

Cabinet – 18th April 2007

Black Country Consortium Living Landmarks Big Lottery Fund Application : 'A Million People - Black Country as Urban Park'

Portfolio: Cllr Louise Harrison – Leisure and Culture
Cllr Adrian Andrew – Regeneration & Enterprise

Service Area: Regeneration Delivery and Development
Neighbourhoods

Wards: All

Forward Plan: Yes

Key Decision: Yes

Summary of report

This report provides an update for Cabinet on the Black Country Consortium's (BCC) funding submission for the "A Million People – Black Country as Urban Park", which has been short-listed for consideration under the Big Lottery Fund's (BLF) national Living Landmarks programme and seeks Cabinet authority to submit the Walsall elements of the required BLF Development Plan which is being prepared by BCC for submission in May 2007.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:-

(i) note and endorse the Black Country Consortium Living Landmarks Big Lottery Fund Stage 2 application for the 'Black Country as Urban Park'.

(ii) delegate authority to the Interim Chief Executive to submit Walsall's elements of the Stage 2 Development Plan for the Black Country as Urban Park initiative, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Regeneration & Enterprise and Leisure and Culture.

Resource and legal considerations

Following approval of a Stage 1 Development grant of £500,000, BCC have led the work on the preparation of a Stage 2 Development Plan for the Black Country as Urban Park project. This grant has enabled initial proposals to be worked up to a more detailed stage, and BCC are now required to submit a Stage 2 Development Plan to BLF by May 2007, once this has been agreed with partners.

Officers have worked closely with BCC to develop the Stage 2 bid submission and have continued to meet with colleagues from Sandwell MBC to develop the initial proposals further. These include the:-

- restoration of Walsall Arboretum through the submission of a supporting Parks for People Big Lottery Fund bid, which Cabinet approved at its meeting on 28th February 2007.
- restoration of Dartmouth Park in West Bromwich, again through a supporting Parks for People bid
- creation of a 12 mile long linear park, through countryside to the east of Walsall Town Centre and through Sandwell Valley, by linking existing nature reserves, open spaces and greenways,
- provision of a new visitor centre at Barr Beacon
- improvements to Rushall Canal
- a new iconic “green bridge” in West Bromwich connecting the park to the Town Centre

In total, the Stage 2 BCC bid for the Black Country exceeded £90 million. £50 million of this will be sought from BLF, through the Living Landmarks – Peoples Millions initiative, with the remaining made up from funding identified from other sources, such as Council funding, European funding, Advantage West Midlands and Heritage Lottery Fund.

The preparation of the Stage 2 Development Plan has requires a detailed funding plan to be prepared, detailing all partner contributions by late May 2007. In addition, BCC have also requested confirmation from the Council of the proposed long term management/maintenance arrangements for the project.

In view of the tight timescale involved in preparing this information, Cabinet is asked to delegate authority to the Acting Chief Executive to finalise and submit Walsall’s elements of the Stage 2 Development Plan for the Black Country as Urban Park initiative, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Regeneration & Enterprise and Parks & Green-spaces.

This delegation would be made on the basis that project match funding can be identified from existing approved resources or from sources of external grant aid and on the basis that future revenue implications of the final projects are minimised.

Citizen impact

The scale and impact of the BCC’s application should not be under estimated. The submission envisages that the proposals will improve the quality of life for over 1 million people who live within the Black Country, by creating unprecedented environmental change.

The BLF Living Landmarks' Initiative will be awarded through use of a televised public vote in Autumn 2007. In order for BCC to be successful, it will be necessary to promote the positive impacts that the combined proposals will have on the communities within the four Black Country boroughs and adjoining authorities, such as Birmingham, Lichfield, etc.

Community safety

In order to ensure the highest levels of personal safety, all proposed designs will be subjected to a "secured by design" assessment prior to implementation.

Environmental impact

BCC's Black Country as Urban Park bid will have a major positive impact of Walsall's and the wider Black Country's natural environment.

The principal flagship sites across the Black Country focus on:

- Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve and Seven Sisters mines
- The creation of a new 12 mile long, linear park between Walsall Town Centre and West Bromwich Town Centre
- The creation of a new exemplar visitor centre at Barr Beacon
- Restoration of a range of canals and waterways in Wolverhampton

Key themes will include environmental sustainability, community access, learning and visitor opportunities, active citizenship and active lifestyles, biodiversity, geo-diversity, and heritage.

Performance and risk management issues:

(i) Performance Management Issues

The development of the Black Country as Urban Park initiative is a key priority with 2006/2007 Regeneration Service Plan.

(ii) Risk Management Issues:-

Risk 1 – *Failure to obtain community support for the initiative* - This is considered to be a low risk in view of the level of community consultation and partner engagement undertaken during the preparation of the Stage 2 Development Plan.

Risk 2 – *Failure to attract sufficient resources to fund priorities* -This risk is considered to be medium on the basis that the majority of funding is still subject to a national public vote in Autumn 2007. Some match funding has still to be secured.

Risk 3 – BLF funding not awarded following Public vote and resources are wasted - This risk is considered to be low at this stage on the basis that, in the event of the BCC bid not winning the public vote, the resources committed to date in developing the projects will allow the Council to develop a range of “shelf schemes” to support bids for future funding from other external sources.

Equality implications

The improvement of the borough’s environment will build upon the themes which reflect Walsall’s diverse cultural heritage and which link people in celebration of Walsall’s past and future irrespective of culture, race and ethnicity.

Consultation

As part of the Stage 2 Development Plan work, significant consultation has been undertaken with stakeholders and communities who live near to the new park. Through a participative community arts based approach, comments and views on design and management of the project have been generated.

In addition to project specific consultation, BCC have been leading on a region-wide marketing and promotion campaign during the development of the Stage 2 plan and in the run up to the televised public vote in Autumn 2007.

Vision 2008

This project contributes directly to the Council’s Vision priorities of:-

- making Walsall a cleaner, greener borough
- encouraging people to feel proud of Walsall

Background papers

All published

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Signed:

Tim Johnson
Executive Director:

Date: 4 April 2007



Signed:

Portfolio Holder:

Date: 4 April 2007



Signed:

Jamie Morris
Executive Director:

Date: 4 April 2007



Signed:

Portfolio Holder:

Date: 4 April 2007