

Birmingham City Council

Report to Cabinet

8th February 2022



APPENDIX E GOVERNANCE

1.0 Background

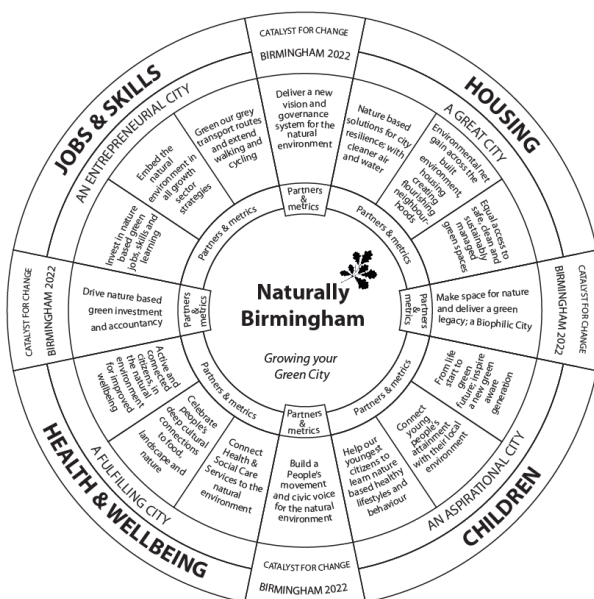
1.1 The Future Parks Accelerator is a national programme across 8 UK (United Kingdom) cities, seeking answers to the questions raised by the evidence gathered through the 2016-17 Parliamentary Inquiry on Future of Public Parks; what is the sustainable future for public parks?

1.2 Birmingham’s evidence to the Inquiry was based around the need for a system change approach. This evidence was drawn from the national research programme Liveable Cities 2013-2018; for which Birmingham was a case study city (see [Future Cities and Infrastructure Engineering research - University of Birmingham](#)).

1.3 This research programme looked at the fundamental building blocks required to create and maintain a sustainable city. One of its significant findings, having looked across global best practice, was the need to integrate the role and function of the natural environment, including parks and green spaces; into central city decision-making. As in most cases the topic of the natural environment is dismissed to the margins and therefore is overlooked and undervalued.

1.4 This classic treatment of urban green space has been exposed for all to see through the global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the unequal access to quality green space for urban residents, especially through lockdown periods. The increasing declarations of climate emergencies across cities including Birmingham, highlights the need to urgently address this dilemma.

1.5 Interestingly the Parliamentary Inquiry into UK Public Parks mapped the evidence returns across the whole of Government and concluded that it reached across eight Departments or Ministries. For the Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator application, we mapped the potential impact of the natural environment right across the Council’s 2018-2022 Council Plan; see diagram below: -

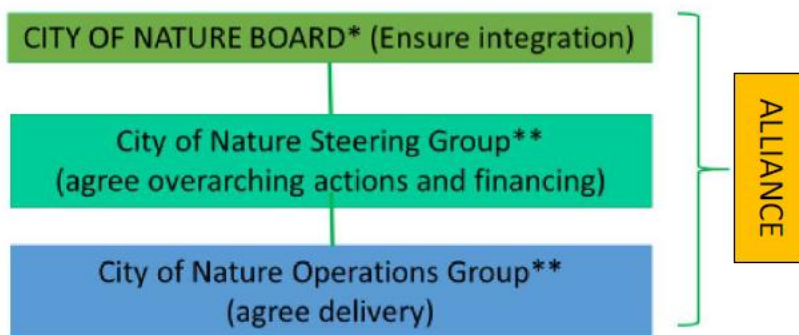


1.6 This highlighted the need to integrate the appreciation of this potential impact of the natural environment on city function and city life and the declared city outcomes. This has formed the basis of the Birmingham programme to make visible these invisible benefits and gain the acceptance and adoption from the 4 main pillars of the council. This was further tested by a neighbourhood pilot for each of those 4 city themes. This identified the gaps in the city's operational systems where the natural environment was getting lost or obscured. The programme response has been to create the City of Nature 5 City Themes; one of which is Green City. It is here that the programme has proposed a new governance framework for the City of Nature; to lock-in the system change required.

2.0 New Governance Model

2.1 Below is the diagram outlining the new governance structure:

City of Nature – Governance - *Integration*



2.2 City of Nature Board would be at the most senior level of the council with the lead for City of Nature being with the Strategic Director of Place, Prosperity and Sustainability. The Board would ensure the long-term strategic decisions and plans for the city fully embrace the natural environment. A specific responsibility would be to align any long-term significant investment plans for the city; including future green investments or linked climate bonds. The Board would therefore lead on the macro funding opportunities. The Board would also have Alliance and partner representation.

2.3 City of Nature Steering Group to be led by Acting Director of Inclusive Growth or their nominee. The steering group is responsible for looking across the organisation and the city's geography to continuously build capacity for the natural environment. To spot synergies and ensure policy alignments; critically those of Our Future City Plan and the climate emergency Route to Zero. The steering group would also have Alliance and critical partners included.

2.4 City of Nature Operations Group is to be chaired by a Senior Planner from Inclusive Growth. This group is concerned with spatial geography, place-making and maximising local impact for local communities and the natural environment. This group will take a keen interest in site specific micro finance and oversee joined-up delivery. This group will work with the Alliance and critical partners, focussing on the environmental justice agenda.

2.5 The City of Nature Alliance is a collaboration between the city's key strategic third sector partners for the natural environment and community development. They have a core group of partners who have signed a Memorandum of Understanding agreeing to work with the city and prioritising the environmental justice agenda. Beyond the core partners will be a City of Nature Roundtable to serve as an umbrella organisation for all of Birmingham's environmental and third sector groups.

3.0 Conclusion

3.1 What will success look like?

This new governance arrangement for the city is hoped to achieve continuous and better integration of services and wider recognition of the value of preserving and improving the city's natural environment. To ensure peoples local environment and access to nature improves over time.

This arrangement has never been in place before but has been introduced in a direct response to the evidence collated through this programme and through mutual agreement across the wider council and our partners.

It is believed that this will strengthen the profile and recognition of Birmingham as a City of Nature and provide a mechanism to oversee its implementation and delivery. With the additional capacity brought through this arrangement, coupled with the new sustainable finance model- it is anticipated that these system changes will enable the council and its partners to work together to implement the City of Nature Delivery Framework; both within existing resources initially; but gradually drawing in new resources to expand and accelerate the programme over time.