

Public Report
Birmingham City Council
Report to Cabinet
5th March 2019



Subject: Future Parks Accelerator Funding Bid - Naturally Birmingham

Report of: Acting Director – Neighbourhoods

Relevant Cabinet Member: Councillor Sharon Thompson, Homes & Neighbourhoods

Relevant O &S Chair(s): Councillor Mariam Khan, Learning, Culture and Physical Activity

Report author: Nick Grayson, Climate Change & Sustainability Manager

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: 006202/2019		
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 In 2016-17 a Parliamentary Inquiry was held into the Future of Public Parks in the UK which sought sustainable solutions for public parks. In late 2018 Heritage Lottery and National Trust formed a Parks Accelerator Fund of £10 million pounds. Birmingham was successful with an Expression of Interest in November 2018. Full bids were required by 18 January 2019 with their final guidance published on 13 December 2018, Birmingham submitted a bid but there was insufficient time to submit a Cabinet report. The Fund Decision Board is meeting on 21 March 2019 and requires Cabinet approval by each City that has submitted an entry.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the City bid 'Naturally Birmingham' for up to £1 million pounds. This is for revenue funding over two years 2019-2021 from the Future Parks Accelerator Fund, to bring about a sustainable future for Birmingham's parks and green spaces.

3 Background

- 3.1 In 2016-17 a Parliamentary Inquiry was held into the Future of Public Parks in the UK which sought answers to three questions:-
- Why do Parks matter?
 - What challenges do Parks face?
 - Is there a sustainable future for Parks?
- 3.2 A recommendation of the Inquiry was to establish both a Parks Action Group and a Ministerial Working Group. Birmingham submitted evidence to the Inquiry and has continued to support these two new groups.
- 3.3 In direct response to the third question posed by the Inquiry, namely finding a sustainable future for parks, the Heritage Lottery Fund and National Trust formed a Parks Accelerator Fund of £10 million pounds nationally launched on 22 October 2018.
- 3.4 The timelines were deliberately tight as the funders only wanted to award places or Cities that were in a state of readiness to move towards a more sustainable future, that could be 'accelerated' and not start from scratch.
- 3.5 The deadline for the Expressions of Interest was 19 November 2018 and they required an acknowledgement of senior level support. To this end, briefing papers were presented to the Cabinet Member for Homes & Neighbourhoods Briefing Meeting on 7 November 2018 and the Corporate Management Team meeting on 12 November 2018.
- 3.6 On 26 November 2018 Birmingham was notified that its Expression of Interest had been successful and we were invited to prepare a full bid.
- 3.7 It was at this point that the funders changed their timelines. The initial guidance notes spoke of a final submission and decision in March 2019 which would have allowed time for a pre-submission full Cabinet report. However, the funders brought forward this final submission date to 18 January 2019; only publishing their final guidance notes on 13 December 2018.
- 3.8 To help meet this new deadline refreshed briefing papers were submitted to the Cabinet Member for Homes & Neighbourhoods Briefing Meeting on 9 January 2019 and Corporate Management Team meeting scheduled for 12 January 2019, following approval the final bid was submitted on 18 January 2019.

- 3.9 The funders have now confirmed the date of their Decision Board as 21 March 2019, the Decision Board wish to see each applicant provide evidence of Cabinet approval.
- 3.10 The evidence that Birmingham submitted to the Parks Inquiry and the two new groups is based on nationally and internationally leading research from the Liveable Cities research programme (2012-17) that sought to uncover the essential components needed to make a sustainable City. One of its most striking findings was the proven need for urban green space and parks as a major component for successful twenty first century Cities. The research came forward with new ways to measure this contribution and new models for its future governance and funding. It is this knowledge base that sits at the heart of the 'Naturally Birmingham' Future Parks Accelerator bid.
- 3.11 What this bid seeks to achieve is to move parks from a maintenance mindset where it struggles to connect with wider corporate outcomes or priorities; into a twenty first century service managing the green estate of the City as assets that directly connect with and benefit the people of Birmingham where they live whilst co-delivering the Cities strategic outcomes in partnership with the many branches of the Council and their wider partners. (see Appendix 1 Naturally Birmingham).
- 3.12 The bid would provide up to £1 million pounds revenue funding, plus expertise and professional service support from The National Trust over two years. A condition of the grant is to work collaboratively with the other winning Cities. This will allow the establishment of a core team who could work across the Council to map and connect the five strategic priorities. This will lead to a critical long-term change to organisational capacity to deliver a very different service going forward.
- 3.13 One of the key synergies this bid seeks to exploit is the parallel work across Public Health, to redefine their priorities and service model; which through this bid will link directly to the multiple benefits offered by the City's parks and green spaces. This would create a national template of good practice that other Cities could then follow.
- 3.14 There has been considerable levels of corporate support across all five strategic priorities and an equal level of public support for this bid.
- 3.15 The proposed merger between Parks and Street Scene provides an internal opportunity for service re-design, in response to the learning emerging from this project.
- 3.16 For an outline of the Future Parks Accelerator Birmingham 'bid-on-a-page' (see Appendix 2), a schematic drawing to explain the proposed two year programme. Please note the four Neighbourhood pilots are indicative and would be subject to further consultation.

4 Options considered and Recommended Proposal

- 4.1 There were eighty six expressions of interest to this fund in November 2018, which demonstrates the resonance this fund has to Parks Authorities across the UK. Eleven finalists were chosen including Birmingham, from which the funders anticipate awarding between five to eight awards, some up to £1 million pounds. For more details see the Future Parks Accelerator Application Guidance. (Appendix 3)
- 4.2 This represents the best possible opportunity for the City to re-shape its parks services based on a re-definition of their future purpose and vision, embedded in new evidence, methodologies and models.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 Internal: The bid required identification of both political and corporate champions who are the Cabinet Member for Homes & Neighbourhoods and the Acting Director of Neighbourhoods who were both engaged with the bid.
- 5.2 Ahead of the bid, consultation was undertaken with the former corporate colleagues: Assistant Director Public Health, Assistant Director Waste Management, Assistant Director Housing Development, Head of Legacy Commonwealth Games 2022, Assistant Director Skills; Service Director Sport, Events, Open Space, Wellbeing and Culture, Planning Ecologist and City Centre team, Corporate Graduate Scheme lead, Parks Senior Management team, Landscape Practice Group, Policy Executive and Corporate Management Team;
- 5.3 Externally ahead of the bid consultation with Birmingham Open Spaces Forum, Head of Environment West Midlands Combined Authority, National Trust Birmingham, Wildlife Trust Birmingham & Black Country, The Active Wellbeing Society, Vivid Economics, West Midlands Natural Capital Roundtable, the Birmingham and Black Country Local Nature Partnership, UK Core Cities Parks Group.
- 5.4 The bid nominally suggests four Neighbourhood pilot projects. If the application is successful, these will be reviewed and confirmed with relevant teams and then full consultation with Ward Members and Communities would follow.

6 Risk Management

- 6.1 The bid is for revenue funding to support the process of corporate re-definition of parks and for the subsequent policy changes needed to implement the necessary changes recommended by the project.
- 6.2 The bid funding is divided into two strands a co-design phase which will be exploratory to determine the required changes, followed by a transition phase. The bid is so structured that milestones will need to be agreed with the funders at the start of the project, these will be actively reviewed by an appointed Account Manager to keep the project on track. At the point between the co-

design phase and the transition phase the funders intend to undertake a mid-point review. At this point they will determine if you are eligible and sufficiently well-positioned and resourced to move to the transition phase. Should the assessment determine you are not ready to proceed, then funding would cease at this point.

- 6.3 As this is a revenue fund and not a capital sum it is not going to leave the City with an 'improved asset' that it cannot then afford to maintain. The purpose of the fund is to assist Cities to move to a sustainable funding model. As referred to in paragraph 3.10 Birmingham is well placed in already advancing these future ideas and models.
- 6.4 A further condition of this grant is that successful authorities will assist Newcastle City Council where the decision has been taken to move to a Parks Trust model. The trust model has been mooted as a potential way forward for Birmingham's parks and, if successful in securing the Future Parks Accelerator bid, this direct experience in respect of a Local Authority Parks Trust will help inform any future decisions by Birmingham City Council.
- 6.5 A Risk Assessment is attached at Appendix 5.

7 Compliance Issues:

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

- 7.1.1 This Future Parks Accelerator Funding bid 'Naturally Birmingham' is based on the diagram (Appendix 1) which clearly shows how the future parks model would serve all five strategic priorities of the Council.
- 7.1.2 Additionally the bid outline in (Appendix 2) also illustrates how the timing of this proposal would mirror the re-design for Public Health resulting in much more integrated policy and delivery going forward.

7.2 Legal Implications

- 7.2.1 Under the general power of competence per Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, the Council has the power to enter into the arrangements set out in this report.
- 7.2.2 Under section 19 of the Local Government Act (Miscellaneous Provisions) 1976, the Council has the power to provide such recreational facilities as it thinks fit in its area.

7.3 Financial Implications

- 7.3.1 The bid if successful would provide a revenue fund to the City of up to £1million pounds over 2 years 2019-2021. This would be subject to

meeting a set of agreed milestones with the funder which would be overseen by their appointed Account Manager.

- 7.3.2 At the mid-point of the project the funder would undertake a mid-point review to ensure full compliance with the grant conditions and that sufficient progress has been made and the City and the project team are properly resourced and supported to complete the final transition phase. If agreed, then the second tranche of funding would be forthcoming; if not the project funding would be stopped at this point.
- 7.3.3 In addition to the cash value on offer, the fund also comes with a matching offer from the National Trust for access to their professional services and expertise. If successful with the award, the National Trust would then work with the City and its project partners to agree a bespoke package of support.
- 7.3.4 Within the bid conditions, 7-10% of the award had to be reserved for evaluation and knowledge sharing across the consortium of winners, so all travel and subsistence costs associated with this would be built into the award.
- 7.3.5 The acceptance of the funding will be dependent on further clarification of the conditions of the funding; coupled with confirmation of detailed budgets including overhead running costs supporting the £1m allocation, in line with the Parks Strategy and the ability to demonstrate value for money. Legal Services advice regarding the conditions of funding will also be sought at this stage.

7.4 Procurement Implications (if required)

- 7.4.1 If the City is successful with this application then all existing rules for procurement will be observed for the commissioning of any external services.

7.5 Human Resources Implications (if required)

- 7.5.1 In terms of staff time the opportunity will exist with the re-design and merger of Street Scene with Parks, to enable in-house support to be found to support this project over the two year period; as participating in the project will in itself inform the future operating model for these services going forward.
- 7.5.2 It is human resource that is the number one limiting factor preventing the Council from implementing these ideas and models now. This fund provides the necessary resource to create the capacity to deliver the change. The changes will then be embedded in all future services.

7.6 Public Sector Equality Duty

7.6.1 A copy of the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Duty statement is appended together with the initial equality impact assessment, EIA (REF: EQUA256) (Appendix 4 and Appendix 4A).

8 Background Documents

8.1 List of appendices accompanying this report:

Appendix 1 - 'Naturally Birmingham' diagram;

Appendix 2 - Future Parks Accelerator Birmingham, 'bid-on-a-page' diagram;

Appendix 3 - Future Parks Accelerator Application Guidance

Appendix 4 - Initial Equality Impact Assessment EIA (REF: EQUA256)

Appendix 4A - Equality Act 2010 - Public Sector Duty statement

Appendix 5 – Risk Assessment