

# Birmingham City Council

## Report to Cabinet

8<sup>th</sup> February 2022



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**Subject:** Creating a City of Nature for Birmingham

**Report of:** Strategic Director of Place, Prosperity and Sustainability

**Relevant Cabinet Member:** Cllr Ian Ward - Leader  
Cllr John O'Shea – Street Scene and Parks  
Councillor Tristan Chatfield – Finance and Resources

**Relevant O &S Chair(s):** Cllr Kate Booth - Housing and Neighbourhoods  
Cllr Mohammed Aikhlaq - Resources

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Are specific wards affected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No – All wards affected
If yes, name(s) of ward(s):		
Is this a key decision?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, add Forward Plan Reference: 009408/2022		
Is the decision eligible for call-in?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, provide exempt information paragraph number or reason if confidential:		

## **1 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Future Parks Accelerator (“FPA”) programme, a collaboration between the National Heritage Lottery Fund (“HLF”), the National Trust (“NT”) and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (“DLUHC”), is designed to help Councils find sustainable ways to manage and fund parks and open spaces across entire towns and cities. In December 2019, the City Council became a member of the programme, testing key proposals to help the city better see the value of nature and our green spaces. The programme was due to finish in May 2021. However, due to Covid-19, the programme has been extended to July 2022 to ensure the learning is fully implemented into the City Council’s operations.
- 1.2 The learning gained as part of the FPA programme forms part of a new governance model for the natural environment called the City of Nature Plan attached at Appendix A.
- 1.3 The City of Nature Plan seeks to build on the aspirations established as part of the FPA programme to provide a basis for ensuring all of Birmingham’s citizens get the opportunity to experience and benefit from nearby nature.
- 1.4 The City of Nature Plan is a direct response to the City of Nature theme within Our Future City Plan 2040. It is also a vital component of the West Midlands National Park (WMNP), both initiatives contributing to the ambition set by Central Government for a 25-year Environment Plan. It goes beyond just parks to encompass all aspects of the natural environment in the city and people’s engagement with it. This becomes a major strand within the Route to Zero Climate Emergency Plan and represents the substantive part of the city’s adaptation response to climate change.
- 1.5 This plan specifically references an environmental justice map, highlighting 13 areas of the city in most need of support to achieve access to good quality green spaces. We propose to focus the first 5 years of this plan on: Bordesley & Highgate, Balsall Heath West, Nechells, Gravelly Hill, Pype Hayes and Castle Vale. This will be followed by support to Aston, Birchfield, Lozells, Alum Rock, Newtown, Bordesley Green and Sparkbrook and Balsall Heath East in years 6-10.
- 1.6 Some wards identified for the first 5 years are within an area covered by the East Birmingham Inclusive Growth Strategy which sets out the City Council’s overall approach to the regeneration of the East Birmingham area. Within these wards we propose that all City of Nature delivery work will be integrated within the East Birmingham Programme and reported to the East Birmingham Board.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Approves the 25-year City of Nature Plan attached as Appendix A, as a statement of the Council’s intention to re-prioritise its existing resources (financial and

staffing) initially within its green space portfolio, but with the ambition to extending to all green spaces in the city and securing the input of stakeholders.

- 2.2 Approves capital expenditure of up to £0.500m funded through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for green space investment comprising improvements to basic parks infrastructure to support the delivery of the thematic themes in the Birmingham Development Plan 2031; as a match for future external investment.
- 2.3 Notes the 1 – year action plan detailed in Appendix C focussed upon Bordesley and Highgate Ward, comprising community engagement in the area to generate greater public awareness and use of their local greenspaces.
- 2.4 Approves request for formal consultation on the 25-year City of Nature Plan.

### **3 Background**

- 3.1 In July 2019, the Council received £0.900m HLF (Heritage Lottery Fund) and up to £0.100m in-kind support from NT (National Trust); to run the Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) Programme, with the huge ambition to embed the value of green spaces across the Council – within Health and Wellbeing (pilot site Witton Lakes), Employability/Skills (pilot site Ward End Park), Children’s Trust (pilot site Dawberry Fields Neighbourhood Park) and Housing/ Development (Edgbaston Reservoir and Druids Heath BMHT (Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust) development). The West Midlands National Park, (WMNP) supportive of the FPA programme was launched in 2018 at Birmingham City University (BCU) and endorsed by both BCC (Birmingham City Council) and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) in 2020.
- 3.2 Key objectives of the Programme were:
  - 3.2.1 To ensure green spaces were considered:
    - as vital community living spaces
    - as to their role in defining local character, identity and place making
    - as to their importance for nature and climate change adaptation
    - for sport and recreation
    - for health and wellbeing
    - as places to stimulate business and enterprise
  - 3.2.2 Parks and green spaces will have more support for their management
  - 3.2.3 A wider range of people will be involved in parks and green spaces
  - 3.2.4 The organisation’s funding for parks and green spaces will be more resilient
  - 3.2.5 The local area will be a better place to live, work or visit
  - 3.2.6 People will have developed skills
  - 3.2.7 People will have greater wellbeing

- 3.2.8 People will be able to directly engage locally to address climate change
- 3.3 Key outcomes and achievements to date include:
  - 3.3.1 Improvements in how residents engage with green spaces across our pilot sites.
  - 3.3.2 Strong linkages made with housing management to support and make existing green spaces in housing more usable and accessible by residents/tenants.
  - 3.3.3 Development of an online and physical skills showcase to highlight what jobs are possible in green spaces and how to access them.
  - 3.3.4 Under Covid-19 restrictions – connecting residents to nature through virtual means and improving their wellbeing through doing so.
  - 3.3.5 Development of a Little Green Champions and Young Green Champions digital pack for use by education settings and families.
  - 3.3.6 Development of a green spaces training pack for use by mentors supporting our most vulnerable young people in the city
  - 3.3.7 Embedding green space thinking within the Early Years team at the Council, and in settings, improving awareness and understanding of nature for children.
  - 3.3.8 Included Nature and Green Infrastructure as part of the draft Birmingham City Design Guide under development.
  - 3.3.9 Our core third sector partners such as Birmingham Open Spaces Forum are agreed to set up a City of Nature Community Alliance, which will allow more funding to come into parks and open spaces through charitable grants.
  - 3.3.10 Raised £2,360 for a wildlife site within Dawberry Fields park through crowdfunding.
  - 3.3.11 A specification for a Birmingham City of Nature digital platform, that will provide the online access point in future for citizens to better engage with this agenda.
  - 3.3.12 A Green Champions leadership course for 80 Birmingham citizens and employees to support them in leading for nature.
  - 3.3.13 Through a series of discussions, workshops and other connections through the West Midlands National Park, the city has established mutually supportive affiliations and partnerships with the WMNP Lab, BCU, and through them, an international network of academics and practitioners.

- 3.4 The current model for FPA has involved having paid staff, or connectors, embedded in various parts of the Council. The services include:
- Parks Management Service
  - Public Health
  - Children's Services and Birmingham Children's Trust
  - Employability and Skills
  - Inclusive Growth
  - City Housing
- 3.5 The funding for the FPA programme ends in June 2022. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted how crucial green and blue space is, as well as connecting to nature has been for people. Helping people to connect to nature (the core of FPA) is an important part of the adaptation response to climate change. It is vital this work continues, especially if we are to achieve ambitious targets for Carbon Net Zero by 2030.
- 3.6 The plan (at Appendix A) seeks to build on the aspirations established through the Future Parks Accelerator Programme as well as bringing the learning gained through the Green Living Spaces Plan (2013) and the visioning exercises undertaken by the WMNP Lab to provide a joined-up approach across the Council and its partner organisations in putting nature at the heart of decision making.
- 3.7 As part of the Plan, five themes have been established for embedding the value of green spaces across our Council and communities.
- 3.7.1 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.
- 3.7.2 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.
- 3.7.3 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.
- 3.7.4 An Involved City – Citizens will know, love, and protect green spaces and nature.
- 3.7.5 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.

- 3.8 Appendix B shows the Environmental Justice Map for Birmingham and the Environmental Justice score on a ward-by-ward basis. This map creates a missing domain in the IMD (Indices of Multiple Deprivation) (Indices of Multiple Deprivation), a nationally agreed set of indicators to assess the equity of areas within all cities. Currently, this national assessment misses some crucial indicators relating to both climate change and people's living environment.
- 3.9 Nationally and internationally, the impact of Covid-19 on cities has universally exposed the inequity of access to urban green spaces and nature. These same communities face increased risk to climate change now and in the future.
- 3.10 Below are our chosen 5 additional indicators for Environmental Justice:
- 3.10.1 Access to a green space (of 2 hectares or larger) within 1,000m
  - 3.10.2 Flood Risk
  - 3.10.3 Urban Heat Island Effect
  - 3.10.4 Excess Years of Life Lost
  - 3.10.5 Indices of Multiple Deprivation
- 3.11 Ref 3.10.4 The Marmot Review firmly established the link between the wider determinants of health linked to local environments, affecting quality of life and life expectancy. The map captures the Excess Years Life Lost measure from Public Health to reflect this.
- 3.12 Birmingham, through the FPA Government sponsor Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) who administer the IMD, are recommending this nationally as an improvement that all cities could adopt.
- 3.13 What this map does is provide a new context for the city's parks and open spaces. It provides new evidence to set new service priorities for the Parks Service and sets a new direction for city policy in addressing an urgent response to climate change, nature recovery and people's wellbeing; all of which are being reflected in the service redesign and restructure across Street Scene and Parks.
- 3.14 A site audit tool, the Birmingham Fair Standard, has been devised to respond to this new evidence base that will work with local communities to derive an appropriate site-specific response.
- 3.15 The City of Nature Plan aims to fast track all parks and open spaces in the red wards over a 10-year period, moving them from their current basic standard to reach a new good standard; that will directly address climate change, nature recovery and wellbeing at all sites.
- 3.16 A Birmingham City of Nature Alliance has been created which brings together key green sector community organisations to ensure we engage citizens with nature and continue to fundraise. More details of this can be found in Appendix A.
- 3.17 Appendix C shows the proposed 1-year action plan which the City of Nature Plan will work towards if Cabinet approve recommendations 2.1 to 2.2.

- 3.18 Appendix D details costings for bringing all 34 public open space sites across the first 6 wards up to the Birmingham Fair Standard, and how this will be funded.
- 3.19 Appendix E details the governance processes to ensure the Plan can be realised.
- 3.20 As well as upgrading existing green space where it is needed, there is a need to identify more green space in the city. According to the current Birmingham Development Plan (BDP) standard of 2 hectares of green space per 1000 population, when looked at on a ward-by-ward basis; Birmingham still requires 600 more hectares of green space to meet this national standard. We will commission a planning consultant to identify how this need could be met, and importantly, how it could be resourced. (Appendix F)
- 3.21 The WMNP Lab will also engage with BCC to de-risk and support the sustainability, scale, and impact of the City of Nature Plan into the future.

#### **4 Options Considered and Recommended Proposal**

- 4.1 **Option 1 – Do Nothing.** Should the City Council decide not to implement the City of Nature Plan, the progress made by the FPA Programme will have been lost. The ability for Birmingham to become net zero carbon by 2030 will also be reduced.
- 4.2 **Option 2 – Support the 25-year City of Nature Plan.** Should the City Council decide to support the plan, work can start to make tangible changes to the green spaces within the six wards listed. It will also allow the Council to start more detailed engagement with local communities about specific actions they want to see taken to improve their wards. The FPA programme will also continue through working with key directorates to embed the FPA way of working and support areas of the city to become more environmentally just. **This is the recommended option.**

#### **5 Consultation**

- 5.1 The City Council has undertaken engagement with residents as part of a You Gov poll, with 613 responses from the public, and community conversations in June 2020 (see Appendix G) which involved 10 virtual conversations with 117 participants, and 153 responses to an online survey. There was a positive response to our proposals, but we are aware of the need to engage with a more diverse range of residents. The feedback from citizens is being used to shape the Plan before it is released for public consultation.
- 5.2 As part of the FPA programme, 215 'Earth Stories' were collected from citizens of Birmingham. Each story was a unique reflection on green spaces which provided an insight into how parks are used and how they have impacted citizens lives. These earth stories were gathered from a diverse range of citizens, a summary of the demographics and key themes of the stories is as follows:
- 23% of respondents were under 20 years of age

- 56.3% of respondents were of ethnic minority backgrounds
- 27% of responses discussed the health benefits green spaces bring
- 17% of responses discussed the community benefits green spaces bring
- 17% of responses expressed the need to protect green spaces for future generations

5.3 In November 2021, we engaged the public to share their thoughts on our City of Nature Plan. We created 5 short videos to explain our plan and why a City of Nature is important; invited local schools in the 6 key wards to hear about our plan; wrote to key community groups within the 6 wards to offer engagement sessions with the local community. More details can be found here - <https://naturallybirmingham.org/birmingham-city-of-nature-delivery-Plan>. The engagement outcome is attached at Appendix H.

5.4 Should Cabinet approve our request for formal consultation, a consultation plan is attached as Appendix I.

## **6 Risk Management**

6.1 Unless directorates fully commit to the programme of work, there is a risk of us not achieving these outcomes.

6.2 Key risks are as follows, to mitigate these risks, the City of Nature Plan will be discussed with senior members and regular updates will be provided to the relevant cabinet members. Risks include:

- The City of Nature Plan will not be supported by communities and stakeholders. To mitigate this, the City of Nature Plan has been drafted in collaboration with internal and external partners, with community conversations allowing further refinements of the document before the City Council support the plan.
- The Plan is not supported, resulting in Birmingham falling behind other cities in its nature recovery ambitions. To mitigate this, the City of Nature Plan has been discussed regularly with senior officers, elected members and partners to ensure the plan is clear and accessible to all and includes specific measures to support longer term sustainability, scale, impact and the opportunity to underpin the Council's international reputation. The City of Nature cross-council governance arrangements will ensure a consistency of approach.

## **7 Compliance Issues:**

**7.1 How are the recommended decisions consistent with the City Council's priorities, plans and strategies?**

7.1.1 The City of Nature Plan is consistent with the Green Living Spaces (2013) Plan; and the Birmingham Development Plan (2017)



specifically the delivery of the thematic themes of TP7 Biodiversity & Geodiversity, and TP9 Open space, playing fields and allotments .

- 7.1.2 The City of Nature Plan and the FPA Programme is consistent with the City Council Plan 2018-2022 (2019 Update). In particular, the City of Nature Plan's key tenets are Health and Wellbeing, Employability and Housing and Children.
- 7.1.3 In particular, the City of Nature Plan will support Outcome 2 Priority 4: We will improve early intervention and prevention work to secure healthy lifestyles and behaviours, Outcome 3 Priority 1: We will work with our citizens to prevent social isolation, loneliness and develop active citizenship; Outcome 3 Priority 4: We will improve the environment and tackle air pollution; Outcome 6 Priority 1: We have declared a climate emergency on a cross-party basis, and we will progress our activity for this through our Climate Emergency Task Force; Outcome 6 Priority 2: We will continue to deliver, report and positively promote the City Council's extensive climate change and carbon reduction activity, with additional initiatives undertaken in line with leading national and peer practice.
- 7.1.4 The plan supports the Additional Climate Change Commitments agreed by Cabinet on 30th July 2019 following the motion on the Climate Emergency passed at the full City Council meeting of 11th June 2019, including the aspiration for the City Council to be net zero carbon by 2030; with City of Nature being a Wave 1 project.
- 7.1.5 The proposals set out in this report will support the City Council's actions to improve air quality; having liaised with Brum Breathes and the University of Birmingham WM-Air Research Programme. Highlighting the importance of open green and blue spaces, which provide a vital refuge of clean air and can act as a barrier between pollution source and pedestrians and capture carbon. The proposals will also contribute to supporting the city to become net carbon zero.
- 7.1.6 In the context of inclusive economic growth, the proposals have a strong focus on supporting the City Council's core mission to be a 'city of growth where every child, citizen and place matters. In addition, the proposals seek to make a significant contribution towards the key priorities of children, jobs and skills, housing, and health by reducing congestion, enabling equitable and green growth, improving road safety, improving accessibility, improving the local environment to offer relief from poor air quality, encouraging active and sustainable modes of travel, and significantly contributing to a net zero city.
- 7.1.7 Our Future City Plan 2040, a recipient of the WMNP Award 2021, specifically references a City of Nature as one of its layers; this City of

Nature Plan provides a robust and comprehensive approach to make this a reality.

## **7.2 Legal Implications**

- 7.2.1 The City of Nature Plan document is not a legal, statutory document.
- 7.2.2 As the City of Nature Plan is an informal document and will not have statutory status, there are no formal legal requirements in relation to consultation.
- 7.2.3 The Council does, however, have a duty under Section 13 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to keep under review the matters which may be expected to affect the development of their area or the planning of its development including the principal physical, economic, social, and environmental characteristics of their area and the principal purposes for which land is used in the area. The Council has already commenced its review of the Birmingham Development Plan in satisfaction of this duty.
- 7.2.4 The Council also has powers under Section 164 of the Public Health Act 1875 to purchase, lease and maintain lands for the purpose of being used as public walks or pleasure grounds or support or contribute to the support of public walks and pleasure grounds provided by any person whomsoever.
- 7.2.5 The Council also has power under the Open Spaces Act 1906 to acquire or maintain land with a view to the enjoyment thereof by the public as an open space.

## **7.3 Financial Implications**

- 7.3.1 Capital expenditure as per the plan comprising basic improvements to all the parks in the six wards, will cost up to £0.500m over 5 years funded from the CIL.
- 7.3.2 The ongoing revenue maintenance implications of these works will be contained within existing revenue budgets within the Parks service.

## **7.4 Procurement Implications**

- 7.4.1 It is intended to use the Council's Landscape Construction Framework Agreement 2019 – 2023 (and its replacement) and award a contract in accordance with rules of the framework agreement, the Constitution, and the Procurement Governance Arrangements.

## **7.5 Human Resources Implications**

- 7.5.1 There are no direct human resource implications because of the recommendations in this report; above those not already covered by the restructuring of Streetscene and Parks Service redesign. These

are being planned through a parallel process and business case to be finalised in due course.

## **7.6 Public Sector Equality Duty**

7.6.1 The Equality Analysis has been approved and is attached to this report - see Appendix I.

## **8 Appendices**

8.1 Appendix A – City of Nature Plan

8.2 Appendix B – Environmental Justice Map and Environmental Justice score by ward.

8.3 Appendix C – Action Plan

8.4 Appendix D – Ward costings

8.5 Appendix E – Governance

8.6 Appendix F - Green City Impact Brief

8.7 Appendix G – FPA Programme Engagement 2020 and 2021

8.8 Appendix H – Engagement regarding Plan

8.9 Appendix I – Consultation Plan

8.10 Appendix J – Equality Analysis

## **9 Background Documents**

Future Parks Accelerator – Notification of Extension (2021) – see Cabinet Report dated 16 March 2021