

Birmingham City of Nature Plan

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1. Executive Summary

[View City of Nature DRAFT Delivery Framework Executive Summary document](#)

2. Foreword by Cllr Ward

Foreword - [picture of Cllr Ian Ward](#)

Councillor Ian Ward, Leader of Birmingham City Council

Thirty years ago, at the Rio Summit in 1992, the world formally recognised how important the environment, biodiversity and sustainability were as a new framework for 21st century living. Over the same intervening 30 years Birmingham has undergone a significant transformation rebuilding its city centre and a vibrant economy.

Over the next 30 years Birmingham sees its future as a *Bolder Greener City* responding directly to the climate change challenge. This green vision also embraces the inequalities in this city exposed through the Covid-19 pandemic and the children and young people struggling to have a fair start in life.

Our Future City Plan (OFCP) 2040 'Shaping this City Together' has introduced a new approach to strategy and plan making in the city based on a shared and inclusive vision. *OFCP* also introduced a vision for Birmingham becoming a city of nature; the City of Nature plan shows how this can be done.

The plan looks at the next 25 years to ensure that this current young generation inherit a much improved, fairer, and greener city. A city that puts nature, people, and the planet at the heart of its decision-making and inclusive growth agenda.

Actions will be delivered across 5 city themes that embrace the circular economy and introduce new ways of working right across the council and its partners. The plan also establishes the Birmingham City of Nature Alliance as a conduit for direct citizen engagement.

By adopting this sustainable and inclusive approach the city is set to benefit enormously, as shown later in this document to the tune of £2.5 Billion pound uplift in natural capital value across the city over the plan period of 25 years. The purpose of introducing this work is to present the true value of blue and green space to the city; literally making those invisible benefits, we can so easily take for granted, visible for all to see and start to appreciate.

Birmingham is rich in parks and blue and green spaces, much of it inherited from our Victorian past. What this document provides is a reimagining of our future as a 21st century green city, not one looking backwards but forward. By 2047 Birmingham, once known as a city of 1000 trades will be known as a city of a 1000 green spaces. This approach will address climate change, nature recovery and inequity of access. This plan will help bring about a bolder greener Birmingham envisioned in *Our Future City Plan*; and so, make Birmingham recognisable as a City of Nature on a world stage.

3. Introduction

Over the next 25 years we want to see Birmingham recognised as a City of Nature where its parks and green spaces are both sustainably managed and funded. This plan aims to change the way Birmingham treats its natural environment and how it thinks about the future of its parks and green spaces.

Birmingham's City of Nature Plan: -

- Provides an outline of the steps we will take to achieve the 25-year City of Nature vision for the city.
- Highlights the wider benefits the natural environment brings to our life that have remained invisible to many, making the invisible – visible.
- Explains why we believe there are opportunities to positively address the challenges we face and what it will mean in practice to benefit from these opportunities.
- Explains the changes that will need to be made at Birmingham City Council and beyond to achieve this.
- Shows how we will give citizens, elected members and wider stakeholders' confidence that we will deliver what we say we will deliver.
- Uses the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as a metric to report our actions against to illustrate how many areas of city life are impacted by the natural environment.
- Encourages us to work with our partners across the Combined Authority geography by embracing the principles adopted by the West Midlands National Park.
- Ensures we will work to the Government priorities within the 2021 Environment Act and the 25 Year Environment Plan

The plan will involve the whole council and its core third sector partners working together to deliver outcomes through the formation of a City of Nature Community Alliance; whilst reaching out to the citizens of Birmingham to facilitate significantly more involvement at every stage.

Over the last two years the Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) Project in Birmingham, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and supported by National Trust and known as Naturally Birmingham, has been working to create a plan for the sustainable provision, maintenance and use of green and blue spaces in the city. Alongside the FPA project, the city and its partners have also been working on ways to make our whole city a Bolder Greener City including the Our Future City Plan (OFCP) 2040 that sets out the vision for the development of the heart of Birmingham.

When we refer to green spaces, this goes beyond just parks to encompass all aspects of the natural environment in the city and people's engagement with it. City of Nature therefore represents a major strand within Birmingham's Route to Zero Climate Emergency Plan and represents the substantive part of the city's adaptation response to climate change.

Our Future City Plan (OFCP) Central Birmingham Framework

The OFCP 'Shaping Our City Together,' visioning document was launched with a vision to create a vibrant city with a mix of activities including retail, offices, leisure, education, tourism, civic and community functions. With equal opportunities for all including access to jobs and high-quality homes.

The following principles were identified as representing the key qualities in the strategy for Central Birmingham 2040:

- Green City - Create a city environment that has a minimal impact on our planet and enables nature to be truly part of the city.
- Equitable City - A city where all our communities have the same opportunities, and no one is left behind.
- Liveable City - A people-focussed city where citizens can create homes and communities.
- Distinctive City - A city that takes pride in the individual identity of its communities.

Six City Themes have been developed to deliver the OFCP vision. These will include goals and actions that we can all work towards together including 'The City of Nature' theme which places nature at the heart of the framework. For the future success of the city tackling climate change, creating places that bring people together, and improving health and wellbeing is essential. The emerging 'OFCP Central Birmingham Framework' has identified seven potential "Central Renewal Areas" (CRAs) as areas with potential for significant change and reimagining. The areas have been selected as those with most scope to unlock new opportunities for mixed use redevelopment to provide housing, jobs and new public/green spaces within new and existing neighbourhoods.

4. Background

Matters related to the environment continue to move at pace and we have heard the worldwide pledges coming out from COP26 (2021) and the inclusion within the 2021 Environment Act on a draft strategy for the education & children's services systems; ([Sustainability & Climate Change: A draft strategy for the education & children's services systems \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)); together with a statutory framework for work on natural capital and biodiversity net gain. This all serves to meet the Government's own stated aim of "For this generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than we found it"; the central message of the UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

In 2019 Birmingham City Council declared a Climate Emergency.

In 2021 the UK hosted a UN Climate Conference - COP 26, 30 years on from the Rio Summit ([United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992 | United Nations](#)) The messages coming out from the conference clearly showed that the world is now racing to catch up with the science.

The UK's State of Nature Report

Urgent action is needed to address the rapid decline in the UK's biodiversity. The UK's State of Nature report provides a detailed look at how the natural environment is changing across the UK against a 1970 baseline.

The most recent (2019) report showed the following:

- **15 per cent of species are under threat of extinction**
- **The average abundance of wildlife has fallen by 13 per cent with the steepest losses in the last ten years**
- **41 per cent of UK species studied show a decline in numbers and 133 species have already been lost from our shores**

UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan

The 25 Year Environment Plan has 10 themes

- Enhancing biosecurity
- Managing exposure to chemicals
- Minimising waste
- Mitigating and adapting to climate change
- Enhancing beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment
- Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently
- Reducing the risks of harm from environmental hazards
- Thriving plants and wildlife
- Clean and plentiful water
- Clean air

The City of Nature Plan will recognise and work across all 10 themes where applicable, but will have a particular focus on 6:

- **Mitigating and adapting to climate change**
- **Enhancing beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment**
- **Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently**
- **Thriving plants and wildlife**
- **Clean and plentiful water**
- **Clean air**

The UK 2021 Environment Act

The City of Nature Plan will be entirely consistent with the 2021 Environment Act. Local Nature Recovery Strategies, with their focus on comprehensive habitat mapping and biodiversity net gain, will be central to this. These are themes that run through all our work on the natural environment. Our focus is on genuine net gain, not just covering losses from new development. There will also be a commitment to follow the mitigation hierarchy to avoid impact where possible before moving through 'minimise, restore and offset' (with the latter as a last resort).

The Landscapes Review 2019

The importance of connecting people and nature more effectively emerged as a priority in The Landscapes Review 2019 (also known as the Glover Review). The report called for innovation in the way we think about our national parks and landscapes, how we connect them to urban communities, and how we ensure that there is representative diversity and inclusivity in their management. The West Midlands National Park (launched in July 2020) is cited as a positive example within the Landscape Review as a form of new, urban national park and this plan works to the principles adopted by the West Midlands National Park; choosing to work on the Combined Authority geography or through cross boundary working, when appropriate.

The Dasgupta Review on the Economics of Biodiversity

Finally, the fundamental benefits of our natural environment were highlighted in The Dasgupta Review on the Economics of Biodiversity, a landmark report commissioned by HM Treasury and released in February 2021. It calls for urgent and transformative change in how we think, act and measure economic success to protect and enhance our prosperity and the natural world and puts

forward ways in which we should account for nature in economics and decision-making. Its headline messages serve as a critical reminder of the importance of nature:

- **Our economies, livelihoods and well-being all depend on our most precious asset: Nature.**
- **We have collectively failed to engage with Nature sustainably, to the extent that our demands far exceed its capacity to supply us with the goods and services we all rely on.**
- **Our unsustainable engagement with Nature is endangering the prosperity of current and future generations.**
- **The solution starts with understanding and accepting a simple truth: our economies are embedded within Nature, not external to it.**

Recognising the many co-benefits from investing time, energy and resources into the natural environment, this plan will also support delivery against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 which have been developed to help ensure that we act as an international community to help to make the world more sustainable.

The goals supported are shown under each of the five themes of the plan.

How green is Birmingham?

Birmingham is one of the greenest cities in Europe - with over 600 publicly accessible parks and green spaces across the city. These spaces cover over 4,700 hectares (47 Km²) - for comparison, this is three times the size of the city of Lichfield (14.02 Km²) or 1.5x Worcester (33.3 Km²). Fifteen of our city's parks, commons and country parks hold the Green Flag Award – the national quality award for parks and green spaces, making them among the best in the country.

There are over 1 million trees across the city - to recognise this, Birmingham has earned the prestigious 'Tree Cities of the World' status.

Connecting these spaces are 160 miles (257km) of canals and 400km of urban brook courses; sometimes referred to as our blue infrastructure.

How do we manage Green and Blue Spaces?

Green and Blue spaces owned by Birmingham City Council are managed through the work of the Parks Service, its partners and an increasing number of volunteers who together care for a wide variety of green spaces from highway verges to large Country Parks. The Ranger Service also help engage the wider community through conservation land management and educational sessions and a wide range of events and activities helping to keep our city green, clean, and safe.

However, in recent years our parks and greenspaces nationally have been under huge threat. As a result of austerity and the demand placed on local authorities' budgets to support statutory services such as social care, non-statutory services like parks have been facing budget pressures and in turn the number of Parks Officers has been reduced.

In response to this, parks innovators in Birmingham and across the country, both inside of local authority parks teams, and outside in universities, community organisations, social enterprises, and charities, show there is a real community of experimenters, activists and entrepreneurs working to enable our parks and greenspaces to evolve, adapt and continue to be at the heart of our communities. But to face the challenges and opportunities ahead, we must continue to adopt and spread the mindset, habits and tools that can support this innovation. The challenges and

opportunities ahead create a clear reason for us to keep innovating for the future of our parks and greenspaces and rethink our future parks.

This plan aims to bring all this work together into one document.

How Do We Use Green and Blue Spaces?

Birmingham's parks and green spaces are our most used leisure and recreation facilities in the city with estimates suggesting over 58-million-person visits per year.

Nearly six out of ten (59.9%) of Birmingham residents visit green space on a weekly basis, with a further 17.5% visiting at least monthly.

Nearly two thirds of respondents (64.3%) rate green spaces as very valuable local assets and 72% of respondents visit the green space closest to home.

The most popular reasons for visiting green spaces in Birmingham are

- to walk or walk the dog (57.6%)
- peace and quiet and to relax (54.1%)
- To experience nature and wildlife (48.6%)

More recent data suggests that levels of use of parks and green spaces has increased because of Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns.

In April 2021, 68% of adults had visited a green and natural space in the last 14 days. A staggering total of 391,548,094 visits were made to green and natural spaces in this one month alone across the country.

(Natural England People and Nature Survey bulletin on 16/06/21)

So, what's the problem?

5. The Challenges

'No one will protect what they don't care about, and no one will care about what they have never experienced'.

Sir David Attenborough

Funding

The 2016-17 Parliamentary Inquiry 'The Future of Public Parks' found that the value of parks and green spaces was well documented but not well understood; so not fully protected in policy.

The Inquiry found that as a non-statutory service they have often been seen as non-essential services and have suffered disproportionately with budget reductions imposed following the 2008 global financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures.

Nationally, there are challenges in terms of finding long term management and sustainable funding solutions that prompted the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Department for Levelling Up, Housing

and Communities (formally Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government) and the National Trust to fund a programme to explore these issues and develop learning across the sector, through the Future Parks Accelerator programme.

The Birmingham Future Accelerator Programme explored this challenge through four themes:

- Children
- Housing and development
- Health
- Skills and Education

To ensure that opportunities through these themes were developed by those with the greatest experience and real life understanding of the challenges faced in these areas a cross-organisational team was brought together to tackle the challenges. The project needed to:

- Understand and promote the benefits the natural world provides us across all the themes.
- Devise opportunities for everyone to access these benefits.
- Investigate how those opportunities would be funded over the next 25 years.

It became obvious that people needed parks and parks needed people and it wasn't just about how to preserve what we have; it was going to be how do we improve what we have and increase the amount of green space people have access to. Only by extolling the value of our green spaces and the natural world would we be able to provide fair and welcoming spaces in the city that people can be involved with every day, benefiting from the opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing.

Inequality

Although Birmingham has over 600 green spaces, many of them were inherited from our Victorian past. We need to see Birmingham as a 21st century green, not that looks backwards, but that looks forward to the future addressing climate change, nature recovery and inequity of access. So, we need to change the way we view and manage all green areas in the city to identify more good quality publicly accessible green spaces. So that Birmingham moves from its historic identity of a city of 1000 trades, to become known for its 1000 green spaces.

As we engaged with communities across Birmingham, we became very aware that sections of our community currently face barriers in accessing green spaces or making full use of facilities on offer. Work is already underway to understand exactly where the gaps are, and Birmingham is the first city in the UK to develop a tool to highlight the inequalities in accessing green space. We call the ambition to achieve equitable access to green spaces **Environmental Justice**.

The tool highlights inequalities across the city at a ward level and produces a map showing wards ranging from "red" to "green" wards. *Details of this tool are shown in the Fair City Theme on page 10 of this document.*

Birmingham was asked to present the innovative work it has done on environmental justice to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Parks in 2021 to demonstrate how cities could better understand this dilemma.

Now we know where we need to prioritise our use of resources, we need to coordinate these resources to be able to deliver the actions required to close the gaps. Tackling this will be key to the success of our wider ambitions and the goals for our plan over the coming years.

6. The Benefits

Introducing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as a key metric through the plan will help establish new working practices that better align with the 5 capitals model of the circular economy, (ref: [The Five Capitals - a framework for sustainability | Forum for the Future](#)).

The 5 capitals model sees natural capital (the natural environment) as the starting place for all human wealth and health creation and through this the wider benefits of the natural environment can be better expressed and valued.

Economic Benefits

It is now possible to capture the value of our natural environment by combining the biological science of ecology with the pragmatic discipline of economics, through a joint venture known as Natural Capital. In this way the invisible benefits of blue and green spaces to the city and the citizen can be made visible. Reference the Appendix

Land providing Natural Capital	Current (2021) Green Space in current condition.	Current Green Space in improved condition (Applying Birmingham Fair Standard actions)	Improved and additional Green Space to meet 25-year ambition
Natural Capital Value (Capitalised/stock values stated in £billions; 2020 prices; central estimates)	£12.30	£13.96	£14.93

Health benefits

Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing. It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety, and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity, and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as asthma. It can combat loneliness and bind communities together. However, there is more to do. The number of people who spend little or no time in natural spaces is too high. Recent data from the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment survey tells us that some 12% of children do not visit the natural environment each year. In the most deprived areas of England, people tend to have the poorest health and significantly less green space than wealthier areas. Playing and learning outside is a fundamental part of childhood, and helps children grow up healthy. Some children are lucky enough to have a family garden; others will not, and it is important that we find other ways to give them better access to the great outdoors. We know that regular contact with green spaces, such as the local park, lake, or playground, can have a beneficial impact on children’s physical and mental health.

(UK Government 25 Year Environmental plan)

Climate Change Response

Responding to the climate emergency presents us with an opportunity for positive change for the city. Bold climate action can deliver many benefits such as better health and wellbeing, improved air quality, economic savings for individuals and businesses, new jobs, less congestion on our roads, and cleaner and greener places.

Carbon contribution of natural environment	Tonnes of Carbon sequestered or absorbed by the city's natural environment	Tonnes of Carbon dioxide gas (CO ₂) taken out of the local atmosphere by the city's natural environment
Current Green Space in current condition	573,457	2,104,585
Current Green space improved to the Birmingham Fair Standard after 25 years	581,144	2,132,810
Improved and additional Green Space to meet 25-year ambition	621,824	2,282,106

Being able to make visible previously invisible benefits of the natural environment help city decision-makers appreciate their substantial contribution above and beyond their maintenance cost burden.

Biodiversity Net Gain and Nature Recovery

The UK Government have published a 25 Year Environment Plan which aims to return an improved environment to the next generation within 25 years. This City of Nature plan aims to do just that. Not to just protect existing parks and open spaces in their current condition but seek to restore the full natural potential of Birmingham. To connect and join up nature, to ensure development brings positive benefits for nature, which in turn will deliver far greater benefits for people and the wider economy. This requires rethinking how and why we value nature especially in the city.

The draft Nature Recovery Network Map (see appendix) shows how much more natural Birmingham could become in 25 years. The matching 2021 Natural Capital Assessment provides what value that would bring collectively to the city; helping make the future of this great city a *Bolder Greener Birmingham*.

Involvement

Involving citizens through the delivery of actions in this plan will mean that there is a greater understanding of the challenges the city faces and ensure local people have a voice in how their area is run.

Involving Council officers, other than just those in Street Scene, and their network of citizens from their associated service areas such as Planning, Public Health, Highways, Neighbourhoods and Jobs and Skills will result in the delivery of appropriate housing, better health outcomes, places for children to learn and play and a sense of pride of our citizens in their local area and in Birmingham as a whole.

7. The City of Nature Plan

Following on from the original 4 themes of the FPA Project the Birmingham City of Nature Plan will work across 5 citywide themes where nature is recognised as integral to wider decision making and planning and that also embraces the circular economy.

The learning gained as part of the FPA programme has highlighted 5 key themes, representing areas relating to nature which are either currently being missed, or are not sufficiently well connected within Council operations and so form part of a new governance model for the natural environment.

These focus on creating:

- A Green City – Ensuring green and blue infrastructure is safe, clean, and sustainably managed. Our 25-year Plan for nature will set the threshold for the City's Nature Recovery Network Plan and embed a new governance model.
- A Healthy City – We will make sure every citizen in Birmingham can access green spaces to improve their health and wellbeing as part of the foundations of a Good Life.
- A Fair City – We will make sure; that there is fair access to green jobs and that our workforce reflects our diverse communities; ensuring every citizen has access to good quality green space wherever they live, fast tracking those in greatest need first
- An Engaged City – Citizens will know, love, and protect green spaces and nature.
- A Valued City – Ensuring that the city better understand and captures the value of nature and green spaces, maximising their commercial and sponsorship potential and establishes new innovative funding avenues.

A Fair City

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030:



Environmental justice is at the heart of what a fair city would look like. It is defined as *the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies*

Measuring Environmental Justice in Birmingham

The Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator Project has looked at how other cities around the world have responded to this issue of unequal access to green space; and is the first UK local authority to develop a measurement tool for Environmental Justice; based on the existing Indices of Multiple Deprivation.

The Environmental Justice score measures:

- Access to a green space (2 hectares or larger) within 1,000m

- Flood Risk
- Urban Heat Island effect
- Health Inequalities (through Excess Years of Life Lost)
- Indices of Multiple Deprivation

Mapping Environmental Justice in Birmingham

Have been asked for a description of what would be acceptable as public open space or do we need to say green space.

We have looked at the whole city and have developed a new map that shows where in the city all these compound issues are being felt most acutely. This then provides a very useful new baseline from which to develop an evidence-based approach to levelling-up.

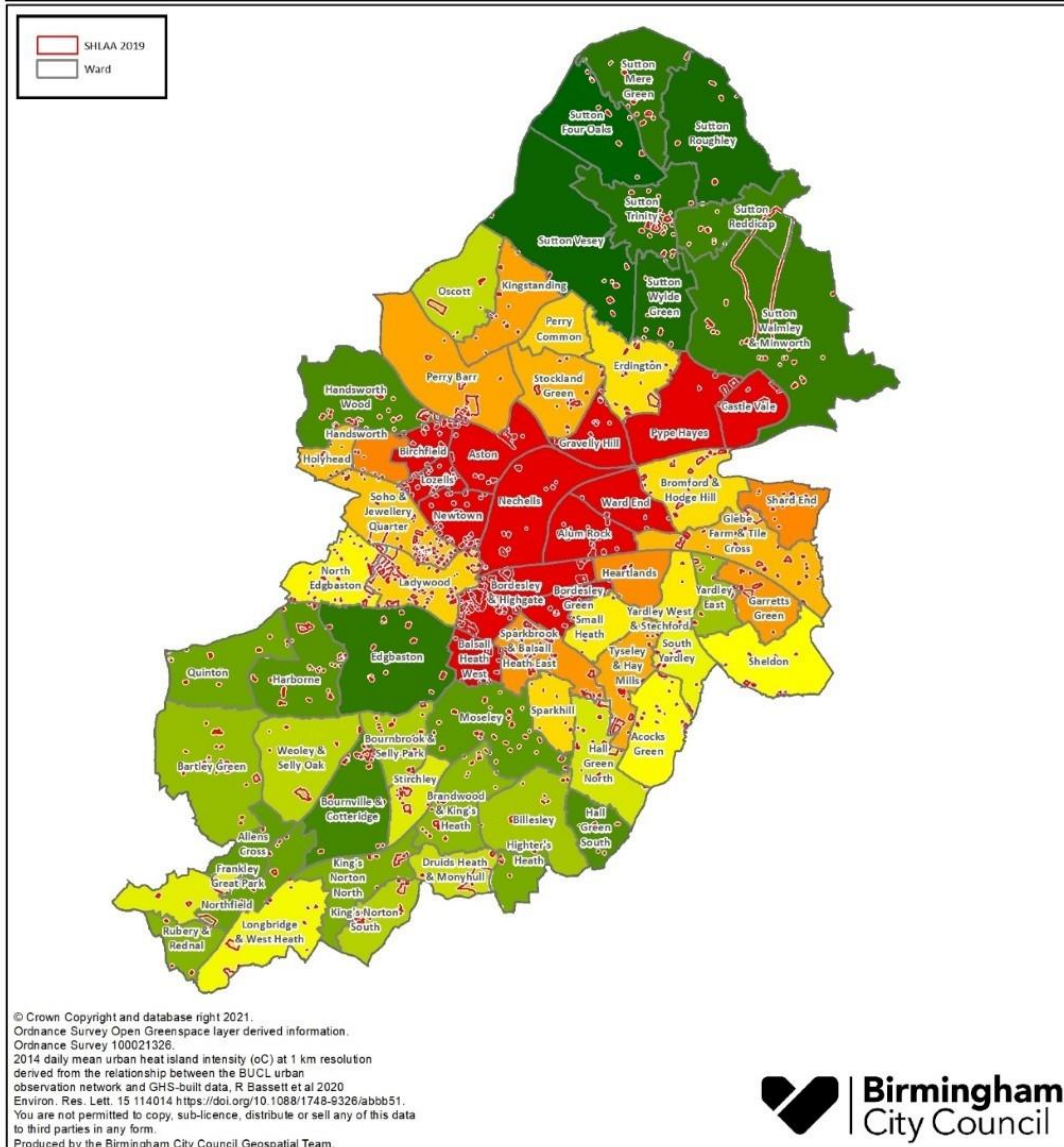
All 69 Wards are given a value and a corresponding colour the highest scores receiving a red colour and the lowest scores show as green. We want to make the changes that will start to turn the “red” high priority wards green.

Priority Areas

The red wards show those areas of the city where there is least environmental justice for citizens living there. Access to green space is lowest, the areas are urban heat islands, at risk of flooding, have high levels of deprivation and people have worse health and wellbeing. This presents a real challenge to the city.

Combined Index by Ward - Mean Value

0.14 - Sutton Four Oaks	0.29 - Highter's Heath	0.32 - Sheldon	0.38 - Garretts Green
0.15 - Sutton Vesey	0.29 - King's Norton North	0.33 - Acocks Green	0.39 - Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath East
0.16 - Sutton Roughley	0.30 - Rubery & Rednal	0.33 - North Edgbaston	0.39 - Heartlands
0.19 - Sutton Wyldes Green	0.30 - Brandwood & King's Heath	0.34 - Small Heath	0.39 - Shard End
0.19 - Sutton Trinity	0.31 - Bartley Green	0.35 - Yardley West & Stechford	0.39 - Handsworth
0.21 - Sutton Mere Green	0.31 - Yardley East	0.35 - Erdington	0.40 - Ward End
0.24 - Edgbaston	0.31 - Billesley	0.36 - Bromford & Hodge Hill	0.40 - Bordesley Green
0.25 - Sutton Walmley & Minworth	0.31 - Bournbrook & Selly Park	0.36 - Sparkhill	0.41 - Alum Rock
0.26 - Sutton Reddica	0.31 - King's Norton South	0.36 - Ladywood	0.41 - Birchfield
0.27 - Bournville & Cotteridge	0.31 - Weoley & Selly Oak	0.36 - Perry Common	0.41 - Bordesley & Highgate
0.27 - Handsworth Wood	0.32 - Oscott	0.37 - Soho & Jewellery Quarter	0.41 - Pype Hayes
0.27 - Hall Green South	0.32 - Druids Heath & Monyhull	0.37 - Holyhead	0.42 - Lozells
0.27 - Harborne	0.32 - Hall Green North	0.37 - Glebe Farm & Tile Cross	0.43 - Newtown
0.28 - Moseley	0.32 - Stirchley	0.37 - Stockland Green	0.44 - Castle Vale
0.29 - Allens Cross	0.32 - Frankley Great Park	0.37 - Tyseley & Hay Mills	0.44 - Balsall Heath West
0.29 - Northfield	0.32 - South Yardley	0.37 - Perry Barr	0.44 - Aston
0.29 - Quinton	0.32 - Longbridge & West Heath	0.38 - Kingstanding	0.44 - Nechells
			0.44 - Gravelly Hill



To be able to 'level-up' environmental justice in terms of the city's parks offer to our citizens, we want BCC Street Scene, which includes the management of green spaces, to introduce the Fair Parks Standard. By assessing each park against a standard under the same 5 themes as city wide.

At a local level we ask if the park is:

- **Fair** (is it welcoming, accessible, clean and safe).
- **Green** (are there different trees and plants, are there habitats for wildlife, is it managed sustainably).
- **Healthy** (are there walking routes, quiet areas, activities, is the park used for social prescriptions; and play value).
- **Involved** (can you find out what's happening in your park, can you influence what is happening).
- **Valued** (do we know the worth of what the park provides, is that shared, are there ways to raise extra funds).

If a park doesn't meet the Fair Standard when it is assessed an action plan is created to show what can be done to raise the park to this standard.

This approach will set a new benchmark of quality for all BCC green spaces. Over the course of this 25-year period all parks will be assessed against the Fair Parks Standard and action plans will be created for all those not meeting the standard to help direct the work of the City of Nature Alliance and identify any need to look for additional funding through the sustainable finance model.

We will work side by side with communities together with all council directorates and key partners to achieve this. Looking at the map above you can see this would be working from the inside out.

Proposed timescale for delivering Fair Parks Standard city wide

First 12 months: 2022 -2023

We will trial this approach first in 5 open spaces in Bordesley and Highgate Ward to ensure it is working well before taking it elsewhere.

First five years: 2022 to 2027

We will use the findings from the Bordesley and Highgate pilot to bring together council departments and community organisations to focus upon the green spaces in another 5 wards:

- Balsall Heath West
- Nechells
- Gravelly Hill
- Pype Hayes and
- Castle Vale

Three of these wards - Balsall Heath West, Nechells and Castle Vale are in the top 5 areas of most need of environmental justice; the other two are geographical neighbours making a central north-south spine of the city.

Years 6 to 10: 2028 - 2032

This will be followed by 8 more red wards:

- Alum Rock
- Aston
- Birchfield
- Bordesley Green
- Heartlands
- Lozells
- Newtown
- Sparkbrook and Balsall Heath East

Within the 25 years of the plan: by 2047

All our parks and green spaces will meet the Fair Parks Standard, with the 35 highest scoring wards forming a vital part of the city's nature recovery network and therefore it's response and resilience to Climate Change; ensuring our whole parks network moves from red to green.

But the City of Nature outcomes don't stop with the Birmingham Parks Standard Audit process. The City of Nature plan supports all green spaces throughout the 25 years to reach their full potential through the involvement of the local community to access resources that BCC alone can no longer provide

For example, there is already substantive work planned along the South and East of Birmingham as part of the East Birmingham Inclusive Growth Strategy. The Cole Valley is a key green corridor running through East and South Birmingham. It is identified within the Council's Route to Zero and East Birmingham programmes as a focus for the improvement of the natural environment and as an active travel artery. The Environment Agency has published a Vision for the Cole Valley Catchment in partnership with the Council and other stakeholders and this provides a useful starting point for planning the delivery of improvements to blue and green infrastructure. These include:

- Cole Valley Country Park designation
- Glebe Farm Rec Improvements
- Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens Access Improvements
- Cole Valley Walking and Cycling including the elements designed under EB002: Ward End/Cole Valley Skills Hub
- Ackers active travel interchange
- Tree planting

We will make sure the Route to Zero and East Birmingham programme teams support the improvement of the Cole Valley in line with City of Nature principles.

Fair City Outcomes

We will make sure every citizen has access to good quality green space wherever they live and that there is fair access to training and green jobs and our workforce reflects our diverse communities. – Involvement throughout the delivery framework including delivery of maintenance and management.

To do this we need:

- Good quality green spaces close to where people live, through the adoption of the **Birmingham Fair Parks Standard** process (F1)
- To Identify up to 400 more public green spaces (F2)
- Green spaces that are managed to ensure they are appealing to our diverse communities (F3)
- Green spaces that are accessible for those with additional needs and those who may need support (F4)
- A training and employment showcase of opportunities in the 'green sector' (F5)
- A green space workforce more reflective of Birmingham's diverse communities (F6)
- A Children and Young People strategy with City of Nature as part of that (F7).

A Green City

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030:



Where nature is recognised as integral to wider decision and plan making; and where green spaces, nature and the environment are protected, maintained, and sustainably managed.

Under a green city this Delivery Framework will address one of the themes prioritised in the 25 Year Environment Plan:

“Support the delivery of the national Nature Recovery Network, with its focus on enhancing landscapes; improving connectivity between wildlife rich places; climate resilience; protection of existing natural environments and supporting access to nature for health and well-being.”

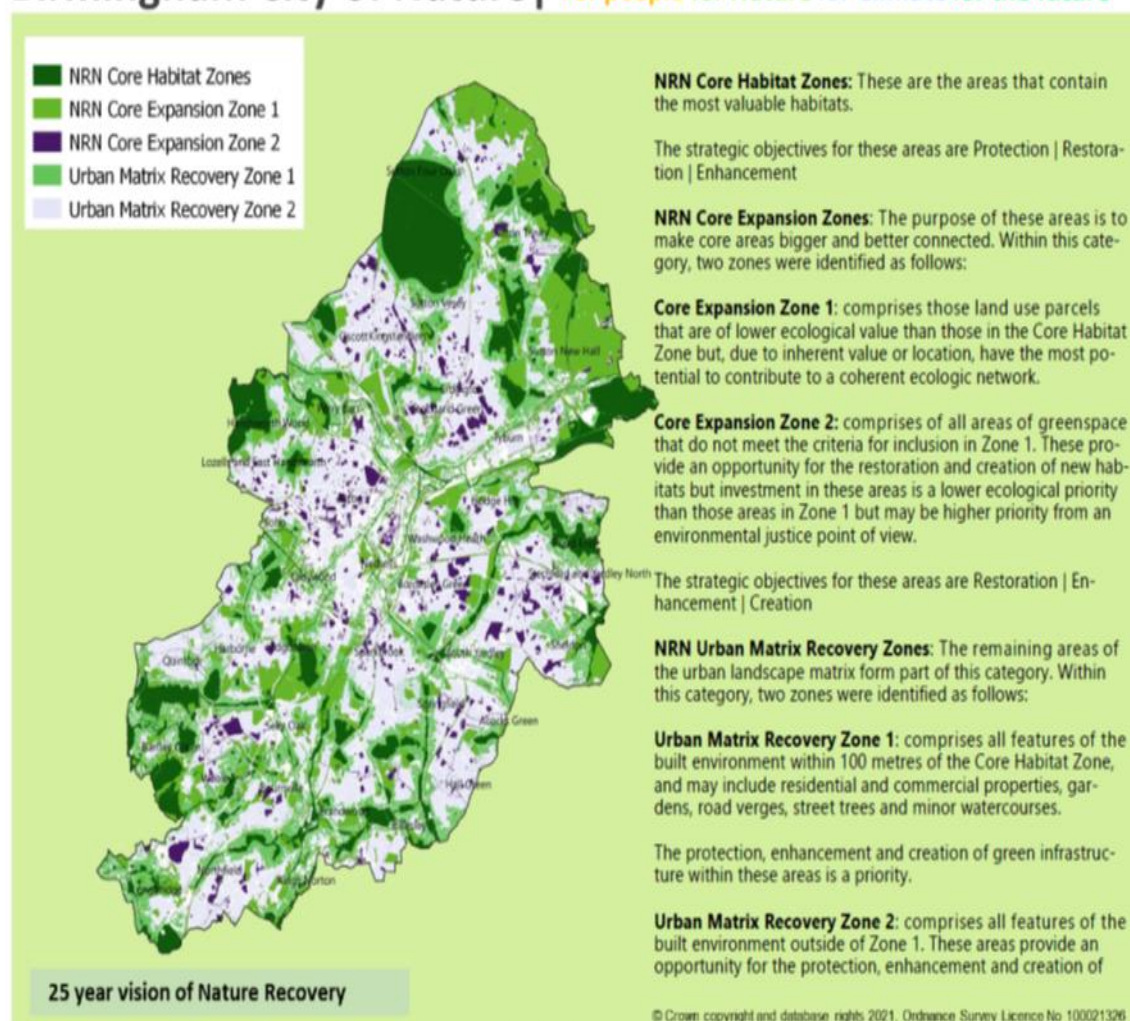
Green City Outcomes

To do this we need:

- A complete change in how we build all our public realm, providing improved connectivity and supporting the restoration and viability of urban areas (G1)
- Green corridors that are easier to find and use, helping citizens to use them for active travel and so improve air quality (G2)
- An enhanced network of green space and green infrastructure that are safe, clean, sustainably managed and meet the Birmingham Fair Parks? Standard (G3)
- The restoration of green spaces, nature, and the environment (G4)
- Greener development bringing natural landscapes or features into every place and neighbourhood (G5)
- Opportunities to help citizens make better use of green space outside of their home for food growing or communal gardens (G6)
- The **Nature Recovery Network**, stretching right across the city and linking with all our West Midlands neighbours, forming part of the **West Midlands National Park (G7)**
- An increase to the tree canopy coverage across the city to 25%, through the **Birmingham Urban Forest Master Plan (G8)**
- A change to the city’s governance structures that oversee the city’s natural environment across the full 25-year term (G9).

MAP OF THE DRAFT NATURE RECOVERY NETWORK FOR BIRMINGHAM FOR 25 YEARS

Birmingham City of Nature | For people for Nature for Climate for the future



A Healthy City

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030:



The value of parks, green spaces and nature is not just defined by numbers.

The health benefits of green spaces have been intuitively known by communities for a long period of time. In recent years there has been an explosion of evidence which comprehensively supports the idea that green spaces are integral for both our physical and mental health.

Green space has been demonstrated to improve physical health in the following ways:

Studies have shown that for children and young people access to green space helps regulate emotional and behavioural activity, specifically inattention and hyperactivity; encourages prosocial behaviour; and is the most significant factor to influence the reduction in childhood obesity.

For adults, access to green space brings significant benefits in terms of reducing the likelihood of cardiovascular diseases, type two diabetes, hip fractures, bowel, and breast cancers.

Older adults also benefit from reduction in levels of obesity, numbers of fractures and reduced death from cardiovascular diseases.

Access to green space can also bring significant benefits in terms of mental health with evidence suggesting higher levels of life satisfaction; lower levels of self-reported stress; and lower levels of anxiety and depression.

Healthy City Outcomes

We will make sure every citizen in Birmingham can access green spaces to improve their health and wellbeing as part of the foundations of a Good Life ([The 7 Foundations of a Good Life - Foundations for the Good Life](#))

To do this we need:

- Nature Connectedness – whereby citizens understand the benefits of using green space and having contact with nature for physical and mental health (H1)
- Safe and attractive routes for walking and cycling (H2)
- An increased number of parks offering health and wellbeing services and green social prescribing (H3)
- To work with fitness providers to offer health and wellbeing activities in parks and other green spaces (H4)
- Support to citizens living in Council housing to make communal gardens where they live (H5).

An Involved City

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030:



Community is key to the City of Nature framework. Our actions must create a better, greener future for everyone across Birmingham.

Our codesign process so far has stretched over 12 months, considering:

- An online survey with 157 responses
- 97 digital display campaigns
- 29k Twitter impressions
- More than 10 engagement sessions and workshops

Involved City Outcomes

Citizens will know, love and protect green spaces and nature.

To do this we need:

- New City of Nature pages on Birmingham City Council's website to bring our green spaces to people at home, helping them to connect to nature wherever they are through a series of videos and photographs (I1)
- Over 100 Parks pages detailing what these parks offer (I2)
- Support to children and young people to learn, play and explore the wonders of nature as part of their education, building on the work of [UNESCO](#) (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Schools and acting as **Young Green Champions (I3)**
- **Opportunities in green spaces to explore and celebrate art and culture and work with libraries to organise book clubs in parks (I4)**

- New and more flexible ways for the citizens to participate and to get involved in volunteering in green spaces; and becoming **Green Champions (I5)**
- A **City of Nature Alliance**, made up of charities and community organisations, to provide a new civic voice and engagement mechanism (I6)
- To establish at least one Community Growing Space in every ward (I7).

A Valued City

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030:



One of the greatest challenges facing the long-term maintenance and recovery of the natural environment and parks and green spaces, is the issue of funding.

The 2016-17 Parliamentary Inquiry 'The Future of Public Parks' found that the value of parks and green spaces was well documented but not well understood; so not fully protected in policy.

The Inquiry found that as a non-statutory service they have often been seen as non-essential services and have suffered disproportionately with budgets reductions imposed following the 2008 global financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures.

Nationally, there are challenges in terms of finding long term management and sustainable funding solutions that prompted the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government and the National Trust to fund a programme to explore these issues and develop learning across the sector, through the *Future Parks Accelerator* programme.

Birmingham City Council was successful in its application to be one of the eight Future Parks Accelerator projects and the City of Nature Delivery Framework has been developed to form the legacy of this short-term programme to explore and test new solutions.

Historically the economic model adopted by all cities has been a linear one resulting in the maintenance of parks being registered as nothing but a cost; with their value not being captured.

In this **City of Nature plan** is moving away from that model towards a circular economy one, that better fits how the city will need to meet its twin challenges of levelling-up and climate change.

In addition, the city will develop a Sustainable Finance Framework with external green investors allowing for the long-term investment into the city's blue and green infrastructure.

All three above mechanisms will help the city realise the true value of the natural environment as captured in this latest Natural Capital Account which valued the city's **future potential** green estate as £14.93 billion after 25 years. **See appendix for details.**

Valued City outcomes

The plan has developed a circular economy funding model that seeks to better capture the true value of the natural environment and ensure that future investment happens where it is needed most, making the invisible benefits, visible.

To do this we need:

- Information that demonstrates the wider environmental, social, and economic value of green space through a Natural Capital Account (V1)
- Biodiversity Net Gain and improved access to good quality green spaces using the planning and development process (V2)
- Diversity of income and funding streams for green spaces from supporting communities to crowdfund and secure grants, through to large scale business contributions (V3)
- Increased Council income through commercial activity (V4)
- Added social value to our green spaces through our procurement processes (V5).
- Education and Skills commissioning done through a green lens (V6).

8. Measurables

As the 25-year city wide City of Nature Plan develops metrics will be developed with a cyclical review process in five-year intervals. Below are some examples of the ambition for city wide targets over the next 25 years.

A Green City

25% Tree Canopy Coverage across the City

50% of adults perceiving West Midlands is a National Park

25% residents feel they contribute to green city decision making

100% Green Waste recycled

1000 public green spaces **identified in the city**

A Healthy City

City of Nature webpage receiving 1 million visits

60% citizens using green spaces at least once a week

90% citizens always listening to birdsong

35% citizens taking part in Health and Wellbeing activities at least once a week in green spaces

50% of social prescriptions using green spaces

20% increase in walking cycling journeys

A Fair City

All public open spaces in all wards to reach **the** Birmingham Fair Standard

25% of parks service being under the age of 25 and be from ethnic minority backgrounds

100 million visits per year to our green spaces

Identification of 400 additional green spaces

An Involved City

100% of nurseries to be signed up to the Little Green Champions Programme

25% of all adult citizens to sign up to Green Champions Programme

600,000 volunteer hours per year

40% of volunteers to be from ethnic minority backgrounds

10% children in care mentoring sessions to be related to green spaces

1500 volunteers receiving training through City of Nature Alliance in total

A Valued City

Birmingham Health and Natural Capital Account increase **by 20%**

£25m per annum income through commercial activity

£1.5m raised through community and third sector investment for investment in green spaces

25% Green infrastructure & nature recovery joint funded through Green or Climate Bonds / Green Investment.

9. Delivery Partners

A major part of the Delivery Framework is the work to develop a city-wide Alliance of delivery partners (the creation of which is funded by Commonwealth Games 2022 Legacy Fund) who will work together under a memorandum of understanding to achieve the following objectives:

Objectives for the Birmingham City of Nature (BCoN) Alliance:

- Continue to identify organisations across Birmingham that deliver outcomes in line with the aims of the Our Future City Plan - City of Nature Vision and invite them to join the Alliance membership to help delivery of actions identified in the City of Nature Delivery Framework.
- Establish and maintain a forum for BCoN Alliance members to come together, whether online or in person to contribute to decision making regarding action taken in each of the 6 Red Wards as identified in the five-year plan.
- Communicate information between BCoN members, communities, and other stakeholders.

- Maintain relationships with people interested / involved with the City of Nature project, including but not limited to volunteers and may include teachers, police officers, local businesses.
- Leading the development and implementation of a data management system.
- Help deliver opportunities for volunteers to be involved in site development and management not already resourced.
- Deliver educational establishment engagement not already resourced.
- Deliver community engagement activities like Earth Stories.
- Identify Community Leads (Green Champions), who are individuals willing to train to lead community activities on a voluntary basis.
- Help to identify funding opportunities and investment to develop a sustainable funding model for the delivery framework including but not limited to, paying for assistance with bid writing for any established groups.
- Delivery of actions required to bring parks up to Birmingham Fair Standard - even in areas that do not have established Friends of groups.

Bordesley and Highgate Ward Delivery Framework Pilot

The Alliance will help deliver the Bordesley and Highgate pilot project through the following actions:

Identify, engage, and involve at least 1 Green Champion for each of the five sites in Bordesley and Highgate Ward (5 Green Champions). Green Champions are members of the community who will help deliver actions on site and or advocate for environmental justice and green spaces. They may be volunteers or professionals such as teachers who have a green focus. Training will be provided as appropriate.

Community Involvement activities with early years children and local schools, monthly activities.

Community involvement activities for individuals and families offered in at least the 5 Parks in Bordesley and Highgate ward 2 occasions per month March to December 2022 on site delivering activities including Healthy Parks, walks, exercise, and mental health mindfulness activities.

Physical landscape improvements including wildflower areas and tree planting appropriate for each site – being developed through the action planning process,

Sustainable Finance Strategy to ensure there is funding to keep comms, engagement, volunteer point of contact and CRM in operation after March 2023. A proposal of how the Alliance could raise money for the 5 subsequent wards to deliver some elements of place and people.

Communications Plan and delivery to engage local residents and businesses. Monthly newsletter, social media at least three times per week, monthly press releases, parks content webpages created for the POS sites within the 6 red wards (within BCC website).

Breakdown of costs

Phase 1

Establishment of Alliance Model	Small grants of £2,000 for up to 15 NGOs	£30,000
Community involvement activities	Small grants of up to £9,000 x 5	£45,000
Landscape enhancement activities	Small grants of up to £ 4,000 x 5	£20,000
Capital purchases	Leaflets, equipment, tools	£15,000
Community identified needs	Small grants of up to £2,000 x 5	£10,000

Phase 2

Customer Relation Management development and procurement	£7,000
Creation of action plans for the remaining 5 wards as part of 2 and 3	£7,000
Development of Sustainable finance model including grants and crowd funding	£7,000
Development of Sustainable finance model including grants and crowd funding	£9,000
Total for Pilot Project	£150,000

Full funding has been secured from the Commonwealth Games Legacy fund for the development of the Alliance Model and delivery of the pilot in the Bordesley and Highgate Ward to get communities more active.

10. Governance

Governance and Finance

Birmingham participated as a case study city in a 5 -year national research study – Liveable Cities (2012-2017) which looked at the world’s most liveable cities to understand the critical ingredients needed to be successful as a green sustainable city.

One of its main findings was that successful cities were clear about how they linked municipal governance, with municipal planning and municipal finance. These lessons have been built into this Plan <http://liveablecities.org.uk/>

Strong and inclusive leadership will be key to the success of Our City of Nature **Plan**.

To ensure the long-term governance and management of Birmingham’s natural environment a series of new bodies and groups have been formed to connect agendas and outcomes; with the benefits that the natural environment can bring to the improved performance of the city.

The core aims and ethos of the Plan need to be considered when any decisions relating to Birmingham green spaces are being taken.

These new bodies are: -

- **The City of Nature Board:** chaired by Cabinet Member for Parks and Street Scene.
- **The City of Nature Steering Group:** chaired by Assistant Director for Development who will bring together other Assistant Directors from across the council.
- **The City of Nature Operations Group:** chaired by Principal Planning Officer who will bring together operational officers from across the council.
- **The Birmingham City of Nature Alliance:** facilitated by the City of Nature Officer who will bring together representatives from external organisations.

The City of Nature Alliance will hold the Council accountable for the delivery of this Plan.

Some key actions we will take to ensure this include:

- The development of a City of Nature Board team - ensuring work ties in with Route 2 Zero and Green Recovery work

- The introduction of Green Champions - individuals responsible for connecting City of Nature's goals to employment, health and wellbeing, children, and housing/ development agendas
- Maximising planning consideration - planning officers will have a checklist that makes it easier for them to make sure nature and green spaces are adequately considered when assessing planning applications
- The creation of a City of Nature Alliance - bringing together environmental organisations, providing a one-stop shop for the interested citizen and an open door to all connected local and national green and blue space organisations operating in Birmingham.

Birmingham City Council Corporate Finance, the City of Nature Alliance and local corporate investors will work together to identify resources that will enable us to turn red wards to green. We will work on five to six wards per year, over a five-year period, taking a focused and co-ordinated phased approach. Although our immediate focus will be on Council owned green place, the Plan has an ambition to work with non-Council green space owners over the 25 -year period.

11. Getting involved

You can help deliver some of the action required to make Birmingham a City of Nature today, no need to wait.

As a resident you can. . . .

- Visit your local park
- Explore the park with friends or other families.
- Look out for information about activities taking place in your local park.
- Sign up to become a Green Champion to help promote your park and learn new skills.
- Look out for children's activities through Little and Young Green Champions
- Take time to notice nature and share what you find.
- Volunteer with a Park Friends Group or help to set one up.

As a local group you can . . .

- Become a part of a Network Organisation like Birmingham Open Spaces Forum
- Consider running a crowdfunding site for your green space.
- Set up a social media account and spread the word!

As a school you can. . . .

- Sign up to our Young Green Champions programme for children aged 6 – 18

- Teach more outdoors!
- Champion National Trust's 50 things to do before you're 11 and ¾ !

As a business you can . . .

- Sign up to become Corporate Green Champions
- Add social value through investing in our parks and green spaces
- Create employment and training opportunities for local people within green industry
- Commit to protecting the environment, minimising waste, and energy consumption

12. Conclusion

In this plan we set out a clear ambition for Birmingham and offer an approach to becoming a City of Nature recognisable on a world stage. It shows how this would be owned right across the organisation and for the long-term.

To ensure this longevity, substantial changes have been made in relation to the ways of working across the council, in how the city wants to work with its core partners and invite in the support of its citizens.

For those surprised to see Birmingham listed as a founder member of the global Biophilic Cities Network and a Tree City of the World this represents the delivery mechanism to achieve these goals for generations to come.

This plan fits within a suite of city policy documents setting out a Bolder Greener Birmingham, making a fundamental contribution to the city's Carbon Net Zero climate ambitions, it has also been submitted for a West Midlands National Park Accreditation Award as they share the same underpinning ethos.

At the start of the FPA programme the question was asked: "What is the problem you are trying to fix?" The problems were numerous but basically came down to one thing, "How could we make the invisible benefits of nature- visible to all those who could play a role in restoring its importance and therefore its long-term protection and restoration?"

Hopefully you will agree that throughout this plan are many instances of how we have made visible the great contribution the natural environment makes to the liveability of Birmingham now and long into the future; across many sectors and areas of interest and showing how it is something that should concern everybody. What we want to put in place is a mechanism that not only perpetuates that but expands it so that the degree of involvement and change accelerates with time, in full recognition of the urgency that is at hand.

Birmingham City Council are very grateful to the National Trust, National Heritage Lottery Fund and the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government for their funding and support through the Future Parks Accelerator scheme; 2019-2022; that enabled this co-ordinated transformational

work to take place and to our partners and the community of Birmingham that have help us shape this.

13. Earth Stories

Everyone in Birmingham has a unique memory of interacting with green space - we call this their Earth Story, whether that be from hanging off branches from trees in Cannon Hill Park or listening to the birds in Highgate Park.

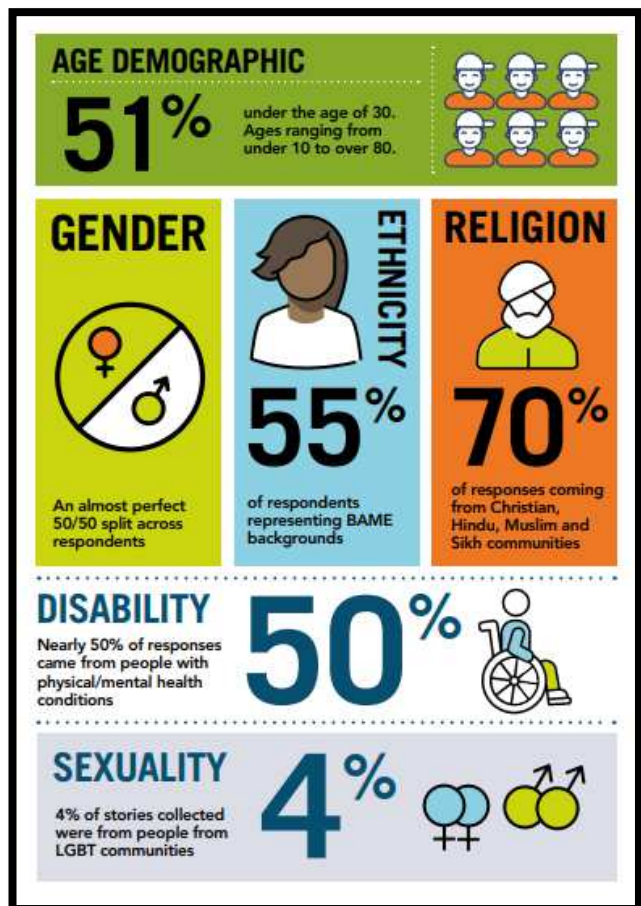
Our search for these Earth Stories provided us an opportunity to form a mosaic of Birmingham residents affinity to these green spaces and helped to shape our ambitions to create a city of nature.

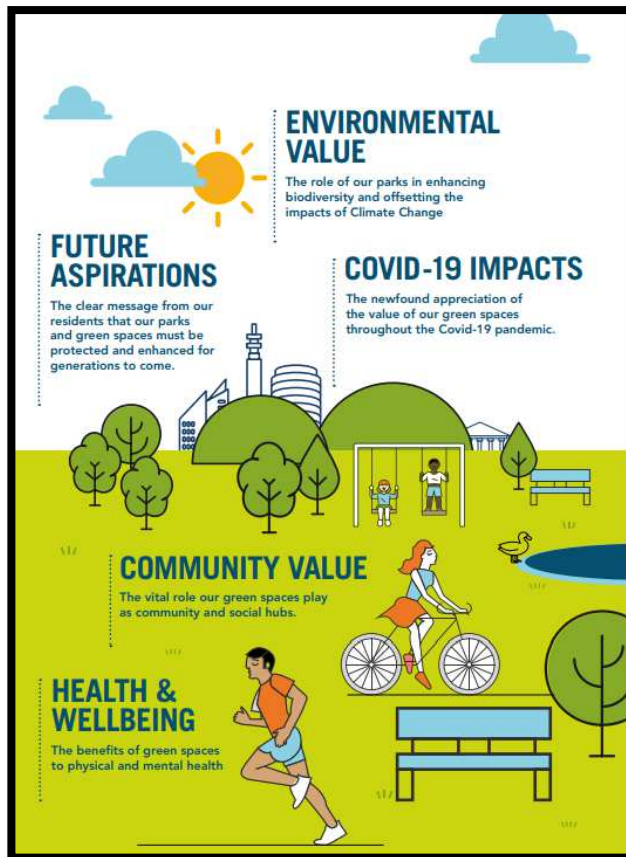
We've received 215 stories to date from a diverse group of citizens in response to our call out.

These insights provided a glimpse into our communities' relationship with nature.

We are particularly proud of the diverse range of sources providing us feedback, some key highlights of which are:

- Age Demographic: Ranging from Under 10 to Over 80 – including 51% under the age of 30
- Gender: An almost perfect 50/50 split across respondents
- Ethnicity: More than 55% of respondents representing BAME backgrounds
- Religion: Over 70% of Responses coming from Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities
- Disability: Nearly 50% of responses came from people with physical/mental health conditions
- Sexuality: 4% of stories collected from were from people from LGBT communities.





We read or listened to all the stories and poems that were submitted and considered all the drawings and photographs including some amazing pictures from children and young people.

After analysis we found 5 common themes:

Green spaces must be preserved and enhanced for generations to come.

The role of our parks in enhancing biodiversity and offsetting the impacts of climate change.

Newfound appreciation of green spaces throughout the Covid19 pandemic.

The vital role our green spaces play as community and social hubs

The benefits of green spaces to physical and mental health.

A selection of Earth Stories will be woven through the final document, below is a small selection.

Making memories in parks - Cllr O'Shea

My favourite local park is Millennium Green in Acocks Green. It's a lovely little green space where you can climb trees, walk by the canal and generally enjoy nature. One of my best memories is bringing the kids down in the snow and getting the sledge out, playing with snowballs and just really enjoying the park in winter.

For me, our parks are crucial – whether it's about health, education, employment and in particular housing, they are so vitally important. They are not a dead weight cost to the Council. I'm really excited to see how much more we can involve volunteers in looking after and influencing the direction of their local parks.

One of my favourite places - by a young Birmingham resident

Before lockdown happened in March 2020 I used to enjoy going out for food or shopping, attending events in Birmingham and travelling out of town to see friends and family. I think that because of the lockdown rules and having to stay inside a lot of people felt like they were out of sync and I was definitely one of those people. It was a good thing and a bad thing because it enabled me to reflect and look at myself and look at what I do but also made me do new things and explore my local area. Something that I definitely enjoy doing now that I didn't so much before is going for walks.

There's a huge park by my house it's called Sutton Park. I recently found out it's one of the biggest parks in Europe. It's got a nature reserve on it and the loads of wild animals such as rabbits. There are horses, cows, weasels – loads of stuff. It's also got kids parks dotted around, it's got lakes and little rivers. It's just a really peaceful nice place to unwind chill. Maybe bring a blanket and a little speaker, sit with your friends and fam and just have vibes, you know what I mean. So that's somewhere that I really enjoy going and I've actually started to encourage my friends to go down there as well. Not always to just chill in the park and listen to music or have a picnic but sometimes we just go for a walk and meet new people.

So, it's something that I probably wouldn't have gone to before, because there was not really a reason to. But now it's one of my favourite places and it's a really nice green space in Birmingham that I didn't really explore properly before and still haven't because it's a huge 2400 acres, so there's a lot to see there, but it's one of my favourite places and it's something I love about Birmingham.

Dawberry Fields Forever - by Kim, a friend of Dawberry Fields Neighbourhood Park



We are blessed in Birmingham with so many green spaces/parks - Wherever we have lived, we have enjoyed playing, walking, exercising, learning about the birds and the trees.

Mom and I moved to Kings Heath, and what a lovely surprise it was to find that 'just over the fence' lies a hidden gem - Dawberry Fields Park shares its bounty with us.

it's (mostly) a tranquil oasis, interspersed with children playing, especially when they pour out of the nearby school to use the playground, and dog walkers chatting, joggers and has become a little busier recently, which is nice. Another bonus is that there are plenty of benches to sit and watch the World go by.

For the Planet We Need More Parks - by Nathan



My name is Nathan and I want to tell you why I like parks. I'm 13 and starting to be interested in the climate change emergency. I think older generations have let us down, although I don't think many people would have known what a mess we would get into, and my generation will change it.

Birmingham would be boring if it was all houses, flats, factories and offices, we have lots of green and it makes everything look nicer and the trees put more oxygen into the air which is good.

I would like there to be more parks in the future. They don't have to be big, little parks near where people live are good as well. They need to be fun though. Some parks are all flower beds, and that's no good for children, making them interesting. Parks need to be for everyone so keep the flower beds for some old people to look at and have adventure trails where you can get muddy for little children. For the planet we need more parks.

Looking Up More - by Sophie Hislam, Public Space Innovator Jobs and Skills



Since starting my role with FPA back in April 2020, I have found myself looking up more – not only looking up on walks to enjoy the surrounding but using the internet to look up what plants grow when, why trees turn orange and yellow in the autumn and how to grow your own fruit and vegetables (the novice guide).

With a maiden name of Green it's no wonder my dad and grandma are such avid gardeners, during my teenage years, I would spend a lot of time watching both dad and grandma in the garden, planting, watering and weeding however at the time nothing was more important to me than sunbathing or "revising" outside....but now I'm older and have a garden of my own – I find myself regularly asking them both for advice on what to plant when, where to plant certain plants and how to

best look after them.

I am lucky enough to have had my own garden for a year now and I am super chuffed that I have been able to grow my own basil, chives, tomatoes, cucumbers, chilli's. I'm hoping for courgettes and purple potatoes next year!

I Could Stay Here Forever - by Ellie Wilde, Health Mentor at Evolve: A Social Impact Community



I've been a Health Mentor with Evolve for over a year, and I love the holistic view that we take of children's health. We include not just physical health, but mental and emotional wellbeing too. One of the most important aspects of physical and mental health, for me, has always been spending time outside in nature. Not every child is so lucky, and some children will barely go into a green space at all. I was really keen to get involved with the Future Parks project recently, to engage children and families with the many green spaces that are all around us in industrial Birmingham.

A life that is a bit more like mine – by a Birmingham resident

I am 23 years old; I have Autism and I live in Lozells. I am also a wheelchair user. I am quite isolated anyway, so lockdown has just meant everyone else has had a life that is a bit more like mine. Getting outside is important to me. I love green spaces and outdoor activities including kite flying and sailing- anything with an adrenaline rush. I have support workers who work with me for a few hours every day and I enjoy going in their cars to visit places such as Edgbaston Reservoir and Cannon Hill Park. I am on the waiting list for an Assistance Dog and I am really looking forward to the company, support and cuddles. However, the parks don't feel safe in Lozells and I am worried about being able to take my dog to the park on my own. There is always lots of rubbish and I worry about the dog eating it. It also makes it difficult to manoeuvre in my wheelchair. I hope to be able to move to an area with safer parks as I know spending as much time as possible outside is really good for my mental health.

Next Generation of Birmingham Stewards - by Councillor John Cotton

I was born and brought up in Birmingham, so I suppose my first memory of a green space goes back to those early days growing up in the north of the city, with these amazing spaces on my doorstep, places like Perry Barr Park, Perry Hall Park and Red House Park.

So, my earliest memories are of hanging out with my mates in those parks, you know, building dens and playing games, just tremendously happy memories that have lived with me to this day.

And it does make me reflect on just how fortunate we are in Birmingham to have so many green spaces.

Whether it is parks, whether it's recreation grounds, whether it's bits of woodland in neighbourhoods right across our city they are a real asset, I think, to our communities.

And when we think about what that means for cohesion and tackling inequalities in our city those green assets are absolutely vital.

These are the places where communities come together, where we share in activities, where we build friendships, where we build those relationships that are so important to building a cohesive city like Birmingham.

Handsworth Park - by Councillor Paulette Hamilton

My name is Paulette Hamilton, I'm the cabinet member for adult social care and health and public health in Birmingham. Let me start by saying I'm a wife, I'm a mother, I'm a grandmother, I'm a carer and I'm daughter. I have a long history in this city, in fact I was born in this city, I grew up in this city, in an area called Handsworth and throughout my life I have visited many of the parks and open spaces in this city. For me when I go into a park and I'm in the open spaces I actually feel relaxed, it really helps my mental health, it helps me to think, and it just helps me to see what we can do going forward, not just for me myself and my family but in the roles that I do what we do going forward in the community.



We would like to thank all the those who shared their Earth Story and the community groups who worked with us to collect these wonderful stories – Black Arts Forum, Stechford Village Neighbourhood Forum, Welsh House Farm Green Grafters, The Friends of Georges' Park, Footsteps, Northfield Arts Forum, Queen Alexandra College, Over 50s Go Getters, Stirchley Snowflakes Festival, Norton Hall and Brownfield Road Allotment Garden Association as well as all those who have shared their earth stories via our blog page: [Blog – Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Project](#)

We plan to publish all our Earth Stories at the end of the Future Parks Project.