

Cabinet – 8 November 2006

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

| | |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Portfolio: | Councillor Louise Harrison – Leisure and Culture Councillor Adrian Andrew – Regeneration and Enterprise |
| Service Area: | Neighbourhoods Greenspaces Environmental Regeneration |
| Wards: | All |
| Forward Plan: | Yes |
| Key Decision | Yes |

Summary of report

This report provides Cabinet with background information on the Black Country Consortium's (BCC) funding submission for the "A Million People – Black Country as Urban Park", which has been shortlisted for consideration under the Big Lottery Fund's (BLF) national Living Landmarks programme. BLF have awarded BCC £500,000 in development funding between now and May 2007 and invited them to prepare a detailed development plan for a range of projects across the Black Country.

The Black Country as Urban Park Project, together with a number of other short-listed projects, will be considered for funding via a televised public vote in Autumn 2007 and, if successful, will be awarded up to £50 million from BLF to implement the public's choice of project by 2012/2013.

Cabinet is asked to authorise officers to work with BCC to develop and finalise the required BLF Development Plan, prior to its submission by BCC in May 2007.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:-

- (1) authorise officers to work with BCC on the preparation of the Stage 2 Development Plan for the Black Country as Urban Park initiative and to delegate authority to the Executive Director Regeneration to commission all necessary work to assist with the development of the Walsall elements of the BLF Development Plan.
- (2) agree to receive a further report at a future Cabinet in order to consider and endorse the final Stage 2 Development Plan, prior to its submission to the Big Lottery Fund.

Resource and legal considerations

On the basis of the Stage 1 bid submitted by BCC, BLF have now approved £500,000 to the Consortium as a Stage 2 Development Grant. This grant has been provided to develop the initial proposals up to a more detailed stage, sufficient to seek tenders and to enable planning permissions, etc to be sought. BCC are 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 1 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
- restoration of Dartmouth Park in West Bromwich
- 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 1 BCC bid for the Black Country exceeded £80 million. £50 million of this would be sought from BLF, through the Living Landmarks – Peoples Millions initiative, with the remaining funding being sought from other sources, such as existing Council funding, European funding, Advantage West Midlands and Heritage Lottery Fund.

The preparation of the Stage 2 Development Plan will require a detailed funding plan to be prepared and partner contributions to be firmed up. A further report will be submitted to Cabinet, setting out the financial implications of the Stage 2 Development Plan for Walsall and to seek authority to sign off the final plan prior to submission to BLF in May 2007.

Of the £500,000 awarded to BCC at this stage, Walsall will receive £70,000 between now and May 2007. This funding will be used to:-

- a range of required surveys, e.g. topographical, archaeological and ecological information to inform proposals,
- develop a landscape design strategy for the urban park in Walsall, including sketch designs, 3D artist impressions and a implementation phasing plan,
- concept designs and 3D artist impressions for Barr Beacon Visitor Centre
- fees (e.g. planning application costs, etc).
- community arts strategy and art feature initial design and development costs,
- community consultation/publicity events in the run up to the public vote in Autumn 2007.

In the event of the BCC bid not being successful in the televised public vote, these designs will provide a significant resource to the Council by way of providing a range of “shelf scheme” proposals that may be used to support other applications for funding from other external funding sources.

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

The Black Country Consortium Stage 1 outline application for Big Lottery Fund Living Landmarks capital funding was submitted on 6 January.

In line with BLF criteria, the project will:

- develop a truly aspirational Vision for environmental renewal, shared by communities throughout the Black Country
- deliver a set of exemplary Flagship Developments that will point the way to that transformational change

The principal flagship sites 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 support for the initiative -*

This is considered to be a low risk in view of the level of community consultation and partner engagement to be undertaken during the preparation of the Stage 2 Development Plan. The proposals form part of the Black Country Consortium's 30 year vision for the Black Country and, as such, have already obtained significant endorsement and support.

Risk 2 – *Failure to attract sufficient resources to fund priorities.*

This risk is considered to be medium on the basis that the lions share of funding is subject to a national public vote in Autumn 2007. Success for the BCC bid will be reliant on ensuring that its bid wins the televised public vote against the other short listed national projects. Match funding will need to be secured and a detailed funding strategy will be developed through the Stage 2 Development Plan phase up to May 2007. It is envisaged that, given the prominence of the BCC's proposals and their strategic fit with the region's major funding agencies, that match funding will be forthcoming if the public vote is won. The £50m is a maximum grant from BLF. This would be 75% of any award, which would need to be matched from other sources. If sufficient match funding could not be found to draw down the £50m, a smaller second stage development plan would have been developed to fit the resources available.

Risk 3 – *Stage 2 Development Grant is claw-backed due to non delivery of outputs/match funding requirements.*

This risk is considered low as the funding currently approved by BLF has no match funding requirement attached to it. The output required from BCC is the production of a Stage 2 Development Plan by May 2007. Initial development work with partners is underway and this timescale is considered achievable.

Risk 4 – *BLF funding not awarded following Public vote and resources are wasted.*

This risk is considered to be medium at this stage on the basis that the BCC bid is in a competitive process with five other short listed projects and success is subject to a public vote. BCC partners feel that the product which is it marketing, ie the Black Country as Urban Park, has the potential to create significant public impact and is likely to be well received by viewers. In the event of the BCC bid not winning the vote, the resources committed in developing the projects will be useful in its own right, in the development of a

range of shelf schemes for future funding. The strength of the partnership formed by the BCC will be a major strength and will help to unlock other funding from a variety of sources over a longer period of time should the current bid fail.

Risk 5 – Walsall Arboretum Restoration Project fails to secure Parks for People Funding from Big Lottery Fund/Heritage Lottery Fund.

This risk is considered to be medium at this stage on the basis that Heritage Lottery Fund officers have been consulted and that they have expressed their support for the project and indicated their wish to receive Walsall's submission in the near future. Heritage Lottery Fund are fully aware of the linkage to the Green Bridge project and have recently approved a Stage 1 Parks for People application for Dartmouth Park in West Bromwich, which forms the southern gateway to the Green Bridge park.

Officers have commenced the preparation of the Walsall Arboretum Parks for People Stage 1 application and it is anticipated that this will be submitted during March 2007, in advance of the BCC's Green Bridge Big Lottery Fund submission in May 2007. This will give the assessment team greater confidence in the Consortium's submission and help to minimise the risk to the overall project.

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 will be held with stakeholders and communities who will be near to the new park. Through a participative community arts based approach, comments and views on design and management of the project will be generated. These events are expected to commence during late 2006/early 2007.

In addition to project specific consultation, BCC will be 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. This will enable a wide cross section of the community to hear about the proposals and to mobilise people within the Black Country to vote.

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

Authors

Steve Lewis
Head of Environmental Regeneration
☎ 01922 652534
✉ e-mail : lewiss@walsall.gov.uk

Graham Hood
Head of Greenspaces
☎ 01922 650340
✉ : hoodg@walsall.gov.uk



Signed:
Executive Director
Tim Johnson

Date: 31 October 2006



Signed:
Portfolio Holder:
Councillor Louise Harrison

Date: 31 October 2006



Signed:
Portfolio Holder:
Councillor Adrian Andrew

Date: 31 October 2006

Walsall – West Bromwich Green Bridge Park Outline Location Plan

