Introduction

The Spark Forum is an initiative of the Bristol Green Capital Partnership to enable its 950+ member organisations to CONNECT and COLLABORATE to create IMPACT.

Established in 2018 and created for members, by members, Spark Forum events are an important way to harness the enormous potential of the Partnership. Their purpose is to ignite collective action between members to help make Bristol a more sustainable city with a high quality of life for all.

This report gives an overview of the Spark Forum’s impact in its first year, which saw three fantastic Spark Forum events.

The Spark Forum is guided by its values of: collaboration, innovation, impact, positivity, and inclusivity.
What happens at the Spark Forum events?

Keynote speakers

Each Spark Forum event kicks off with a keynote speaker, to show how even big and successful initiatives in Bristol can always be traced back to a simple idea. Our speakers highlight challenges and reveal their secrets to success, to inspire and motivate attendees.

The inaugural Spark Forum welcomed Natalie Fee, co-founder of City to Sea, an award-winning organisation that is campaigning to stop plastic pollution at source. Natalie spoke about the importance of being comfortable asking for help, seeking collaboration and support rather than working ineffectually in isolation.

Jasper Thompson spoke at our second event, telling his story of how he came to set up local charity Help Bristol’s Homeless. Jasper’s talk was an inspiring example of how positivity and practical action can make a tangible difference in the city. And in September 2019, Ben Moss, co-founder of Bristol Wood Recycling Project, shared his experience of 17 years of running one of Bristol’s best known social enterprises (see below).

Hearing about their journeys provided an inspiring and positive start to the Spark Forum events, showing the pitchers and participants that change is possible.
Case Study: Ben Moss, Bristol Wood Recycling Project

“It’s rare to have the opportunity to share the experience of giving birth to an enterprise and navigating the journey of growth with it. To have the opportunity to reflect back to an interested audience had real value for me; to know that some of the gleaned learnings I have come by may be of worth to others is greatly affirming and rewarding. I was able to meet other inspiring entrepreneurs and find a commonality there too; to know that I am part of a movement of community and environmental activists further inspires me to keep on growing and progressing.”
Pitches

At each Spark Forum event, Partnership members pitch ideas or projects that need support from other members to succeed. To get a pitch slot, members must apply via an application form before the event. Pitchers are selected by the Spark Forum committee based on how well they meet the five Spark Forum values: **Collaboration, Positivity, Inclusivity, Innovation** and **Impact**.

We heard a total of 17 pitches the first year of the Spark Forum, with each pitcher having just three minutes to explain their idea and how Partnership members can help. The type of support needed ranged from legal advice to business planning, marketing expertise, technical assistance and communications support.

Pitch highlights

The pitches represented a diverse cross-section of Bristol’s communities, environmental challenges and campaigns.

**Livegraft** asked for volunteers with commercial buildings in central Bristol to install one of their ‘living walls’, reducing carbon, recycling water and promoting sustainable architecture.

**Children’s Scrapstore** sought technical expertise for setting up a Precious Plastic workshop, a DIY system for recycling plastics that promotes sustainability, circularity, and resource efficiency.

**Going for Gold** called upon organisations to support Bristol’s bid to become a Gold Sustainable Food City.

**Bristol Schools Nature Reserve** pitched for volunteers and links with schools to help establishing mini-nature reserves in 50 local schools.

**Global Goals Centre** asked for business planning support to develop an immersive educational hub in Bristol, linked to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.
“The Spark Forum allowed us to go beyond a one-minute pitch, helping to give our ideas a little more depth. The open feedback session was the most useful aspect.”
Simon Green, The Circle

“Pitching at the Spark Forum brought significant benefits for us. Spark Forum is a valuable mechanism for sharing a new idea with the green community in Bristol and facilitating meaningful collaboration with a diverse and skilled group of people.”
Jenny Foster, Global Goals Centre

“Presenting our Precious Plastic project at the Spark Forum was an invaluable experience. Discussing our plans and sharing ideas with representatives of local business and industry, local government, and third sector organisations helped us to adapt, evolve, and ultimately strengthen our project.”
Harry Wood, Children’s Scrapstore

“I would highly recommend the Spark Forum as a platform to pitch ideas, get balls rolling and give your project momentum and exposure.”
Alex Patience, Livegraft

“It is a fantastic opportunity to help launch innovative projects.”
Bridget Appleby, Sustainabubbles
Networking

Enabling connection is one of the main aims of the Spark Forum, and not just for those pitching. The events include a 'speed networking' section to help everyone come away with at least one useful new connection.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Livegraft</strong></td>
<td>Ignited a relationship with the Future Economy Network and has since led to the installation of Bristol’s longest ‘living wall’ alongside its frontage on Gloucester Road;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Children’s Scrapstore</strong></td>
<td>Met a videography company who helped produce a promotional film, and following a connection made at the University of Bath, successfully applied to the Sustainable Technologies Business Acceleration Hub;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>grOWN IT</strong></td>
<td>Forged a link with a local primary school who are collaborating on introducing a food sustainability programme into the curriculum;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GPad Enterprises</strong></td>
<td>Signed up with the Sustainable Technologies Business Acceleration Hub who will provide them with 12 hours of free consultancy and business coaching;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Going for Gold</strong></td>
<td>Were offered pro bono support from a freelance PR consultant and received an offer from Redland Parish Church to host their next event;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bristol Schools Nature Reserve</strong></td>
<td>Made connections with some new schools and recruited a number of volunteers for the project;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Global Goals Centre</strong></td>
<td>Were offered pro bono business planning sessions and made useful contacts at two universities and We The Curious;</td>
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Attendee overview and feedback

- **97%** of respondents rated the Spark forum as an ‘Excellent’ or ‘Very Good’ event.
- **91%** of respondents made at least one useful connection.
- **60%** of respondents planned to follow-up with one or more of the pitchers.
- **97%** of respondents would recommend the event to others.

- "The balance between structured sessions and more open networking opportunities worked so well."
- "The whole event was well crafted to make the most of having so many people and projects in one room!"
- "The keynote speaker was incredibly inspiring."
- "Thanks for your work on this, what a great opportunity for all involved :)"
- "The time-limited pitches were thought provoking and hearing from previous pitchers was really positive."
Get involved

The Spark Forum is open to all members of Bristol Green Capital Partnership. We are always interested in hearing from people and organisations interested in pitching an idea, hosting or sponsoring an event, and joining the Spark Committee.

Website

Please visit the Partnership’s website for more information - https://bristolgreencapital.org/membership/the-spark-forum/

Linked In

The Spark Forum Hub is a LinkedIn based communication platform through which Partnership members can connect and collaborate - https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12161404/

Supporting members

We would like to thank our supporting members whose support enables the delivery of this work:
Thanks to Spark supporters

Many thanks to all the members of the Spark Committee for their time and contributions to the Forum.

Thanks to our three generous hosts in our first year - We the Curious, Burges Salmon, and Triodos Bank.

Thanks also to Greenhouse PR and Yoke for providing significant in-kind support, and to our keynote speakers for their time and inspiration.

Bristol Green Capital Partnership is the city’s environmental sustainability network, with a community of 950+ member organisations from across sectors working towards a shared vision of ‘a sustainable city with a high quality of life for all’. Bristol Green Capital Partnership (CIC) supports its members in their environmental sustainability work, enabled by 11 supporting members, in-kind supporters and the vital involvement of our members.