
 Harts Lane borders boat-dwelling communities, often overlooked in planning, presenting an opportunity for shared public realm and integrated design.

 Engagement must be inclusive, reflecting diverse living arrangements and access needs.
- Underused Land & Inward-Facing Layout:
 Like many 1960s estates, Harts Lane suffers from inward-facing blocks, underused leftover spaces, and a lack of permeability. There is potential to re-orient the estate toward the river, creating safe, inclusive, active outdoor space that improves mental and physical health.

Demographics & Health Indicators:

- Population: ~500 homes; ~1,000–1,200 residents
- Social Housing: Majority tenure
- Nearby Amenities: Barking Community Hospital (1.1 mi), Northbury Primary School (140m), GP (220m)

Current pattern of use:

Main users: Harts Lane Estate residents and river boat communities

- Hard-surfaced areas with benches see limited use.
- The park and fitness area appear underused.
- The bridge is occasionally used but functions as an out-of-town crossing.
- No vehicle access to this part of the site.
- Design should consider the relationship with surrounding residential buildings.
- Wildlife and habitats are important factors.

The River Roding – Site 2

2. The Viewing Platform at Town Quay Wharf

Town Quay Wharf is a prominent waterfront site with strong potential to anchor the River Roding Health Corridor. Positioned at a key junction between river and town, it offers an opportunity to deliver inclusive, health-focused public realm that reflects Barking's heritage, ecology and community.

The site could become a leading example of a **therapeutic, nature-rich public waterfront** integrated with community use, heritage, and well-being.









The River Roding – Site 2

2. The Viewing Platform at Town Quay Wharf

Key features

- Civic Platform Linking Town to River:
 The site offers a central public platform with open views across the River Roding. As one of the few locations where Barking town centre meets the water, it has strong potential to become a key civic space, linking high street activity with riverside identity.
- Direct River Access & Engagement with Boating Communities:
 Unlike much of the riverbank, Town Quay Wharf includes gradual
 access down to the water, offering the potential to physically and
 socially connect with Barking's historic and contemporary river
 communities, including houseboats and water users. This makes it an
 ideal space to test interventions that promote active and
 therapeutic engagement with water.
- Unmatched Linear River Views:
 The site offers long, open views both north and south along the river a unique quality in London where such perspectives are often constrained. These expansive vistas could be used to frame wayfinding, orientation, and wellbeing-led design, encouraging walking, pausing, and mindfulness.
- Challenging Microclimate and Design Opportunity:
 Currently dominated by hard surfacing, the space suffers from exposure to wind and rain, which can make it inhospitable for users.
 Design responses should address shelter, greening, and microclimate improvements to create a more welcoming and comfortable space to dwell.

Rich Heritage Context:

The Wharf sits adjacent to the **Granary and the Quay**, key assets of Barking's **maritime and fishing heritage**. Historic elements, such as the **18th-century fishing steps**, remain visible but undercelebrated. The site offers powerful potential to **reconnect local communities** with place-based history through interpretation, play, and storytelling.

- Ecological Opportunity in a Hard-Edged River System:
 Much of the River Roding is defined by sheet-piled edges, limiting ecological richness. Town Quay Wharf, with its softer edge and proximity to open land and planting, could become a flagship site for biodiversity and riverside ecology introducing trees, wetland planting, bird habitats and floating interventions.
- Future Vision and Masterplan Potential:

As part of the emerging **masterplan for Barking's riverside**, this site should be seen as a **strategic testbed** for wider ambitions. A successful intervention here could demonstrate how preventative health, ecological repair and local heritage can come together in a flagship civic space.

The River Roding – Site 2

2. The Viewing Platform at Town Quay Wharf

Current pattern of use

Main users: Local and new river communities

- The space is underused.
- Primarily accessed by cars, though infrequently.
- Some pedestrian crossings occur for commuting to town or the station.

Demographics & Health Indicators

- Population: Estimated 300–400 residents
- Tenure: Mixed (private ownership and rental)
- Nearby Amenities: Barking Station (0.3 mi), Abbey Leisure Centre (0.4 mi), GP (0.5 mi)



The River Roding - Site 3

3. Barking Barrage Bridge Connection

The Barking Barrage is a distinctive and underutilised piece of civic infrastructure, offering a powerful setting for reimagining how the public realm can support health, learning and community life.

This site has the potential to be a landmark destination for preventative health, learning and ecological awareness, reinforcing Barking's identity as a place where river, community and innovation meet.









The River Roding - Site 3

3. Barking Barrage Bridge Connection

Key features

Iconic Infrastructure:

As a prominent structure along the River Roding, the Barrage has strong visual presence and symbolic value. It acts as a physical and conceptual gateway between the tidal and non-tidal sections of the river.

Strategic Location:

The site offers panoramic views of the river and immediate proximity to natural assets, making it a unique platform for promoting nature-connected health interventions. It sits adjacent to existing walking routes and could anchor a 5km riverside health corridor, connecting to nearby parks, residential areas and civic infrastructure.

• Low Development Pressure / High Social Value:

Unlike more commercially-driven sites, the Barrage and its surroundings have **limited immediate development pressures**. This opens the door to **community-first interventions**, such as flexible pavilion structures, landscape enhancements, or meanwhile uses that prioritise health, nature and civic space over profit.

Educational Potential:

The Barrage presents a compelling opportunity for **learning about river systems**, **ecology**, **climate resilience and sustainable water management**. Educational interventions (physical or digital) could engage local schools, young people and visitors in understanding the role of the river in local life and health.

Connection to River Communities:

The site lies close to houseboat and boating communities and offers an interface between the river's working life and wider community use. This connection could be celebrated and deepened through design that supports storytelling, interpretation and dialogue.

Current pattern of use

- The site sees limited use.
- Occasional crossings by the general public.
- River access is mainly by the canoe club and some anglers.
- The park is sometimes used, but the site feels disconnected from the town.
- Opportunities should consider connections to Abbey Park.

Demographics & Health Indicators

- Population: Adjacent areas ~300–500 residents
- Tenure: Mixed
- Nearby Amenities: Barking Station (0.5 mi), Barking Community Hospital (1.2 mi), GP (0.7 mi)

The Trial Challenge



Challenge Theme

Helping children and young people to achieve a healthy weight by making public spaces more inclusive, inviting and connected

Approach

Research & Engagement

To shape the open call challenge, CPC collaborated with the Roding Health Corridor (RHC) consortium, leveraging their extensive local expertise in health, community and public realm. This involved:

- 1. Internal workshops with RHC consortium partners
- Interviews with local place stakeholders, identified by the consortium partners
- 3. Community workshops and interviews, led by CareCity
- 4. Analysis of datasets and key reports
 - Spatial analysis of Barking & Dagenham, focusing on the River Roding
 - Local health policy context
 - o NHS health determinants at the local level
 - Relevant UK-wide policy and strategy documents

Step 1

Gained insights from project partners on the local area, residents' health profile, and the potential benefits of the River Roding corridor.

Step 2

Interviewed local stakeholders in Barking and Dagenham to understand community priorities.

Step 3

Gathered insights from local residents on their experiences and perspectives regarding the river and health.

Challenge Theme

Supporting children and young people to achieve a healthy weight by making public spaces more inclusive, inviting and connected.

How can we support more children and young people in Barking and Dagenham achieve a healthy weight by activating underused River Roding spaces through integrated public realm interventions that improve health provision and outcomes?

Barking and Dagenham has the highest childhood obesity rate of any London borough, linked to wider health determinants such as deprivation, food inequality, and limited access to safe, active public spaces. The borough's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023–2028 prioritises early intervention, community resilience, and place-based care to tackle these systemic challenges.

There is an opportunity to transform the River Roding corridor into a health-promoting environment. How can the river and adjacent open spaces be used to enhance health and wellbeing, foster community pride and create thriving, nature-centred neighbourhoods?



We are seeking solutions that could...

Supporting children and young people to achieve a healthy weight by making public spaces more inclusive, inviting and connected.

- Integrate public health initiatives and social prescribing into the built environment by supporting preventative care and changing people's behaviour so that they become healthier - initiatives such as physical activity, active travel and improved nutrition which through spatial design connect individuals to community-based health and wellbeing services.
- Design playful, visible and inclusive public spaces that encourage physical activity, active travel and healthy eating habits among children and young people (aged under 18).
- Secure the long-term sustainability of built environment interventions by embedding community stewardship, fostering local ownership and establishing resilient governance ensuring residents shape, maintain and benefit from spaces that support health, wellbeing, and NHS engagement amid ecological and demographic change.

The following design requirements should be considered:

Supporting children and young people to achieve a healthy weight by making public spaces more inclusive, inviting and connected

- Create a coherent and accessible health corridor along the River Roding by
 considering both individual site-based interventions and the connections between
 them ensuring continuity, safe movement and a unified experience that
 supports sustained healthy behaviours among children and young people.
- Foster interdisciplinary collaboration, bringing together public health, urban design, education and community development sectors to deliver holistic and sustainable outcomes.
- Assess impact using community and stakeholder-defined metrics such as wellbeing, accessibility, trust, and usage - to ensure interventions are meaningful and effective, and to support scaling. Include methods to capture longer-term health outcomes, with baseline measures, even if benefits extend beyond the trial period (please see page 33 on measuring trial impact)

Research Insights



Health, children and young people

Research identified **children and young people (under 18)** as a key group for healthy weight support. Key health data includes:

- The population is fast growing, up 17.7% since 2011 and is one of the fastest-growing boroughs in England [1]. The population of the Borough is also young with a median age of 33 (younger than London average of 35).[1]
- The Borough is among the 20% most deprived areas in England [2]. Almost a quarter of children (22.5%) line in low-income families [2]. Life expectancy is also below the London average.
- There are high rates of childhood obesity and long-term health conditions the obesity rate amongst Year 6 children in the Borough has risen from 26.3% in 2013/14 to 29.3% in 2023/24. [3]
- There are strong links between childhood obesity and wider deprivation across England in 2023/4 obesity rates for Year 6 children in most deprived areas was double that in least deprived areas (30% v 15%). [4]
- From local stakeholder engagement there is a sense of a lack of accessible, engaging activities for young people, linking inactivity to rising obesity. There are also concerns that residents are unable to easily access fresh, healthy food. Many stakeholders realise the need for systemic interventions that are community-based and not implemented in isolation... "You can't just plant a tree and expect it to work... you need programmes built around it"; "Behavioural change requires long-term support, training and community ownership."

Sources:

- [1] How life has changed in Barking and Dagenham: Census 2021 ons.gov.uk
- [2] E09000002 fingertips.phe.org.uk
- [3] https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/child-obesity/
- [4] NHS Digital. National Child Measurement Programme

Community based care

Community-based care refers to non-clinical, locally embedded support systems that promote health and wellbeing outside traditional healthcare settings. It includes:

- <u>Social prescribing</u>: including gardening, walking groups, food growing, festivals and nature-based activities.
- Neighbourhood networks and faith-based outreach.
- Health literacy initiatives and peer support.
- Community hubs and informal care networks.

Relevance to Project Goal:

This model supports the shift from reactive healthcare to proactive, preventative approaches rooted in place. It enables early intervention, reduces NHS demand and fosters local ownership of health outcomes.

It's about meeting residents where they are on their journey... the current health system isn't meeting the needs of our most vulnerable residents."

Stakeholder interview

Social and Cultural Factors

Stakeholders working in London Borough of Barking and Dagenham reflect on community dynamics, inclusion and lived experience to outline barriers to engaging about health with the local community:

- Language barriers and low health literacy reduce participation in health and wellbeing initiatives Solutions provider must consider how their solution / trial will be accessible to engage a diverse audience.
- **Transient populations** with limited community ties make long-term engagement challenging how can innovations make people feel part of the community quickly and how can we find stewards for the interventions when communities come and go.
- Safety concerns, particularly in historically underserved estates like Harts Lane and Mill Court bad lighting, overgrown areas and disconnected routes make communities feel unsafe.
- **Disengagement** due to past failed or short-lived regeneration efforts Solutions provider must consider how to engage the local communities in the short and long-term to increase engagement.

Through workshops with our community partner CareCity, local residents shared their aspirations for the River Roding space. We aim to engage children and young people as the project develops to better reflect their needs. Key resident priorities include:

- Water-based activities: More access to canoes, boats, and other river activities.
- **Community-led projects and events:** Space to host music, festivals and initiatives that celebrate local diversity.
- Food growing opportunities: Particularly for children to learn and participate.
- Enhanced accessibility and comfort: Walking routes, seating and toilet facilities to make the space more inviting."

Health literacy is a really huge one... not only language but understanding the actual health system and knowing where to go and what to expect."

Stakeholder interview

The bits of the river you can access... they look barely broken down, not particularly well lit and quite overgrown."

Stakeholder interview

It's very busy and quite dark because of the flats there."

Local Resident

Activating public spaces along the River Roding

The River Roding has great potential, but practical barriers currently limit its ability to thrive as a vibrant public space:

- Absence of clear ownership and maintenance plans for green and blue infrastructure.
 Interventions succeed most when tied to a group or community responsible for their upkeep.
- Access to water-level areas, particularly near Barking Barrage and Town Quay Wharf, is limited. We aim to celebrate the River Roding corridor by creating a public space that connects people to its blue and green spaces.
- **Inadequate infrastructure** for walking, fishing or other recreational activities along the River Roding. Disconnected paths and poor signage limit the river's appeal as a destination.
- Inadequate lighting and accessibility in public spaces compromise safety and usability.
- **Limited seating and dwelling areas**, combined with high levels of litter and vandalistic graffiti, reduce the usability and appeal of the space.

There's nothing to draw people out onto it... the bits of the river you can access are intimidating."

Stakeholder interview

The people who live by the river are not getting much out of the river at all. The pathways not great, it's limited for people who have mobility issues."

Stakeholder interview

My daughter went to
Greenwich with her school but I don't see anything different that we could not have here along this river"
Local Resident

Recommended Reading

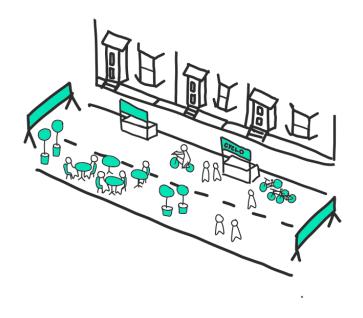
- HSC System Wide Review into Childhood Obesity, 2018/29. LBBD
- NHS National Child Measurement Programme, 2023/24
- Trust for London, Barking & Dagenham Poverty Profile
- London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Statistics and Data
- London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023–2028
- North East London Interim Integrated Care Strategy (2023)
- Design Council & Social Change UK, 2018
- Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), 2022

Running a Trial



What is a Trial

A trial is when a solution (a product, service or system) is tested with end-users in real-life situations to assess its performance, qualities, or suitability in a given context.



For example, a trial can use public spaces to test solutions that enhance onward journeys and promote active travel

Trials are a great opportunity to:

- **Test new and ambitious ideas** at small scale in real-life settings and de-risk innovation
- Collect insights and feedback from user groups to uncover issues and opportunities that cannot be predicted on paper
- Refine your solution to align more closely with user needs, aspirations, and the context of the challenge
- Demonstrate a compelling case for scaling

Trial Information

Trial Format

- Solutions will be tested in real-life settings in one or several of the selected sites along the River Roding, involving local residents such as children, young people, their families and related groups (e.g. schools, youth clubs, etc.)
- The **trial period** will run between January 5th to March 16th, 2026.
- Solution providers must be present on site to deploy and run their trial and measure impacts (with the support of local organisations and Connected Places Catapult).
- You will be supported to set up a trial project team (including key partner and Catapult representatives) and run a regular cadence of meetings across the trial period to ensure delivery of the proposed trial plan

An engaging and collaborative process

- Our approach centres on community-led innovation. We encourage solution providers to engage creatively with local residents and target groups throughout the trial - from coadapting solutions and refining trial plans, to offering opportunities for public testing and gathering feedback to improve outcomes.
- Participant recruitment, engagement, and costs: Each solution provider is expected to trial their solution with 12-40 participants, ensuring diverse profiles to generate sufficient evidence of impact. Additional interviews or focus groups may be required for baselines or feedback as part of monitoring and evaluation. Connected Places Catapult and consortium partners will support recruitment, but providers must include engagement costs such as participant incentives in their trial budget.

Trial Information

The Catapult team, together with consortium partners and local stakeholder groups, will support solution providers throughout the design, deployment, monitoring and evaluation of their trial within the River Roding Health Corridor.



Trial support

Support for trial design, preparation and deployment, including site access support



Domain expert knowledge

To gain deeper insight into the challenge, user needs, and the public space and placemaking context



Engaging with the targeted audience

Guidance on best practices for meaningful engagement with children and young people



Data Privacy & Safety

Support for responsible data management and ethical use of data



Monitoring & evaluation

Support for evaluating trial results and impacts within the public space context and against the selected challenge

Measuring trial Impact

If successful, you will be asked to create an impact assessment plan, set up to:

- Ensure interventions are meaningful and effective
- Understand and demonstrate how the solutions impact the Challenge Area
- Build the case for scaling these solutions in other sites both in the short-term during the trials, and contributing to longer-term benefits after the trials.

Some indicative (non-exhaustive) potential benefits are highlighted below. Your solution may not target all of these, and there may also be other benefits that your solution expects beyond these examples:

Change to audience opinions and behaviours

- Site footfall
- Site dwell time
- Site usage patterns or characteristics
- Behavioural change
- Safety (subjective and objective)
- community participation

Health and community impacts

- Health outcomes
- Health determinants (e.g. exercise, nutritional intake etc)
- Preventative health links
- Community ownvership/ stewardship
- Improvements for community groups: inclusivity, accessibility, trust

Impact on the public realm

- Quality of green space
- Improved access to the river
- Change to land usage such as food growing
- Change to infrastucture

Please consider what benefits you expect for different stakeholder groups from your solution. Consider how you would measure your impact, including through community- and stakeholder-defined metrics. This may include findings that are monetisable (£ values), quantifiable and / or qualitative techniques, positives and negatives, intended and unintended. The considerations should include what data you plan to collect, how, and any analysis you plan to conduct in order to understand impacts. (N.B. we may want to work with you on your monitoring plans so that the different trial partners are monitoring coherently). These impacts may be economic, environmental or social, and may relate to different stakeholder groups, depending on the design of your solution.

Thank you!

Any questions?

Please email innovation_funding@cp.catapult.org.uk



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