

FPA NEWSLETTER - MAY 2021

An unusual year in the life of the Birmingham Park Service - Helen Rooney, Performance Officer, Parks & Nature Conservation

It was 165 years ago when Birmingham got its first public park at Adderley, Washwood Heath. This proved hugely popular with local people as a massive relief to life in a growing industrial city. The idea of public parks really caught on and spread across Birmingham. For the last year, peoples' gratitude and use of Birmingham parks has soared with the impact of COVID-19. The Parks Survey 2020 revealed 40% of respondents used the parks daily and over 50% said they had used parks more frequently during the pandemic. Consequently, Birmingham Parks and Nurseries has picked up an additional 95,000 bags of litter and have started to install solar powered bins with greater capacities in hotspot areas.



During the Covid-19 emergency the Park Service has been recognised for the benefits it provides to the community and this good work is not only a credit to its staff but to the continuous support from the public, friends, community groups, business and local partnerships. In the year before Covid (2019/20), the Park Service benefited from over 25,000 volunteers, offering over 22,000 volunteer days including assistance from litter picks to tree planting and Parks is especially grateful to all its partners including Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF), the Friends of Parks, Birmingham Trees For Life (BTFL) and the Birmingham Tree People (BTP) to name a few.

In February 2021 the city retained its "Tree Cities of the World" designation for a second year and Councillor O'Shea personally thanked stakeholders such as Birmingham Trees for Life, the Birmingham Tree People, Birmingham's Sustainability Team and our own Tree Officers for their individual contributions to help Birmingham City Council keep this prestigious award.

Parks, as a holder of "Gold" medals at RHS Chelsea Flower Show for eight consecutive years, was unable to enter in 2020 due to the pandemic but instead displayed the sponsored entry outside the Town Hall for all to see. The installation (below), featured as its centrepiece the NHS logo surrounded by a rainbow and other items associated with key workers or community activity including a floral double decker bus for support from the public transport services, a planted-out shopping trolley to reflect the retail workers who kept up the supply of essential items and planted-out bins to mark the contribution from our refuse and street cleaning teams.



The Park Service was saddened that the popular Birmingham Wildlife Conservation Park was mostly closed during the pandemic so set up live-feeds, providing educational animal information for the younger audience (and their parents), showing off new arrivals such as the South American Bush Dogs, new births and enclosures.

Last year the service worked tirelessly to keep all parks and playgrounds open safely. The Parks Service manages

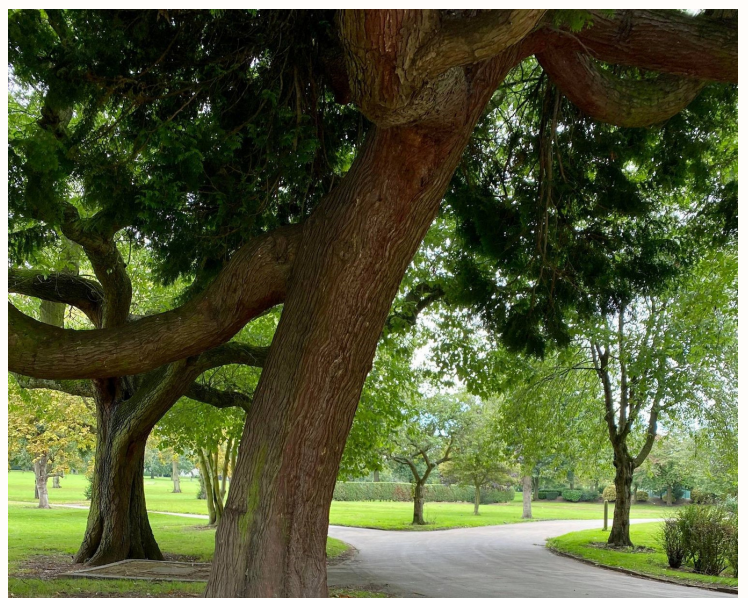
the grounds maintenance work programme for the whole city which includes Housing, Highways, Bereavement, Schools and all Parks sites, and the Birmingham Parks and Nurseries team tried as far as possible to keep to the grass cutting programme for the majority of the City. The Park Service inspects and maintains 254 playgrounds and these were inspected for safety throughout Covid. The Parks Tree Service also manages the City Council's tree stock of over 700,000 trees (with the exception of Highways Trees) and as well as safety inspections the tree team reacted to nearly 3,000 tree enquiries during last year.

The Landscape Practice Group continued to design and deliver improvements to parks, for example Chamberlain Gardens, as well as providing new accessible walking and cycling routes for people to use during lockdowns including the BournBrook Walkway to Harborne Lane path that connects Woodgate Country Park to the University of Birmingham.

Allotments have always been a popular pastime in Birmingham but the Park Service, working with 92 Allotment Associations, saw an increase in Allotment growers seeking the "good life", with current occupancy rates up by 5% to 87%.

As we are hopefully moving slowly out of the pandemic the Park Service are currently working on an idea to set up COVID-19 memorial community gardens across the city, in recognition of the fact the virus has affected all parts of Birmingham.

And finally, although this year has been a challenging and turbulent one for Parks, it has shown how deeply valuable green space is and encourages us all to constantly strive to have a safe vibrant GREEN city which meets local community needs and provides valuable open green spaces for everyone.



A NEW GOVERNANCE MODEL FOR BIRMINGHAM'S GREEN SPACE

25 YEAR CITY OF NATURE VISION – YOUR CHANCE TO FIND OUT MORE!

As mentioned in last month's newsletter, we are currently in the process of establishing a 25 Year vision for the City to become a 'City of Nature'. At its heart, it aims to address the issues the UK and Birmingham face by seizing the opportunities presented to us by Covid-19 and investing in our green and blue spaces, creating a cleaner and healthier city for all to enjoy.

We have now completed our deep dive into the evidence as to why green and blue spaces are so important for our physical and mental health. Our next steps are to synthesise this evidence which will then form the basis for the reasoning as to why Birmingham should become a City of Nature.

Throughout May, we have been talking to internal stakeholders on our vision to gather the views of our colleagues to ensure everyone has a chance to input into the City of Nature vision. We will continue to move this forward by talking to more internal stakeholders over the next couple of months.

The next steps for this vision are that we want to hear from as many as you as possible to take you through our vision and thinking and allow you to input into creating the vision for the citizens of Birmingham. We will be holding a series of webinars throughout June which you can book on using the following link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/a-city-of-nature-25-year-vision-for-birmingham-tickets-155528874049>

These engagement sessions will be crucial in shaping our vision and will outline the next steps of utilising our 591 parks and over 160 miles of canals within Birmingham to make these areas, as well as the whole city, the best places they can be, allowing everyone to enjoy nature together.

After these engagement sessions, the team will be reviewing the common themes which have been derived and ensuring the views are incorporated into the vision. Keep your eyes peeled for more information and to learn more on what we have found!

WHAT IS GOVERNANCE?

A core part of our FPA programme is ensuring that green spaces are at the forefront of decision making across all areas of the Council and the wider community. To do this requires a huge shift in the way we think about and value our green spaces, and we hope to facilitate this change through our FPA programme by connecting others to the green agenda.

Visit our [website](#) for more information on our frameworks.



HEALTHY CITY FRAMEWORK

WHAT IS A HEALTHY CITY?

Birmingham aspires to be a healthy city as well as a green city. Part of this means recognising the overwhelming health benefits of the natural environment to people's lives. Our Naturally Birmingham Programme will aim to re-connect these agendas once again in Birmingham so that we clearly link health and wellbeing to green space nature, helping our residents to live healthier lives.

SKILLS SHOWCASE AT WITTON LAKES

Witton Lodge Community Association has delivered the first behind the scenes public tour of the new Eco Hub site at Witton Lakes for local residents to see the Velvet Community Orchard in full bloom and experience the beauty of connecting to nature in glorious sunshine. Attendees saw the construction of the new facility taking shape and heard about the exciting plans for the new state-of-the-art centre which is scheduled to open in September. To finish off the visit, residents joined the Duckling Watch group on a tour around the Lakes where they caught a glimpse of recently hatched coot ducklings and learned more about the park and wildlife here.

Throughout summer a number of site visits and workshops are being organised to give residents a chance to see the development and help co-design both the landscape and the services in the centre, so that the Eco Hub becomes a place that truly belongs to the community it serves.

Local young people will soon be starting work placements at the facility, seeing the kinds of jobs available in green spaces and will be able to build skills to support their careers too.

For more information on the Eco Hub project or to sign up to get involved in future tours, design workshops and events, please contact paul.tse@wittonlodge.org.uk or **0121 382 1930**.



REFLECTIONS FROM WITTON LAKES: JOURNEY TOWARDS A PARK FOR HEALTH

Green spaces are good for wellbeing, we've seen that over the past year - but we knew this already! Witton Lodge Community Association was approached to deliver the Health & Wellbeing Pilot at Witton Lakes 18 months ago. In that time we have delivered a range of activities, created new connections and built on existing ones, and used community-led solutions to show the value of green spaces for good health.

As we conclude the pilot at Witton Lakes, what have we learned from Naturally Birmingham? We have seen the incredible power of connecting to green spaces in improving health and wellbeing. We have seen that you don't have to visit a park in order to enjoy some greenery, and small patches of green space through our city are just as beneficial for our collective mental health in society; they give us places to relax and unwind, stay healthy, socialise and make new friends, and they instil tranquillity throughout our city. We have also seen that for those who have been stuck at home, shielding because of the pandemic, that there are other ways to connect to green spaces, whether that's growing your own plants at home or joining virtual sessions to see, hear and experience the joys of nature.

We have learned throughout the pandemic that residents in our community have been able to adapt to the challenges of lockdown by learning to use IT and online platforms such as Zoom as a different method to connect to green spaces from the comfort of their own homes.

We have also seen that many others love their parks too – from Friends groups to community groups, charities and health providers, we are more connected now to others who are working towards the same things we are. We will take these insights and connections forward into the future to keep building towards a real Park for Health.

CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT FRAMEWORK

WHAT IS CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT?

The world's greenest cities make it very easy for their citizens to make a difference through contributing their ideas, their endeavour, and their time. Birmingham needs such a support system for its citizens and under FPA we intend to create such a platform - where everybody's voice can be heard.

BIG SPRING CLEAN - STETCHFORD REC GROUND

Stechford Recreation ground in the East of Birmingham has been identified as the new focus for the children's pilot. We have been meeting with local councillors and schools to discuss what we can deliver in the area, and we are progressing forward with a range of initiatives, the first of which being a BIG Spring Clean on Wednesday 2nd June and Tuesday 9th June. On these days we will be talking with local residents and asking how they would like to get involved with their local green spaces. If you live in this area please feel free to come and join in! If you would like to find out more, please contact Sam at:

Samantha.J.Hall@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

VERY HUNGRY CATERPILLAR TRAIL

Two parks in South Birmingham have been part of the 'Very Hungry Caterpillar' book trail aimed at young children, allowing them to follow along and have fun while exploring the park – this will be running until the end of half term week. Contact Sam on the above email address for info.



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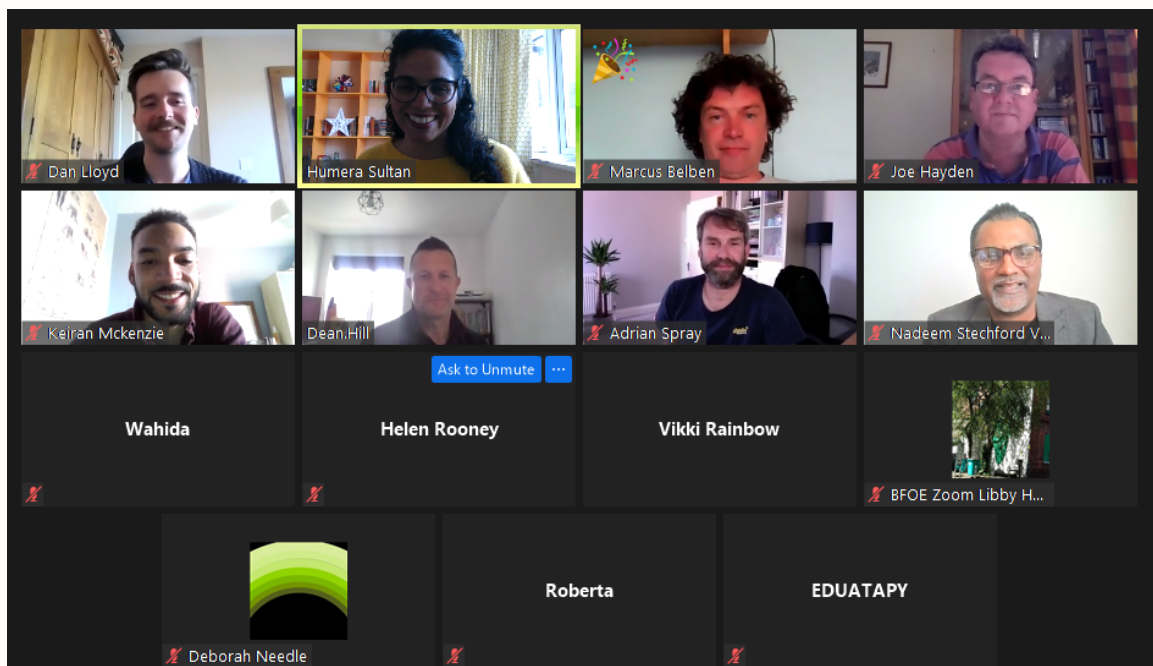
Keep Britain Tidy is a registered Charity No. 1071327

BIRMINGHAM CITY OF NATURE WEBSITE

We are currently developing the specification for our Birmingham City of Nature website, which we hope will allow anyone to easily find information relating to green spaces - incorporating all 'green' workstreams from the council and acting as a signposting resource to key partners, activities/events, how-to guides, volunteering opportunities, and interest pieces related to the green agenda in Birmingham. The website will link in with our existing City Council Website and some of the features we hope to implement include:

- Recommending parks based on the sorts of activities they would like to take part in, such as relaxing, exercising, or days out with the family; both locally and further afield.
- Provide summaries of Birmingham's parks and green spaces, including information on their history, ecology and key features. As well as routes and nature trails, linking up our green and blue spaces.
- Include information on events and activities taking place in green spaces across Birmingham.
- Provide information on volunteering, skills workshops, green careers, and other ways to get involved.
- Host all of our FPA work and updates currently found on our Naturally Birmingham site.
- And much more!

We have hosted several consultation sessions over the last year, and we are finalising the specification for the website as we speak. We are keen for the website to be developed alongside the community, and we would love to host media produced by our residents. If you have any good quality images of our parks and green spaces in Birmingham, would be interested in producing a short video explaining why you love our parks, or if you would like to find out more about the project, contact Dan at Daniel.lloyd@birmingham.gov.uk



SUSTAINABLE FINANCE FRAMEWORK

BIOPHILIC CITIES NETWORK

You may know that Birmingham was a founding member of the Biophilic Cities Network; a group of like-minded green-thinking cities that try to put nature at the heart of what they do. Membership does not cost the city anything, and it serves predominantly as a knowledge sharing platform; check it out here:

<https://www.biophiliccities.org/our-vision>

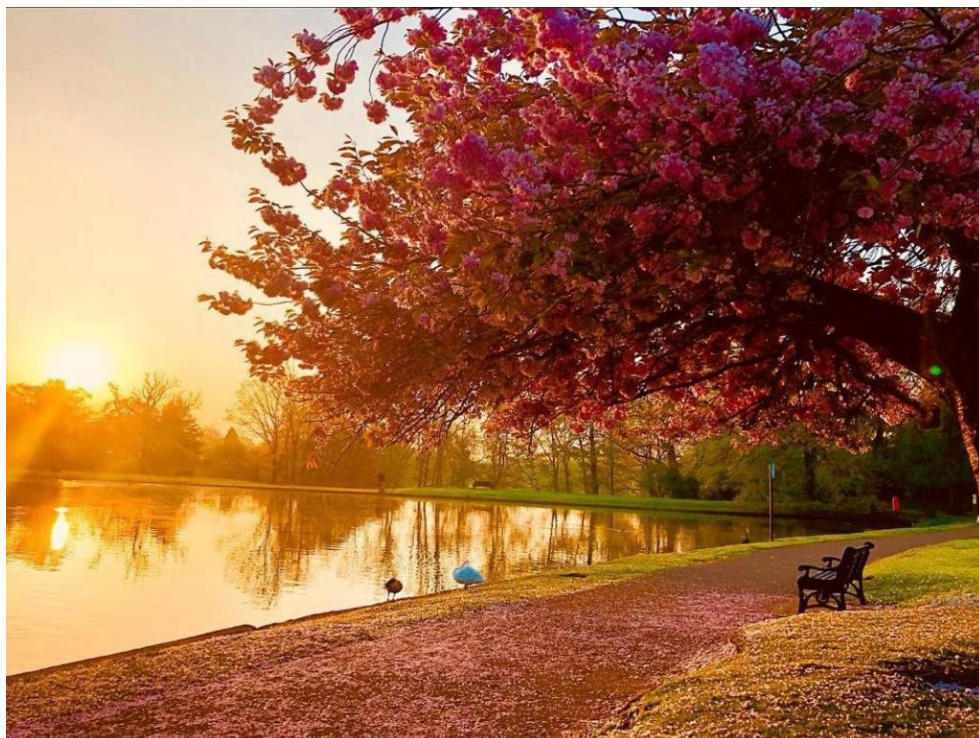
We are partnering with these cities through a finance working group, looking for best case examples of how they fund their green spaces and their successful nature programmes, to see what lessons can be transferred here.

What might also surprise you is that they want to know all about the Naturally Birmingham programme. In particular how we are working both with our own corporate finance teams but also external green investors on a set of principles that would allow Birmingham to access these new emerging green funds to help us with our vision and plans. These principles are being put together into a Sustainable Finance Framework, that would serve as a benchmark document that will set out what the city would ask from outside green investors and what they might ask of the city.

As more and more cities around the world, like Birmingham are declaring climate emergencies, so more potential green investment is starting to be targeted at cities. This Framework will allow Birmingham to engage in these discussions and seriously look at these as future options.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE FINANCE?

Any change or improvement we make to parks and green spaces has to be financially viable. Our new finance framework will re-calculate all the benefits green space brings to the whole City. We will look at ways to bring extra money in where possible. By focusing on money and budgets, we will grow a greener future with confidence.



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE?

We believe that access to green spaces is a fundamental right.

People living in more deprived areas have poorer health, access to work/education, and often cannot access good quality green spaces.

This theme connects Climate Change, ecological decline, and the Covid-19 pandemic workstreams to ensure the enormous benefits of being in nature are available to those who need them most.

SKILLS SHOWCASE

We're so excited that we've been able to get out and about and bring our Skills Showcase to life, we may have only been joined by a few people for each session, (we imagine due to the weather) but we had a great time! We hosted a range of walk & talks in some of our beautiful Birmingham Parks, including Dawberry Fields, Witton Lakes, Ward End and Georges Park. We were lucky to be joined by FPA's Rupri Chawlia talking about her career as a Landscape Architect, Mike Hinton talking about his role as District Park Manager, Pamela Smith from the National Trust gave us an insight into botanic and heritage gardens and much more. I'd like to thank everyone that hosted and supported these sessions.

If you missed out on our sessions this time round, don't worry we have two more weeks scheduled in:

- 12th – 16th July
- 9th – 13th August

(if you want to join a mailing list to ensure you receive the Eventbrite links, please email Sophie.j.green@birmingham.gov.uk).

Some of our sessions for these weeks are already confirmed including the BBC Wildlife Trust, Tyesley Energy Park and more...

These sessions are a fantastic opportunity to engage with your local greenspace, learn all about the different jobs and opportunities that are available and meet others that share a passion for greenspace.

Just remember you can always take a look at our online Skills Showcase [here](#).



Be sure to also check out the Groundwork report on equal access to urban green spaces [here](#).

Still not had enough of FPA? Why not check out our blogs [here](#)?

<https://naturallybirmingham.org/blog/>

You can also read our previous newsletters [here](#):

<https://naturallybirmingham.org/read-our-newsletters/>