

Birmingham City Council

Report to Cabinet

30th July 2019



Subject: Future Parks Accelerator - Naturally Birmingham
Report of: Director of Neighbourhoods
Relevant Cabinet Member(s): Councillor John O'Shea – Street Scene and Parks
Councillor Tristan Chatfield – Finance and Resources
Relevant O &S Chair(s): Councillor Penny Holbrook, Housing and Neighbourhoods
Councillor Sir Albert Bore – Resources
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: 006762/2019		
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 Cabinet approved the submission of a funding bid for £1 million to the Future Parks Accelerator Fund, on March 5th 2019. The Fund is a partnership fund between Heritage Lottery, the National Trust and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The bid has been successful albeit reduced to £900,000 grant plus the equivalent of £100,000 support package of professional services (see 3.8,) and in-kind National Trust support; from 2019-2021. This report seeks the formal acceptance of this grant and support package; and its delegation to the Director of Neighbourhoods, for full project implementation.

2 Recommendations

That Cabinet

- 2.1 Accepts the grant offer from the Future Parks Accelerator Fund of £900,000 for the City bid known as 'Naturally Birmingham' for the period 2019-2021; and its £100,000 support package.
- 2.2 Delegates this grant to the Director of Neighbourhoods to oversee the full implementation of the 2 year project plan.
- 2.3 That Cabinet authorises the City Solicitor to negotiate, execute seal and complete all necessary documents in connection with the award of the grant.

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 Fund and National Trust, were additionally supported by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and have formed a Future Parks Accelerator Fund of £11 million.
- 3.4 81 cities applied; 11 were short-listed, including Birmingham, and finally 8 places were awarded grant funding from the Future Parks Accelerator Fund. Birmingham and Bristol being the two largest recipients.
- 3.5 These 8 places will now work as a cohort over the next 2 years, sharing best practice and ideas with extensive support packages; involving two environmental economist specialists and an academic evaluation programme led by Sheffield Hallam University.
- 3.6 A condition of the grant award is that all 8 cohort places will be asked to work with Newcastle City Council and specifically their newly formed Newcastle Parks and Allotments Trust. Newcastle has made this move in an attempt to secure the long-term future of its city's urban green spaces- but to date its Trust has only secured a 10 year funding package to cover just 33 parks and 64 allotments. This development has been supported by both the National Trust and Heritage Fund; but they recognise that this currently only represent a partial solution. Their hope is that the collective learning from across the cohort may well offer some wider and more sustainable options for Newcastle's Parks and Allotments.

3.7 The 8 places are listed with brief descriptions in Appendix 1; they are:-

Birmingham; Bournemouth; Bristol; Cambridgeshire;
Edinburgh; Islington and Camden; Nottingham; and Plymouth

3.8 The circa £100,000 support package is being provided through 3 national contracts let through the National Trust to:-

Environmental Finance will assist each place on a 1:1 basis; they have developed a national lead in the development of place-based approaches for long-term funding and management of urban parks; as specialists in social finance and investment.

Vivid Economics will offer their support on a 1:1 basis with each place; as a company they have leading national and international role in the development of natural capital assessments and accounts, valuing the contribution nature makes to city living. They have devised a new national tool for assessing all parks, which will be trialled as part of the project;

Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research will lead a national programme of evaluation for the whole Future Parks Accelerator project; but will additionally work with and support each individual place to negotiate the best possible evaluation outcomes for each place.

Summaries of each of these companies can be found in Appendices, 2, 3, and 4.

3.9 The Naturally Birmingham project seeks to integrate a re-alignment of corporate strategic working coupled with and informed by 4 community pilots, testing and trialling service delivery options on capturing community engagement.

3.10 The whole project can be summarised in 3 steps;

- new visions;
- new measures; and
- new governance.

3.11 The **new vision** comes from our first community Highbury Summit and from the new contexts of the climate emergency and the 25 year environment plan; looking for a truly long-term solution; and through this project will be added to, and tested, at the very local level through our 4 community pilots.

3.12 The **new measures** refers to the new areas of science we can now bring to bear, such as ecosystem services- measuring the wider societal benefits , nature provides for free. Those benefits can be tracked against all those who might hold a stake, through systems mapping and thinking. All these benefits can then be given an economic value- through the new accountancy methodology- known as natural capital. We will be publishing the very latest value figures for Birmingham's parks- in the very near future.

3.13 By addressing the challenge in this way we start to arrive at a totally fresh perspective and new solutions to old problems. This presents its own challenge

that of looking to change the current **governance model for parks**. Recognising the many and varied current and future owners of these citywide strategic benefits requires us to re-shape the ownership and engagement model; to create something fit for purpose for the 21st century; see Appendix 5.

- 3.14 In October 2017 the Greater London Authority published a valuation study of the green space in London, using new accountancy methodologies, known as a natural capital account. This revealed a financial value attributed to the entire green network in London and valued that asset at £91 billion. This work was published by Vivid Economics- now one of the Future Parks advisors. Birmingham has undertaken an identical study that is currently with Vivid Economics for verification and national endorsement. This will help re-set the perceived value of parks in the city; see Appendix 6.
- 3.15 The Naturally Birmingham project will feature 4 community pilots each with a corporate priority outcome lead. These locations have been identified where there is an existing lead project on the ground and where Parks and The Active Wellbeing Service are already delivering the Sports Lottery funded Local Delivery Pilots. This then will enable the potential for local scale synergistic working that can both test and inform the strategic synergies being mapped at the organisational scale- so both processes inform each other; and reflect the community visions for their open spaces. These areas have been identified as follows:- Ward End Park / Washwood Heath- linking to a city and regional skills program; Perry Common / Erdington- linking to a Public Health England pilot for social prescribing; Cotteridge Park and Brandwood- which has seen a focus on young people led projects; Burford Road in Kingstanding and Magnet Centre in Stockland Green are housing sites with BMHT where some of these new measures can be further tested to look at creating even better social and green environments.
- 3.16 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.
- 3.17 To maximise these opportunities the central project Director post has been advertised as a Consultant in Public Health- working directly to the Director for Public Health. The project Director post will seek to integrate the project ambitions of Naturally Birmingham with the organisation's vision to be a modern council, developed closely with Members and partners across the City, that provides an exciting and challenging view for the growth of the Birmingham, where every child, citizen and place matters. Designed to develop our people and communities and to focus on our priorities of children, housing, health, jobs and skills.
- 3.18 The majority of the funding will employ a small team of 7 posts for the duration of the project, including the project Director post mentioned above (health), this post will co-ordinate that team. A post will support the parks service with an additional

post for each other corporate priority outcome area of housing, skills, children-designed to their specifications; a support post to the Planning Ecologist and an external support post for the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum, to act as a community advocate throughout the process; seven posts in all.

- 3.19 There has been a considerable level of corporate support across all five strategic priority outcome areas, including the Commonwealth Games team and an equal level of public support for this project.
- 3.20 The merger between Parks and Street Scene provides an internal opportunity for service re-design, in response to the learning emerging from this project.
- 3.21 For an outline of the Future Parks Accelerator Birmingham 'bid-on-a-page' (see Appendix 7), a schematic drawing to explain the proposed two year programme.

4 Options considered and Recommended Proposal

- 4.1 There were 81 expressions of interest to this fund in November 2018, which demonstrates the resonance this fund has to Parks Authorities across the UK. 11 finalists were chosen including Birmingham, from which the funders have awarded 8 places in total.
- 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 through a new vision, informed and articulated through new evidence, resulting in the opportunity to re-define the governance model for parks and making it fit for purpose for the 21st century city.
- 4.3 As part of this Future Parks Accelerator programme Birmingham will be regarded as an exemplar authority, testing its unique model and transformational approach.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 Internal: The bid required identification of both political and corporate champions who are the Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Parks; and the Director of Neighbourhoods - both have been heavily engaged with the process.
- 5.3 Ahead of the bid, consultation was undertaken with 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;

- 5.4 The 4 community pilots have been determined through a co-location with the Sports Lottery Local Delivery pilots, run by The Active Wellbeing Society; whose funding was confirmed during the bid writing process. This is to seek to achieve the maximum synergies with existing engaged communities coupled with active parks groups. The locations were then confirmed by alignment identified by each corporate outcome theme lead- where their existing on the ground programmes could easily integrate with these community pilot areas.
- 5.5 Community engagement sits at the heart of this project and is a pre-requisite of the Funders, so this will happen continuously throughout the project in these 4 locations. This bottom-up community voice will then inform the corporate re-alignment process due to take place at the strategic level across the Council.

6 Risk Management

- 6.1 This grant award 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 over 2 years.
- 6.2 The 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 project has been structured into a series of milestones with matching cashflow; these have been agreed with the Funders, through their Permission to Start process.
- 6.3 The grant funding and the performance of the whole project is being overseen by an appointed Account Manager from the Funders to keep the project on track.
- 6.4 The grant fund is subject to a Midpoint Review - which for Birmingham has been set at the end of month 15. The conditions of grant aid state that if insufficient progress has been made at this point the project could be halted.
- 6.5 Should the Account Manager be satisfied both with progress and the commitment of resources to complete the project, then approval will be given to move to the transition phase, in month 16 and to complete the project.
- 6.6 To effectively manage these project risks the project Director will manage the project team and together with the support of the FPA service director (Assistant Director Street Scene & Parks) and the Account Manager, monthly project team meetings will take place to sign-off milestones and monitor progress.
- 6.7 Every quarter a Project Board co-chaired by the corporate and political champions will receive progress reports and sign off milestone completion and initiate financial draw downs, in line with the cashflow.
- 6.8 Additionally to this internal Birmingham process there will be regular interaction across the other cohort cities to ensure best practice and project efficiencies are maximised, supported by the Account Manager.

- 6.9 A further condition of this grant is that all cohort cities will assist Newcastle City Council where the decision has been taken to move to a Parks Trust. There has been much discussion at the national level about future Trust models for parks; the Naturally Birmingham project is not aiming to establish a Trust for Birmingham; but by seeing first-hand the detail and the issues behind this will better inform any future decision for Birmingham and help highlight any significant risks involved.
- 6.10 A full risk matrix is attached, see Appendix 8.

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 5) which clearly shows how the future parks model would serve all five strategic priority outcomes of the Council.
- 7.1.2 Additionally the bid outline in (Appendix 7) 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 grant of £900,000 has now been offered to the city over 2 years 2019-2021; with an agreed set of project milestones and matching cashflow. Oversight of this would be undertaken via the dedicated Account Manager and through the Parks Project Board.
- 7.3.2 At the mid-point (end of month 15) 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; the city would not face any clawback.
- 7.3.3 In addition to the cash value of £900,000 of grant, there is a support package valued circa £100,000 made up of professional services from 2

Environment economist firms; and a project evaluation team led by Sheffield Hallam University; together with in-kind support from the National Trust including their dedicated Account Manager.

- 7.3.4 Within the bid conditions, 7% of the award had to be reserved for evaluation and knowledge sharing across the cohort, so all travel and subsistence costs associated are fully covered.

7.4 Procurement Implications (if required)

- 7.4.1 The majority of the grant will be used to appoint a team of 7 staff for the duration of the project. In addition to this there will be a series of small scale procurement exercises for specific services which will follow all existing rules for procurement for the commissioning of any external service.

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 has been the lack of human resource that has been the number one limiting factor preventing the Council from implementing these ideas and models before now. The changes will then be embedded in all future services; with re-defined and re-allocated resources; and potentially access to new external future funding resources, identified through the project.

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 9 and Appendix 9A). A full equality impact assessment is not required for this report.

8 Background Documents

- 8.1 List of appendices accompanying this report:
- Appendix 1 – FPA cohort induction pack
 - Appendix 2 – Environmental Finance
 - Appendix 3 - Vivid Economics
 - Appendix 4 - Sheffield Hallam University FPA evaluation summary
 - Appendix 5 - 'Naturally Birmingham' diagram
 - Appendix 6 - Birmingham Parks Valuation Study
 - Appendix 7- Future Parks Accelerator Birmingham, 'bid-on-a-page' diagram
 - Appendix 8 - Risk Assessment
 - Appendix 9 - Initial Equality Impact Assessment EIA (REF: EQUA256)
 - Appendix 9A - Equality Act 2010 - Public Sector Duty statement