



people spaces places

END OF PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT





people spaces places

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator

End of Project Evaluation

Issue number: 3

Status: FINAL

Date: 27 July 2022

Prepared by: AS / EH / CL

Authorised by: Ian Baggott

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator

End of Project Evaluation

Contents

1	Executive Summary	1
2	About the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator Project	10
2.1	The Future Parks Accelerator Programme	10
2.2	The Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator Project	10
2.3	Vision & Aims	11
2.4	Objectives	12
2.5	Project Delivery	17
3	Project Activity	19
3.1	Overview of Co-design Phase	19
3.2	Learning from Pilot Projects	24
3.3	Mid-Point Review	24
3.4	Overview of Transition Phase	25
4	Evaluation Approach and Methods	27
4.1	Evaluation Framework	27
4.2	Evaluation Methods	27
5	Project Evaluation	29
5.1	Outputs	29
5.2	National Lottery Heritage Fund Outcomes	30
5.2.1	Outcomes for Heritage	31
5.2.2	Outcomes for People	32
5.2.3	Outcomes for Communities	34
5.3	Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator Outcomes	37
5.4	Longer term impact	44
5.5	Process Evaluation	49
5.6	Partnership Evaluation	51
5.6.1	Staff and Partners Survey	51
5.6.2	ECLT Survey	56
5.6.3	Volunteer Survey	57
5.7	Qualitative Assessment	59
6	Project Review	60
6.1	Successes	60
6.2	Challenges	64
6.3	Lessons Learnt	66
7	Project Legacy	71
8	Conclusions	74

Appendix A - Environmental Justice Audit Tool Case Study

Appendix B – City of Nature Alliance Case Study

Appendix C - Earth Stories Case Study

1 Executive Summary

Below is a summary of this detailed End of Evaluation Report describing the project, its aims and objectives and progress in delivering this short term accelerator project. A separate End of Project Evaluation Summary Report is also available.

1.1 About Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator

The Future Parks Accelerator is a national programme that aims to help local authorities transform their parks and open spaces and make sure these valuable places achieve financial sustainability, so that communities can continue to benefit from them for generations to come. The programme is a collaboration between the National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Trust and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government to find new models of operation and funding that address the decline of parks and open spaces that has been experienced over the last ten to fifteen years.

The Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project is one of just eight projects across the country that has received funding to find ways of looking after parks and open spaces, now and in the future. It has been working to explore new ways to transform, manage and fund open spaces across the city of Birmingham in a sustainable way for the future. The project involves many services areas across the Council working with the voluntary sector and community based organisations across the city to test new ways of working and to agree a vision for parks and green spaces for the future.

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator launched in July 2019 and will run until July 2022. Originally a two-year project, the programme timescales were extended due to the impact of COVID-19.

The funding through the Future Parks Accelerator programme has allowed Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator to create a dedicated team to manage and oversee the delivery of the project, working alongside project partners.

1.2 Project Delivery

Naturally Birmingham is working as a cross-council strategic project, testing new approaches coupled with people's views and values held at local level through four community pilots. Each one is led by a strategic city council theme, of housing, skills, children and health.

The four pilots are:

- A Skills-led project at Ward End Park and wider neighbourhood – developing future skills requirement for the sector and how to link to the regional jobs programmes, how to get volunteers involved in other aspects of parks management; how to get large employers within the city to value green space as an asset for their employees.
- The health initiative - involving the local community through partner organisations and local health centres to test how we really embed green spaces as part of social prescribing. This will link locally and nationally with the Public Health agenda;
- A Housing initiative - will look at different ways of integrating urban green space and parks to better serve local communities. The council's Planning department will be involved to ensure green spaces in housing are supported and managed in more meaningful ways;
- Children's initiative - focused around better engaging children and young people with green spaces both in early years as well as in our most vulnerable children in care through corporate mentoring.

The initial phase of the project, the Co-design Phase focused on the delivery of the pilot projects, bringing the project partners together to test new ways of working and new ideas. Alongside this work there was extensive engagement activity to raise awareness of the project and to encourage greater participation and to join the team working to find solutions. A successful gateway review with the national Future Parks Accelerator team then allowed the project to progress to the Transition Phase where the learning and models were brought together to set out a long term strategy. This work led to the development of the City of Nature Plan, aligned with the adopted vision for the city set out in the 'Our Future City Plan'.

1.3 Vision and Aims

The purpose of the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project is to ensure green spaces are considered:

- as vital community living spaces;
- as to their role in defining local character, identity and place making;
- as to their importance for nature and climate change adaptation;

- for sport and recreation;
- for health and wellbeing;
- as places to stimulate business and enterprise.

The project aimed to deliver the following benefits:

- Parks and green spaces will have more support for their management
- A wider range of people will be involved in parks and green spaces
- The organisation's funding for parks and green spaces will be more resilient
- The local area will be a better place to live, work or visit
- People will have developed skills
- People will have greater wellbeing
- People will be able to directly engage locally to address climate change

The Pilot project activity, successes and learning are summarised in a series of case studies within the main report. The delivery against the project outcomes is discussed below and then consideration is given to the development of the long term strategy : The Birmingham City of Nature Plan.

1.4 Project Achievements

Overall, the project can demonstrate significant progress with 77.4% of project outputs completed and a further 22.6% in progress and on track to be completed by the end of the project.

The project has been successful in substantially delivering the outputs that were set out in the original application of the Future Parks Accelerator programme. The methods for delivering some of these outputs, and associated outcomes has evolved and responded to local circumstances and new opportunities, but the project has to a large degree been delivered as intended. There are clear threads that run through the project linking the original objectives to project delivery. The project has substantially delivery against the National Lottery Heritage Fund outcomes and has built the foundations for longer term change to ensure that:

- Heritage will be Better Managed;

- Heritage will be in Better Condition;
- Your Local Area / Community will be a Better Place to Live, Work or Visit;
- Your Organisation will be more Resilient;

And through this process there is evidence that “People have Developed Skills’ through working together to explore solutions and deliver activities which support the project aims and objectives. The project has also successfully delivered against the short and medium term outcomes set out in the Evaluation Framework with 72% delivered in full and 28% either in progress or delivered in part.

The Pilot projects have tested new ways of working and provided a structured approach to test new activities and approaches through a process of co-design and peer learning. This has resulted in finding new ways to work together, breaking down silos and sharing skills. The activities have engaged new audiences and focused on areas of the city where there have typically been lower levels of participation. In delivering the pilot projects the project can demonstrate improvements in how residents engage with green spaces across the pilot sites.

The project can clearly demonstrate innovation with:

- stronger linkages developed with housing management to support and make existing green spaces in housing more usable and accessible by residents and tenants;
- development of skills showcase (online and physical) to highlight the range of jobs available in green spaces and how to access them;
- finding new ways to connect residents to nature through virtual means and improving their wellbeing through doing so;
- development of a green spaces training pack for use by mentors supporting our most vulnerable young people in the city;
- embedding green space thinking within the Early Years team at the Council, and in settings, improving awareness and understanding of nature for children;
- developed a Little Green Champions and Young Green Champions digital pack for use by education settings and families;

- Included nature and Green Infrastructure as part of the Birmingham City Design Guide;
- running a Green Champions leadership course for 80 Birmingham citizens and employees to support them in leading for nature.

1.5 Key Successes & Learning

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator has been successful in raising awareness of the value of green space within the Birmingham City Council and the links to climate change mitigation and adaption, nature recovery and Covid-19 recovery. In this sense the project has helped broaden the influence of parks and green space within the city.

The project has been successful in building a new cohort of professionals within Birmingham City Council working to deliver improvements to green space, with greater understanding of how this aligns with their departments goals and that of the Council. There is evidence to show there is now greater leadership and greater co-ordination and barriers to delivering future change have also been reduced. Stakeholders, both officers and members have noted that there is now a greater political will to deliver positive change for parks and green spaces across the city and to realise their potential.

One stakeholder noted that the Future Parks Accelerator had been particularly effective in the policy arena. "More has been done in the last one or two years in setting strategic direction that has been achieved in a long, long time".

These significant changes have underpinned the development of the City of Nature Plan, development of the City of Nature Alliance and a new city wide governance structure to support this. This work has formed the keystone to the Transition Phase and the project has developed a long term strategy to establish Birmingham as a City of Nature through five frameworks:

- A Green city;
- A Healthy city;
- A Fair City;
- An involved City;
- A Valued City.

The development of the Environmental Justice Audit tool and map is a key success of the project and is a model that can be replicated by other local authorities across the UK. This has allowed the concept of Environmental Justice to be explored and quantified, helping to identify priority wards across the city. Linked to this the development of the Birmingham Fair Parks Standard will identify improvements at a site specific level and allow a costed plan of improvements to be developed.

The City of Nature Alliance provides a new framework for greater citizen involvement and participation and will provide a vehicle for partner organisations to contribute to the delivery of the City of Nature Plan and to have a voice in this process. The development of the City of Nature Alliance, with Terms of Reference and a Memorandum of Understanding reflects a change from the original intent to investigate the establishment of a Foundation model. However, it is a model that reflects the local context and the scale of community engagement that already occurs in some parts of the city and provides an agreed vehicle to deliver greater change in the future.

The project can also demonstrate a commitment to engaging citizens and communities in thinking about what a City of Nature may comprise and providing an opportunity for highlighting the importance of green space to individuals. The Earth Stories project was particularly effective in reaching communities and individuals that do not usually respond to standard consultation techniques. These Earth Stories capture powerful personal connections to green space and nature and are a strong element running through the City of Nature Plan.

A Case Study about the Earth Stories project has been published on the Green Flag Award Resources Hub and can also be found at Appendix C.

The Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project is part of an approach to find long term sustainable solutions to the management and funding of parks and green spaces. The Sustainable Finance Steering Group has sought to explore these concepts and turn thinking into a practical and deliverable financial model and can clearly demonstrate progress in scoping a Birmingham Sustainable Finance Framework and developing principles that support its application. The model has now been formally adopted by the Council and will guide longer term investment decisions and guide the delivery of large projects.

In the short-term there have been some positive achievements that the project can demonstrate with respect to funding. These include:

- Cabinet approval to invest £500,000 Community Infrastructure Levy Funding to the delivery of the City of Nature Plan in Bordesley and Highgate and the 'top' five red wards;
- £150,000 funding through the Commonwealth Games to support the development of greater volunteer participation and the infrastructure to support this as a legacy for the games;
- £10,000 seed funding for the City of Nature Alliance to secure additional external funding for local projects which has now been used to secure over £100,000.
- Proof of concept for a crowd funding project at Dawberry Fields that raised £2,360 for a project with the Wildlife Trust to create suitable habitat for slow worms;
- Agreement that sponsorship and commercial income generated through parks and green spaces can be reinvested into the service (rather than being directed to the centre);
- Development of wider sponsorship packages with the corporate team that will generate greater income for parks and green spaces;
- Work with procurement to develop a Social Responsibility Charter that will bring additional funding and help in-kind.

1.6 Challenges

Getting the project established, starting up and managing the pilots projects has been challenging and this reflects the complexity of the programme and the breadth of activity that was planned and delivered. Having a small dedicated project team with systems to monitor progress, steer and deliver the project has been critical to its success.

The Impact of Covid-19 on the development and delivery of Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator has been significant. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic severely limited the ability to deliver face to face engagement, and activities as originally planned, with most switching to online delivery. Engaging with schools and education providers during Covid-19 was not possible. However, Covid-19 highlighted the value of green space and need to provide greater equality of access and environmental justice across the city.

Stakeholders have spoken about the need to recognise and be responsive to new opportunities, if they appear to offer promise and are a good fit with the overall vision. With a small team and

limited resource there is the need to focus on delivery of the agreed outputs but to also be responsive to emerging opportunities.

The FPA project was being delivered whilst the Council was undergoing a radical reorganisation from the top down and the whole organisation appeared to be in a state of flux. To have developed the City of Nature Plan, have this adopted and find a 'home' within Housing and Inclusive Growth is a significant achievement.

Language and terminology have been raised by some participants and stakeholders as having been a barrier to participation, particularly in relation to the Children's Pilot. Whilst many of the terms are commonly used their meaning is open to interpretation and sometimes perceptions and understanding of terms was off-putting. Finding simple ways to communicate what the project is about and what it is seeking to achieve has been challenging. The complexity of the project, the focus on exploring new ways of working without a well defined 'end' presented some issues but the project has focused on 'winning hearts and minds' and building a wider team of Green Champions. The Earth Stories project was particularly successful in generating a high level of response from the city's diverse communities.

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator has sought to change the culture and the structure of the Council and to build external support to deliver long term positive change. There is evidence that the project has developed a cohort of 'Green Champions' across the Council and partner organisations and there are now more people seeking to improve and enhance parks and green spaces as a direct result of the project. However, there remains more work to across the Council to develop policies and procedures (supported by appropriate financial valuation and management tools) to develop better place based solutions that recognise eco-system services and deliver Green Infrastructure benefits and deliver nature recovery.

Further work continues to put in place delivery structures within the Council. The timetable for the restructure of the parks service has been extended, in order to allow more time to examine what a stronger, better resourced and more responsive service may look like and to allow engagement in this process with staff. This is an important element of the Future Parks Accelerator project and one that will be crucial in embedding the future strategy within the organisation.

1.7 Project Legacy

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator can clearly demonstrate that through the Transition Phase the project has developed plans for the future and that these are embedded within Birmingham City Council and partner organisations. The learning gained as part of the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project now forms part of a new governance model for the natural environment, the City of Nature Plan which was adopted by Birmingham City Council in February 2022.

The City of Nature Plan is a direct response to the City of Nature theme within the Council's Our Future City Plan 2040. It goes beyond just parks to encompass all aspects of the natural environment in the city and people's engagement with it. This becomes a major strand within the Route to Zero Climate Emergency Plan and represents a substantive part of the city's adaptation response to climate change.

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator was led by the project team located within Birmingham City Council Public Health. This was a short term measure to facilitate the delivery of the accelerator project. The City of Nature Plan is now 'owned' by Housing and Inclusive Growth alongside the Our Future City Plan, however delivery of the City of Nature requires a partnership approach with other service areas and external partners. The partnership approach is underpinned by the development of the City of Nature Alliance bringing together key voluntary and community based organisations across the city.

A new governance structure has been developed to oversee the delivery of the City of Nature. It is intended 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.

In terms of delivery, the City of Nature Plan is currently being implemented in Bordesley and Highgate ward to test the tools and develop effective implementation mechanisms and to develop social capacity.

2 About the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator Project

2.1 *The Future Parks Accelerator Programme*

The Future Parks Accelerator is a national programme that aims to help local authorities transform their parks and green spaces and make sure these valuable places achieve financial sustainability, so that communities can continue to benefit from them for generations to come. The programme is a collaboration between the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the National Trust and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government to find new models of operation and funding that address the decline of parks and open spaces that has been experienced over the last ten to fifteen years.

2.2 *The Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator Project*

Birmingham City Council is one of only eight places across the UK selected to take part in the ground-breaking Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) programme. It has received a share of more than £6m of funding and £5m worth of advice and support from some of the country's leading experts in conservation, fundraising, volunteering and green space management. Future Parks is designed to help councils find sustainable ways to manage and fund parks and open spaces across entire towns and cities.

Naturally Birmingham is working as a cross-council strategic project, testing new approaches coupled with people's views and values held at local level through four community pilots. Each one is led by a strategic city council theme, of housing, skills, children and health. The pilots will help create new policy for the City and different ways to work in future. The four pilots are:

- A Skills-led project at Ward End Park and wider neighbourhood – this is looking at developing future skills requirement for the sector and how to link to the regional jobs programmes, and the national Parks Advisory Group, reporting to Government; how to get volunteers involved in other aspects of parks management; how to get large employers within the city to value green space as an asset for their employees.
- The health initiative will focus on Perry Common Recreation Ground, which is being re-structured through a recent housing scheme, as well as Witton Lakes in Stockland Green which is the site of a new eco hub being developed. This will involve the local community through Witton Lodge Community Association and local health centres to test how we really embed green spaces as part of social prescribing. This will link locally and nationally with Public Health;

- A Housing initiative looking at the development of a 12-hectare site in Stockland Green (the Magnet Centre) will look at different ways of integrating urban green space and parks to better serve local communities. Through this the city will be working closely with the council's Planning department to ensure green spaces in housing are supported and managed in more meaningful ways;
- The Children's Trust are our fourth partner in this project – this community pilot will look to engage with existing projects in south Birmingham around Cotteridge Park and apply the learning to areas more in need within Kings Heath and Brandwood. The primary focus is going to be around better engaging children and young people with green spaces both in early years (the first 1001 days) as well as in our most vulnerable children in care through corporate mentoring.

2.3 Vision & Aims

The purpose of the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project is to ensure green spaces are considered:

- as vital community living spaces;
- as to their role in defining local character, identity and place making;
- as to their importance for nature and climate change adaptation;
- for sport and recreation;
- for health and wellbeing;
- as places to stimulate business and enterprise.

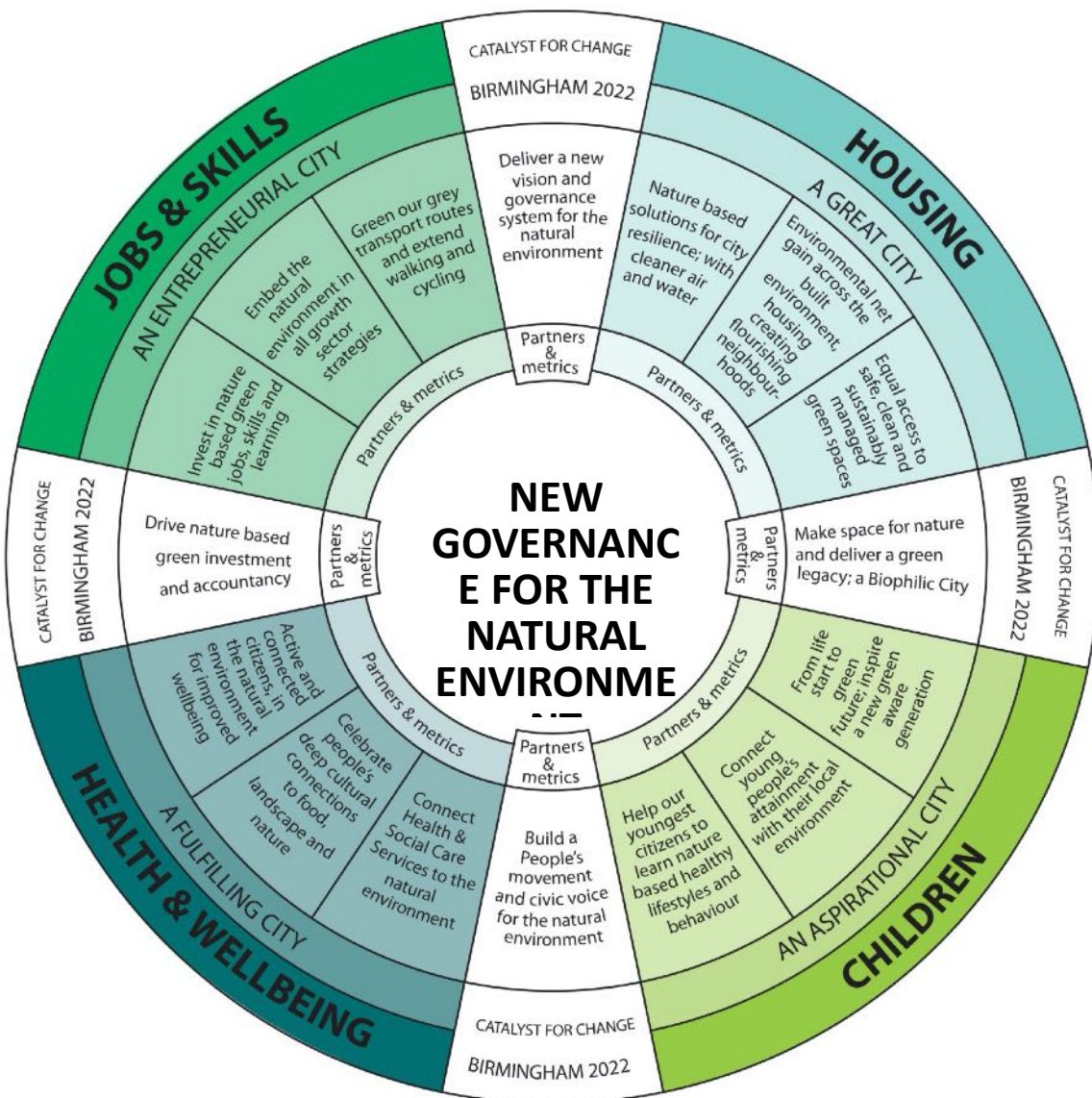
The project aims to deliver the following benefits:

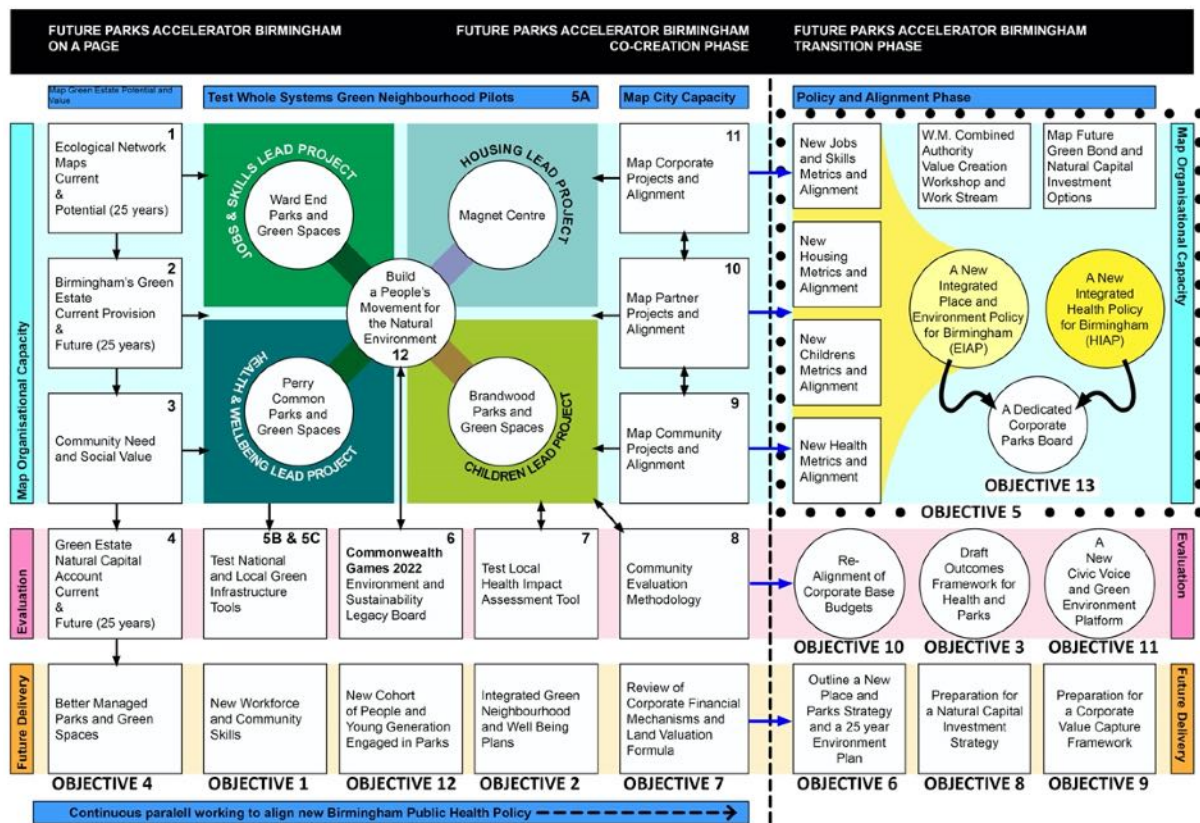
- Parks and green spaces will have more support for their management
- A wider range of people will be involved in parks and green spaces
- The organisation's funding for parks and green spaces will be more resilient
- The local area will be a better place to live, work or visit
- People will have developed skills

- People will have greater wellbeing
- People will be able to directly engage locally to address climate change

2.4 Objectives

The figure below shows the original ambition for the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project.





The Figure above shows a summary of the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project set out as "The bid on a page". The project included thirteen objectives which are described in turn below.

1. New workforce and community skills

In order to take a more corporate approach to addressing environmental justice in line with the vision diagram, the FPA will identify opportunities for change both at the city and local neighbourhood levels - on how best to serve our communities. New skills may well be required, and existing areas of council service may need to partner more closely or be re-designed; together with bottom-up community based solutions coming to the fore.

2. Integrated green neighbourhood and well-being plans

With Birmingham's ambition to become a Healthy City (WHO) and the focus on environmental justice; the city will need to look at creating healthy neighbourhood plans, as recommended by RIBA. This will be one of the mechanisms through which Public Health and Environmental & Place

policies will be conjoined and delivered- post FPA. This will look at the wider public realm and local environment, not just the parks. The FPA will have trialled the Health Impact Assessment Tool in conjunction with other methodologies for the Health Pilot neighbourhood as a minimum, to derive a standard methodology.

3. Draft Outcomes Framework for Health & Parks (draft)

Nationally Public Health England publish a Public Health Outcomes Framework for all local authorities in England to follow- as Key Performance Indicators. Since a major review in 2016 there is no longer any KPI that relates to urban green space. The Birmingham FPA will re-visit this gap to look to introduce a suitable metric(s) that can be trialled in the city as a new draft standard KPI. This work will be shared with PHE. This new health KPI will then be integral to the developing 25 year Nature Recovery and Green Infrastructure Strategy for the city.

4. Better managed parks and greenspaces

In order to address the key aim of environmental justice 'Naturally Birmingham' will introduce a new parks assessment methodology for all parks and greenspaces in the city. This will determine the best use of each site and determine its place or priority in the future strategy. New resources and partnerships developed through 'Naturally Birmingham' will enable additional activities or outcomes for certain park sites. An improved communication and marketing system will convey clearly to Birmingham residents what standards exist and what is intended for all sites and for the city's green estate through a 25 year vision.

5. Organisational capacity

With the Future Parks Accelerator being as much a corporate transformation programme as a park based project the requirement for all FPA partners is to see how all the operations need to identify key synergies; and policy and delivery overlaps across and between council services and teams. If we are collectively looking to address environmental justice in its broadest sense, then there is a role for all to play. This then extends to existing group of engaged stakeholders and participants. This process will grow organisational capacity. All local authorities are partnering externally to deliver public service outcomes- so naturally this organisational capacity will grow beyond the boundaries of the organisation over time.

6. A new place and parks strategy and 25 year environment plan

In order to address environmental justice fully at all scales and how it affects all relevant strategic city outcomes, a new parks and place strategy will be developed capturing the key findings from the FPA whilst embracing the full Governmental framework for a 25 year environment plan. This will clearly address the missing links in current city policy and delivery and be the new mechanism to deliver a truly biophilic City for Birmingham.

7. Review of corporate financial mechanisms and land valuation formula

Considering the need to prioritise environmental justice, a re-understanding and appreciation, will have to be reached through a new financial mechanism for assessing the wider and integrated values of the 5 capitals. This will enable the city to identify how it could re-adjust base budgets and identify potential external partners and funders that could support the city in addressing this key concern. To help unlock existing asset value the Housing & Planning pilot will review the current land valuation formula employed by the city. An alternative model or mechanism will be tested. A combination of these two actions will introduce a new mechanism to allow for multiple value calculation by city finance.

8. Preparation for Natural Capital Investment Strategy

There will undoubtedly be a cost to addressing environmental justice across Birmingham much of which will sit outside of the current resource. Part of the rationale of testing all parts of the FPA through the 5 capitals is that this will provide the necessary evidence required to commence an investment strategy for Birmingham routed in the benefits returned through enhanced natural capital over a generation. This strategy would work in concert with the West Midlands Combined Authority, as some investment projects work best at the regional scale. As part of this strategy work there would be an exploration of Municipal Bonds, Green Bonds and the principles of a Green New Deal.

9. Preparation for a Corporate Value Capture Framework

Addressing environmental justice will not be solely a public sector responsibility. As shown by the diagram and figures in section 3.1 Aims- sustainable and inclusive growth can no longer be defined and valued only through standard GDP mechanisms. To get to the heart of environmental justice delivery, all new infrastructure and developments will have to address all 5 capitals. This concept

has now been understood and is slowly being adopted globally through Value Capture Frameworks. Although delivered through private sector investment they are very often public sector led. The FPA gives Birmingham the opportunity to show national leadership in this area and work with existing worked examples and engage with expert partners to develop such an approach.

10. Re-alignment of Base Budgets

Through the work of the neighbourhood pilots, the neighbourhood and city scale environmental justice audits; and utilising the University of Birmingham's LISRIRC Sustainable Finance Tool; the multiple values attributable to green space will be captured. Considering these newly captured values working with City Finance, adjustments will be made to how departmental base budgets currently align to environmental enhancements, at both the city and neighbourhood scales.

11. A Peoples Movement and Civic Voice for the (Natural) Environment

A vital part of making environmental justice a reality for people is to facilitate how people can engage in the topic, how they can address their own awareness and how they can affect decision-making and so giving them a meaningful civic voice. This area of the FPA will be addressed jointly with the Birmingham Commonwealth Games and through our national cohort partners; as many of the 8 cities have also identified this similar idea. For us in Birmingham we were considering a one-stop go-to web platform. The FPA would launch it, but it would hopefully grow far beyond the FPA- to be truly effective addressing environmental justice in the city.

12. New cohort of people and young generation engaged in parks

In our efforts to address environmental justice new mechanisms of engagement will be developed for young people to engage on wider environmental topics and activities; and through the work of the pilot projects new links to children's services and young people's development will be made. New routes to environmental engagement, experience, training and employment will be developed with partners. A special place will be designed for children and young people within the new civic voice and people's movement platform for the natural environment for Birmingham.

13. Future Parks Board

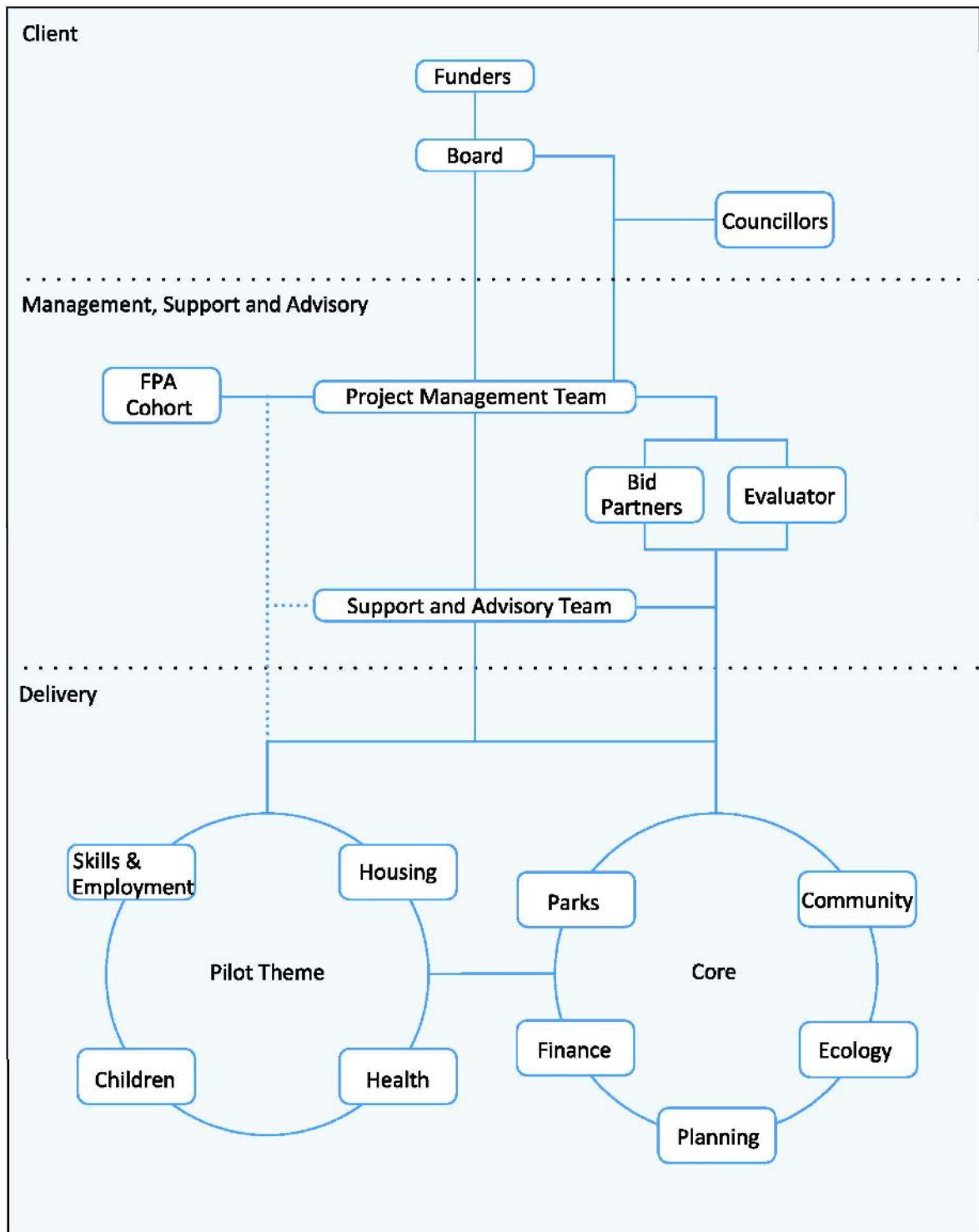
An ambition of the FPA is to establish the working Board for the purposes of the FPA project; but to have it established as a long-term city committee. Its key function would be to mainstream the findings of the FPA and continue to deliver corporately across the environmental justice agenda as a recognised and resourced council function.

2.5 *Project Delivery*

The current model for FPA has involved having paid staff, or connectors, embedded in various parts of the Council. The services include:

- Parks Management Service
- Public Health
- Children's Services and Birmingham Children's Trust
- Employability and Skills
- Inclusive Growth
- City Housing

The funding for the FPA programme was initially for two years to April 2021 however, this was extended as a consequence of Covid-19 to June 2022. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted how crucial green and blue space is, as well as connecting to nature has been for people. Helping people to connect to nature (the core of FPA) is an important part of the adaptation response to climate change and provides a mechanism for Birmingham City Council to achieve its ambitious targets for Carbon Net Zero by 2030.



3 Project Activity

The Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project has been structured around two distinct phases in line with the overall FPA programme. This includes the initial Co-design phase characterised by the delivery of test and learn projects, followed by a Transition Phase where detailed planning takes place to develop the structures for longer term change and deliver the legacy of the project. The Mid-Point Review, a formal gateway review, marks the journey from the Co-design Phase to the Transition Phase.

3.1 Overview of Co-design Phase

The Co-design phase included the development and delivery of the four Pilot Projects which focused on:

- Children's Pilot – exploring how parks and green spaces could deliver greater benefits for children and families and how spaces could be better activated;
- Health and Wellbeing Pilot – looking at the benefits of connecting with nature for health and wellbeing and how activities and services could be delivered to achieve this;
- Housing Pilot – a review of the policies and planning processes and the synergy between housing development and green infrastructure; how access to green space at a local level can benefit residents and how residents can be engaged in the design, management and maintenance of green space;
- Jobs and Skills Pilot – promoting the range of opportunities for developing skills and gaining employment in the green space sector; and the development of structured training opportunities and work based learning.

The aims and objectives and the success and learning from each of the pilot projects is set out in case studies included below. CFP would like to recognise the contribution of GP Trainees Jacqueline Morgan, Alex Hickman and Hajra Shah in researching and producing the pilot project case studies.

Children's Pilot Evaluation

PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- Change how people see green spaces; making the invisible visible
- Create opportunities for children to visit their local green spaces while ensuring it improves their physical and mental well being
- Increase nature connectedness in local children

WHY WAS THE PILOT IMPORTANT?

The parks and green spaces in Birmingham provide real benefits for children and their families. However, access to green space varies throughout the city, highlighting and intensifying existing inequalities. Therefore, the mission was to support children and families in maximising their use of green space for their well-being and making green spaces a part of their everyday life.

WHAT WAS TRIALLED AND TESTED IN THE PILOT?

- Bringing green spaces to life and creating opportunities for children and families to use them for health and well being
- Using Dawberry Fields as the pilot area, engaging and involving local communities in their local park to encourage them to spend time in green spaces
- Telling children and young people about why nature is important through engagement, education and training with schools, early years and the Children's Trust

ACTIVITIES TO ENGAGE PEOPLE

- Word of mouth through lots of conversations with young people in the local community
- Posters in Dawberry Fields
- Regular updates on social media, newsletters
- Website links promoted and distributed widely
- Online webinars to train teachers and early practitioners in using outdoor spaces
- A self-guided nature trail to connect residents in Dawberry Fields
- Outdoor mentoring sessions and activities



Special thanks to:

Debbie Needle,
Community facilitator
FPA

Samantha Hall,
Children's Pilot lead in
FPA

Children's Pilot Evaluation

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Established a Friends of Dawberry Fields group to look after their local park
- Created mentors in the Children's Trust, who will train others in utilising the green spaces and creating green skills
- Successful Green Champion and Young Green Champion programme
- Engagement of schools and early years in green spaces

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

- COVID-19 was the biggest challenge, leading to:
 - * Disruption of face-to-face meetings
 - * Working with a new team entirely online
 - * Restrictions to using Park Ranger service
- Cultural barriers and changing mindsets

HOW WE OVERCAME THE BARRIERS

- Swapped to online work and webinars
- Communicated through social media and the website
- Open communication with local people to see issues from their perspective
- Interacting with the community to "break the ice"

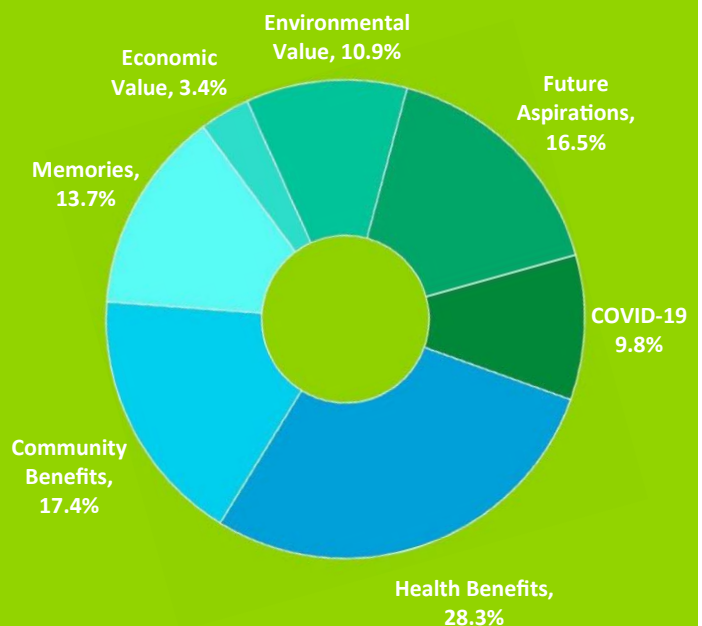
LESSONS LEARNED

- It's not about green space; it's about individual's connection with nature and keeping the conversations going
- Anything is achievable if you keep at it
- Share both good things and bad things with the team and other organisations involved
- Learn from experiences in the pilot

EVIDENCE TO SHOW SUCCESS

- Feedback for online webinars
- Tweets on social media
- Feedback from Green Champion programme and 30 families involved
- Engagement and connections from schools and early year settings
- Over 150 Earth Stories about the value of green spaces submitted on the website

Earth Story themes:



FUTURE PLAN AND ACTION

- Delivery of work around activities in the Bordesley and Highgate area, then the other six wards
- Seeing the objective evidence through the appreciative enquiry and measuring activity levels
- Alliance and the team have been set up and will start delivery in January

This case study is part of the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Project. More information can be found at naturallybirmingham.org

Health & Wellbeing Pilot Evaluation

PROJECT AIMS & OBJECTIVES

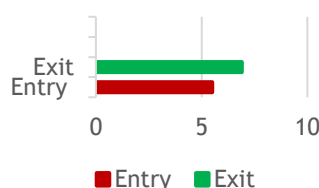
- Engage local GPs and social prescribing link workers with green space activities
- Enhance the local offer for organised health & wellbeing services taking place outdoors
- Increase the profile of and improve the ease of access to green space activities
- Evidence the mental health benefits of connecting with nature



PILOT LOCATION - WITTON LAKES, BIRMINGHAM



Life Satisfaction ONS Outcome Measures (0-10) amongst 50 participants

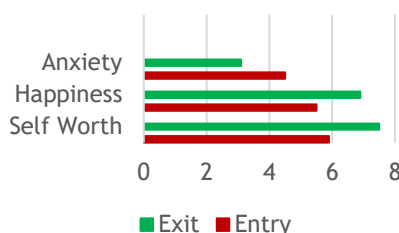


Why the pilot was needed...

Birmingham's reputation as a grey & industrial metropolis is incorrect- the city has over 622 parks and green spaces. Evidence proving the physical, mental, psychological and social health benefits of connecting with nature is abundant, but residents of the city experience inequality in access to, and the quality of, parks and other natural environments. Parks and green spaces in Birmingham need to be protected, enhanced, and primed to help boost the health of citizens!

"...we've contributed some changing of the thinking around the city council in terms of how they use and view green spaces"

ONS outcomes for Self Worth, Happiness and Anxiety levels (0-10) amongst 50 participants



ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

- Virtual 'active in nature' sessions
- 'Buddy scheme' for local walking within parks and green & blue spaces
- Growing kit delivery with virtual grow from a seed competition
- Sensory walks in nature
- Meditation walks
- Community co-creation workshops



With thanks to:

- Rob Netherway and all of the team at Witton Lodge Community Association
- Hamira Sultan and the Future Parks Accelerator

Key achievements

- **Relationships and partnerships** developed with the local Primary Care Network (PCN) of 7 GP practices, as well as with the Active and Wellbeing Society (TAWs) and their local Social Prescribing Link Worker.
- Optimised approach and 'offer' to GP practices based on their feedback -> creating a concise 'menu' of **activities** and communicating in a way that makes sense to Healthcare professionals
- Engaging the local community with Witton Lakes Park via the curation of over **20 activities** that aimed to **connect people with nature**
- Statistically significant **improvements in mental health** ONS outcomes amongst a study of 50 programme participants:

- 25% improvement in Life Satisfaction
- 25% improvement in Happiness
- 27% improvement in Self Worth
- 31% reduction to Anxiety levels



- Building on the momentum and activity for citizens in green spaces, helping them to connect with nature around Witton Lakes
- Maintaining and enhancing healthy relationships with third party organisations:
 - Trust
 - Minimising red tape
 - Accessing funding
 - Staff training
- Using the City of Nature Alliance to facilitate regular, open communication and feedback between organisations
- Harnessing the learning from the pilot as a blueprint for developing and upscaling similar initiatives across the city

Challenges

- **The Covid-19 pandemic:**
 - High clinical workload for GPs -> shifting priorities and reduced capacity to engage
 - Lockdown regulations necessitating virtual/remote activities for large periods
 - Fear of coronavirus resulting in changing citizen's attitudes and reluctance in many leaving their homes

"...it not only helped mental wellbeing but also physical as well... and we have reduced the need for them to go to the GP as often as a result of the activity!"

This Case Study is part of the Future Parks Accelerator Project

Further information and resources:

- <https://naturallybirmingham.org/about/>
- <https://naturallybirmingham.org/birmingham-city-of-nature-delivery-framework/>
- <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/ourfuturecityplan>



Housing Pilot Evaluation

PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- Demonstrate how the most can be made of communal spaces in housing developments by creating a community garden
- Engage the local community in the design and management of green space
- Develop more structured policies to ensure planning processes take complete account of green infrastructure and open spaces

WHY WAS THE PILOT IMPORTANT?

Green spaces provide residents and the broader community with a wide range of benefits, from improving the local environment to simply creating more pleasant surroundings. Creating a safe environment for recreation and social interaction can also tackle isolation and encourage everyone to interact and support each other.

WHAT WAS TRIALLED AND TESTED IN THE PILOT?

Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust (BMHT), Services for Older People, Harpers (BMHT contractor) and the Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) team worked with residents from the Cornerway Sheltered Housing Scheme in Kings Norton to develop a community garden.

A draft green space checklist was created to ensure development applications account fully for green space development and design. A working group consisting of Birmingham City Council (BCC) Development Management teams, BMHT and legal representatives was established to make procedural changes to ensure green space is delivered effectively and consistently using the checklist.

ACTIVITIES TO ENGAGE PEOPLE

- Letters issued to residents
- Survey distributed to residents to establish initial interest in the project
- Two on-site design workshops with residents
- Three community workshops on the green space checklist

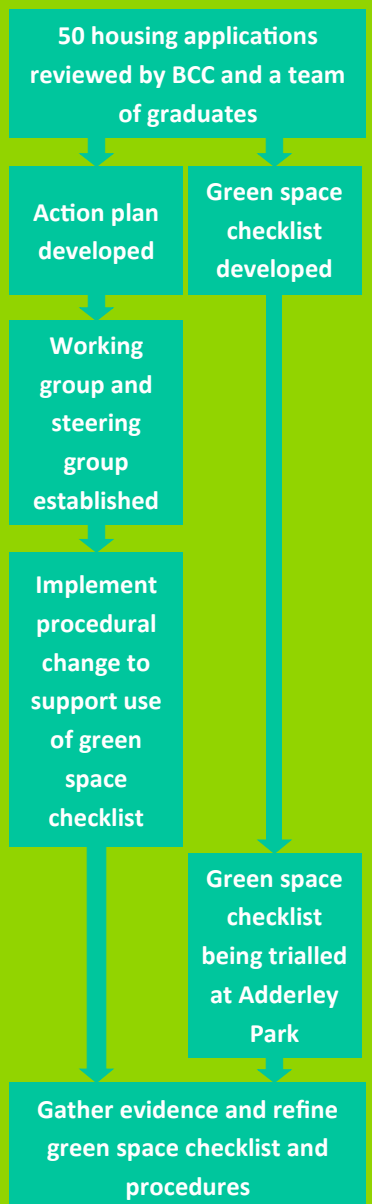


Special thanks to:

Andy Lindop,
Development Plan
Officer

Louise Fletcher,
Senior Service
Manager

DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING THE GREEN SPACE CHECKLIST



Housing Pilot Evaluation

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Harpers constructed the community garden for free under their Social Charter
- Residents of Cornerway who were not socialising are now utilising the community garden
- Residents were passionate about the community garden and maintaining the space in future; they just needed to be engaged
- The green space checklist is being trialled on the Adderley Park project and the community group have secured £20,000 for improvements

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

- Limited engagement due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Limited funding to develop plans
- Loss of momentum due to limited time and resources
- Limited communication and understanding between different departments and stakeholders
- Lack of resources in the BCC Development Management team to enforce the green space checklist

FUTURE PLAN AND ACTION

- Lessons learnt from developing the community garden are now being applied to other projects
- Work within BMHT team to ensure social responsibility criteria are used in future contracts
- Work with tenants at Cornerway to set up a constituted Friends Group who can apply for funding for maintaining the community garden
- Further refine the green space checklist using public health evidence
- Exploring future fundings models for green space, such as service charges for new builds
- Ensure the working group is maintained, reports regularly to steering group and take new BCC initiatives into account

EVIDENCE TO SHOW SUCCESS

- High level of interest from residents in the survey
- A community garden for tenants which they have used to grow flowers and vegetables
- Achievements shared with other FPA pilot projects and within the City Housing Directorate
- Funding secured to spend on improvements at Adderley Park



HOW WE OVERCAME THE BARRIERS

- Community workshops were held outdoors
- Community group established at Adderley Park who secured £20,000 for improvements
- Set up steering group to oversee the working group and ensure the “wheel keeps spinning”
- Kept communication open and consistent between the contractors and residents from the outset
- Ensure the checklist is supported by procedures that warrants developers submit evidence for accounting for green space

LESSONS LEARNED

- Be realistic and manage expectations
- Ensure open communication between all parties
- Get involved and engage as much as possible
- Every step counts; deal with each problem as it arises as there is always a way around
- Invest in measures to secure further funding, such as consultants, rather than spending it outright

This case study is part of the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Project. More information can be found at naturallybirmingham.org

Jobs & Skills Pilot Evaluation

KEY WORKSTREAMS

PROJECT AIMS & OBJECTIVES

- 'Bring the green sector to life' -> showcase, promote and develop learning for young people on jobs and careers within the green sector
- Curation and engagement work, encompassing the principles of the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) 'Nurturing Skills for 21st Century Parks' report
- Develop relationships with businesses and educational organisations to enhance opportunities for careers within the environmental/green sector
- Creation of green apprenticeships/works placements within both Birmingham City Council and other organisations in the region



PILOT LOCATION - WARD END PARK, BIRMINGHAM



Over 1,673
Channel Views!



Engagement
across social
media platforms!

Why was the pilot necessary?

Addressing the climate and biodiversity crises in the United Kingdom requires forward thinking, industrious and motivated employees across all sectors. The green and environmental industries have historically been stereotyped as being unglamorous with challenging working conditions, however this could not be further from the truth. Birmingham needs a vibrant, young, and innovative Parks workforce, that is more representative of the diversity within the region, and that can bring a broader range of skills. By engaging the younger generation and showcasing the exciting and varied range of employment opportunities available in this area, the city can move in the right direction towards meeting its carbon neutrality ambition and become greener, fairer and healthier.

"A young person doesn't always want to do loads of studying or have to get 10 GCSE's...they want to learn that you can have a job where not every day is the same and you're not expected to sit in an office"



With thanks to:

- Sophie Hislam (lead)
- Tara Verrell
- The Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) team

ACHIEVEMENTS

- 27 YouTube videos from professionals working in the green industry, explaining their jobs and why they love them -> roles ranging from park ranger, arborist, horticulturalist, energy engineer, sustainability specialist, landscape architect and more, including Jane Findlay, president of the Landscape Institute!
- Engaging local, national, and international businesses -> gaining their support in creating **events and sessions** but also promoting their opportunities via social media and education/employment events
- Developing relationships with schools and colleges -> career focus webinars, **job fairs**, Birmingham City Council (BCC) schools noticeboard
- Online and in-person '**skills showcase**' events + 'walk and talk' in parks -> informally engaging young people and communities about the opportunities and scope of working in green spaces/outdoors
- '**Green champions**' - Volunteer based recruitment of 60 people passionate about green spaces who then undertook a workshop based training programme, aiming to empowering individuals to act as 'change agents' within their communities
- Green & environmental sector **placements** recruited through the 'Kickstarter' programme -> 5 x Trainee Parks Rangers, 3 x Trainee Grounds Maintenance Roles, 4 x Trainee Wildlife Assistant Roles, 1 x Trainee Parks Communications Officer
- **Sow and grow courses** -> £10,368 RHS Flourish funding secured, allowing the courses to run at no cost to unemployed candidates
- Embedding **green skills** in the BCC Adult Education programme -> recruitment of a dedicated tutor for this purpose
- Birmingham city council '**green apprenticeships**' in the pipeline



- Embedding the pilot within Birmingham City Council's Education and Skills directorate:
- Utilising the contacts and workstreams developed during the pilot
- Building on the momentum
- Maintaining and enhancing relationships with businesses and other organisations
- Continuing and improving communication with schools and colleges:
- Broadening network of educational partners
- Building advertising within the BCC schools noticeboard
- Developing further apprenticeships and jobs, both within BCC and wider
- 'Process' how-to-guides created, providing instructions for developing and running skills showcase sessions
- Incorporating the 'green champions' process across all BCC directorates

What have the challenges been

- *The Covid-19 pandemic:*
 - Requirement for remote and virtual working throughout the majority of the course of the pilot due to lockdowns
 - Challenging business climate -> staff being furloughed, very little new work opportunities arising

"...now we've actually got schools coming to us saying 'we've got a careers event in January, can you find us a green sector organisation who could come?' ... So we've actually got schools coming to us now with their specific requests, which is quite nice!"

This Case Study is part of the Future Parks Accelerator Project

Further information and resources:

- <https://naturallybirmingham.org/about/>
- <https://naturallybirmingham.org/birmingham-city-of-nature-delivery-framework/>
- <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/ourfuturecityplan>



3.2 *Learning from Pilot Projects*

The Interim Evaluation found that the Pilot Projects had supported some key learning.

- The test and learn projects provided the mandate to work outside silos;
- There has been “more dealing with colleagues in different departments in the last 12 months than the whole of my career”;
- Working with new partners to test what works has been a useful approach both in terms of learning new skills and testing ideas, but also in building relationship with other organisations and individuals;
- The Future Parks Accelerator project has provided the space and freedom to experiment and take a less risk averse approach;
- The Pilots Projects have explored innovative approaches within a framework of testing and review (“Give it a name” / “Make the invisible visible”);
- The Pilot Projects whilst reaffirming that ‘good practice’ and known approaches are effective have provided a local evidence base about what can work in Birmingham;
- New organisations have been engaged in delivering activities in parks and green spaces and helped created a bigger team of advocates for the benefits of green space and the value of Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator;
- The success of the Pilot activities has helped change attitudes and raised awareness of opportunities for future change and joint working.

3.3 *Mid-Point Review*

The Mid-point review was a formal gateway review in March 2021. The review recognised that:

- NBFPA is a really ambitious programme seeking to deliver systemic change;
- All outputs have been delivered, either fully or in part, even if methods have had to change;
- Collaboration has been impressive and “internal & external partners have fully embraced the culture & ethos of FPA”;
- Pilot Projects have been successful and overcome challenges, involved new partners and provided local evidence of what works;

- Learning from the Pilots is informing the transition phase and future delivery;
- Innovation is being demonstrated through NBFPAs;
- There is evidence of policy change through Housing Pilot, Citywide Design Guide, Social Responsibility Charter, R20 & 20 Minute Neighbourhoods;
- Leadership & advocacy is a strength – Integration / Green Champions;
- Learning will be of interest to the wider sector & approaches are replicable.

However, it was noted that the Transition Phase is a critical phase and will require focus, tighter project and risk management and a change of approach from the test and learn approach to developing and adopting frameworks and the development of the longer term strategy.

3.4 Overview of Transition Phase

Prior to the Mid-Point Review the project team had recognised that there were governance gaps present in the project. A revised approach was proposed which sought to address these with a focus on four frameworks of Environmental Justice; Sustainable Finance; Health; and Citizen Involvement. These four frameworks would all underpin a new governance model for the natural environment.



Based on the feedback from the Mid-Point Review and internal review by the project team, the Transition Phase was characterised by greater focus and prioritisation and included:

- More effective communication both internally and externally recognising the breadth and scope of the project is a difficult 'story' to tell: developing clear audience-led communication, aligned with good marketing and captured in a robust comms strategy;
- Developing the Financial Model, Delivery Structure and Operating Model (Governance Framework);
- Further developing and applying the Environmental Justice Framework to inform the future strategy;
- Developing the Citizen Involvement Framework & Model for engagement;
- Embedding the change within the organisation and ensuring the vision is shared by all partners.

These elements come together to form the long term strategy, later called the City of Nature Plan.

The next section of the reports sets out how we approached the evaluation of the project and then following sections review the delivery of the project against the stated outputs, outcomes and longer term impacts.

4 Evaluation Approach and Methods

4.1 Evaluation Framework

An overall project Evaluation Framework for the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project was developed and adopted in December 2020. As part of this process a Logic Model and Evaluation Framework was developed to identify and set out short-term and medium-term outcomes to assist with demonstrating the change that the project was seeking to achieved. This has provided a framework for the assessment of the difference(s) that the project has made. Further analysis of outputs and the National Lottery Heritage Fund outcomes has also been carried out.

Later sections of this report consider how the project was delivered (process evaluation) and how the partnership has developed and functioned and has sought to address the following questions:

- What have the 4 pilot themes achieved with respect to how green spaces are being used differently?
- Which key partners are being engaged and how successfully? What makes the engagement successful?
- What building blocks are being put in place to ensure the 25-year strategy is successful?
- Is there public awareness of the 25-year strategy and what is the response?
- How are perceptions of parks and green spaces changing both in the community / public as well as within BCC staff for each of the four pilot themes?
- How is the approach to parks and green spaces changing within Birmingham City Council?

4.2 Evaluation Methods

This End of Project Evaluation Report has been carried out based on the following sources of information:

- NBFPA Evaluation Framework;
- Project Outputs across the Pilot Projects and all other areas;

- Quantitative project data;
- New primary data gathered through the project including:
 - Staff and Partners Survey
 - Volunteer Survey
 - Residents Survey (YouGov)
- Responses to public engagement work delivered through the project;
- 1-2-1 Interviews with members of the Project Team, Parks Service, Senior Officers across the Council, Elected Members, Partner Organisations and the national FPA team;
- Observation and outputs from workshops delivered across key workstreams;
- Mid-Point Review Reports and documentation;
- Review of lessons learned captured throughout the project delivery.

The End of Project Evaluation Report draws upon data and research carried out across the project by the project team, GP Trainees on Public Health placements with Birmingham City Council and by consultants CFP.

5 Project Evaluation

This section of the Evaluation Report considers the delivery of the project against the proposed measures and looks at the project outputs and the difference the project has made.

5.1 Outputs

The Figure below summarises the delivery of the project outputs.



This graphic summarises the delivery of the key project outputs. Overall, the project can demonstrate significant progress with 77.4% of project outputs completed and a further 22.6% in progress and on track to be completed by the end of the project.

The following section of the report considers the difference the project has made against the stated National Lottery Heritage Fund outcomes, and then the project outcomes set out in the project Evaluation Framework.

5.2 National Lottery Heritage Fund Outcomes

The figure below shows the links between the original NBFPA objectives and the Heritage Fund Outcomes.





You said....				
Outcomes for Heritage		Outcomes for people	Outcomes for communities	
Better managed	In better condition	Developed skills	Your local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit	Your organisation will be more resilient
We did....				
'Naturally Birmingham' Objectives				
Integrated green neighbourhood and well-being plans –	Better managed parks and greenspaces –	New workforce and community skills –	A Peoples Movement and Civic Voice for the Natural Environment –	Review of corporate financial mechanisms and land valuation formula –
Draft Outcomes Framework for Health & Parks -	Organisational capacity –		New cohort of people and young generation engaged in parks –	Preparation for Natural Capital Investment Strategy
	25 year Nature Recovery and Green Infrastructure Strategy -			Re-alignment of base budgets –
Future Parks Board				

5.2.1 Outcomes for Heritage

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator sought to deliver two key outcomes for heritage:

1. Heritage will be Better Managed
2. Heritage will be in Better Condition

This was to be achieved by the objectives set out in the table below which summarises the actions from the original FPA bid. We have reviewed progress against each of these objectives and rated then using a RAG (Red Amber Green) scale. Green equates to the objective having been delivered in full and there is evidence to demonstrate this, Amber where there is partial delivery and Red where there has been no progress.







Objective	Evidence	Status
Better understanding of the value of green space in term of social, health & wellbeing & community expectations.	Baseline surveys have provided evidence of understanding, motivating factors and barriers. The Pilot projects have tested interventions with specific audiences.	
Better understanding of the potential value of green spaces in terms of ecology and economics linked to 5 corporate priorities.	CoN Plan developed and adopted based around 5 themes. CoN Governance Board currently being established. Steering Group is up and running.	
The value of the city's green estate will be recognised in corporate goals and business plans of Birmingham City Council and partner organisations (increasing organisational capacity)	CoN Plan developed and adopted based around 5 themes. CoN Governance Board currently being established. Steering Group is up and running.	
Reconfigured parks service integrated across all key parts of the Council.	Green Champions programme has been developed and there is more integration across the council. The Parks service restructure not yet agreed. CoN Governance Board currently being established. Steering Group is up and running.	
Development of a clear and exciting vision for the city's green estate based on the	CoN Plan developed and adopted based around 5 themes. The Housing	

Objective	Evidence	Status
learning from 4 green neighbourhood pilots.	Pilot has tested resident participation in community gardening and also the development of the Green User Guide.	
The vision will be based on an assessment of the capacity of the city council, partners and community sector.	CoN Plan developed and adopted based around 5 themes. There was extensive consultation with Council Service areas about the vision and the implementation of the plan. The Con Board is currently being established. However, the Parks service restructure has not yet been completed.	
The project will increase the skills and knowledge of service staff, partners and the community.	There has been learning through the delivery of the pilots project involving staff, partners and the community. The delivery of the project has provided work based learning for GP trainees. The Development of CoN Alliance is positive and provides a structure for further developing skills and community capacity. Further work is required to get full buy-in from the Parks Service.	
A new model for service delivery will be developed along with new metrics to measure success.	CoN Plan developed and adopted based around 5 themes. This includes some headline measures of success. The Development of CoN Alliance is positive. However, further work to get full buy-in from the Parks Service is required.	
We will develop a new, more flexible and responsive model for community engagement	CoN alliance & terms of reference agreed	

5.2.2 Outcomes for People

The key Heritage Fund outcomes for People Is that the project set out to deliver is:

1. People will have Developed Skills






Objective	Evidence	Status
The project will develop new policies and outcomes that are integrated with a new public health model for the city.	The CoN Plan is developed and adopted and is based around 5 themes including a Healthy City. The Health & Wellbeing strategy was adopted in March 2022. A key theme is "Contributing to a Green and Sustainable Future". The team to deliver the HWB Strategy are now in place.	
We will develop a new, more flexible and responsive model for community engagement	CoN Alliance established with terms of reference	
We will develop an integrated place based approach based around neighbourhoods and the wider environment.	The EJA tool has been developed and has been used to identify priority wards. The CoN Plan has been developed and adopted and is based around 5 themes. The Bordesley & Highgate pilot is being implemented.	
Staff, partners and volunteers will gain new skills through a process of shared learning.	The pilot projects show some learning that is now being applied through the delivery of the CoN Plan. Skills and knowledge have been developed across many council service area. Work based learning has been delivered supporting GP Trainees. Community groups and volunteers have developed skills. However, the buy-in from the Parks Service has been limited at times.	
We will deliver a pilot project to raise awareness of the jobs and opportunities within the wider environment sector and how the project can support development of green jobs and skills.	Pilot activity has now been delivered successfully. Now working with procurement to develop policy to deliver wider benefits through social value requirements.	
We will deliver a pilot project to explore how BCT can use green space to support their mentoring work with young people.	The pilot project has been delivered successfully and the learning is being taken forward.	
We will develop a new, more flexible and responsive model for community engagement.	The CoN Alliance established with terms of reference which will support greater citizen engagement. Barriers for friends and community groups	

Objective	Evidence	Status
	wishing to use parks have been reduced through revised policies.	
The parks service will be reviewed, and a new structure put in place that supports skills development and training as part of a future corporate programme.	The parks service restructure is currently ongoing working to an extended timescale.	
The project will support BOSF to develop skills and capacity to engage with a wider range of people that are more representative of the diversity of communities across the city.	The pilot project at Dawberry Fields tested new ways of engaging with local communities. The co-ordinator for this project is now employed by BOSF increasing the capacity of the organisation to deliver these approaches in new areas. BOSF now has targets for delivery which includes engagement with young people and diverse communities. The focused work in the 'red wards' will target communities that have traditionally had low levels of participation.	
The project will increase the organisational capacity of the Council, partners and communities to reach new and diverse audiences.	The Environmental Justice Mapping and Fair Parks Standard which together with the Alliance and Sustainable Funding model changes priorities and approach being used. The CoN Alliance has been established with agreed Terms of Reference. This increases the organisational capacity of the Council, partners and communities to reach new and diverse audiences. There is funding in place to deliver the CoN Plan in the 'red wards'. However, the parks service restructure is not yet agreed and implemented.	
Our approach to community participation, engagement and evaluation are creative, innovative and effective.	Pilot projects delivered, responded to COVID-19 challenges, Earth Stories project is innovative and effective.	

5.2.3 Outcomes for Communities

The key Heritage Fund outcomes for Communities is that the project set out to deliver is:

1. Your Local Area / Community will be a Better Place to Live, Work or Visit
2. Your Organisation will be more Resilient

Objective	Evidence	Status
We will develop a better understanding of parks users and non-users and their needs and aspirations.	Baseline surveys have provided new and up to date data – YouGov, volunteer surveys & other engagement work	
We will use this learning (about users and non-users) to develop new and effective models of community engagement.	The CoN Alliance has been established with terms of reference. The CoN Plan has new mechanisms for citizen involvement.	
We will develop a new more flexible and responsive model for community engagement	The CoN Alliance has been established with terms of reference. The process for friends and community groups to activate parks has been streamlined.	
We will deliver pilot projects and use this learning to better understand how we can better connect our citizens (including young people) with their local green space.	The Pilot Projects and Baseline Surveys have been delivered. The Earth Stories project was successful in engaging the city's diverse communities.	
We will develop new integrated policies for place, the environment and health that will change the way we work and deliver benefits for all communities across the city.	The CoN Plan has been developed and adopted based around 5 themes. This is being implemented and tested in Bordesley & Highgate.	

Summary

The charts below summarise the progress against the Heritage Fund outcomes and the objectives set out in the original FPA application. Overall, the project has been delivered in a way that links back to the original outcomes and objectives. It can clearly demonstrate excellent progress against these original objectives with nearly three quarters (72%) of these delivered in full and 28% delivered in part.

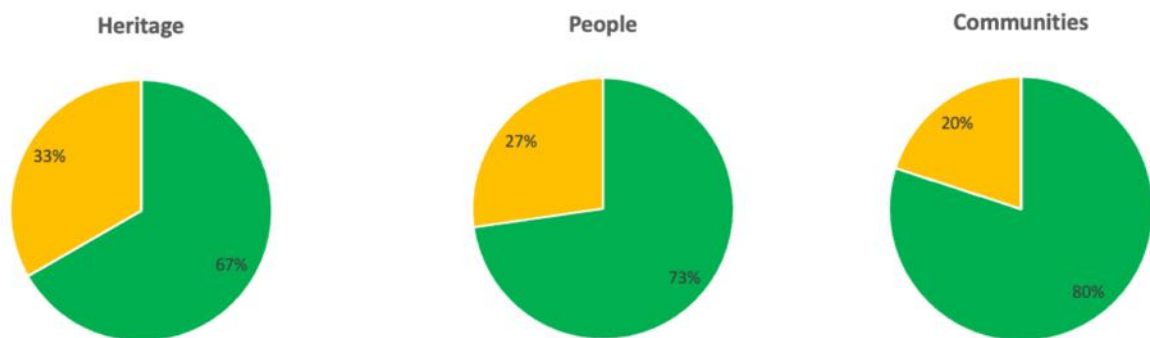
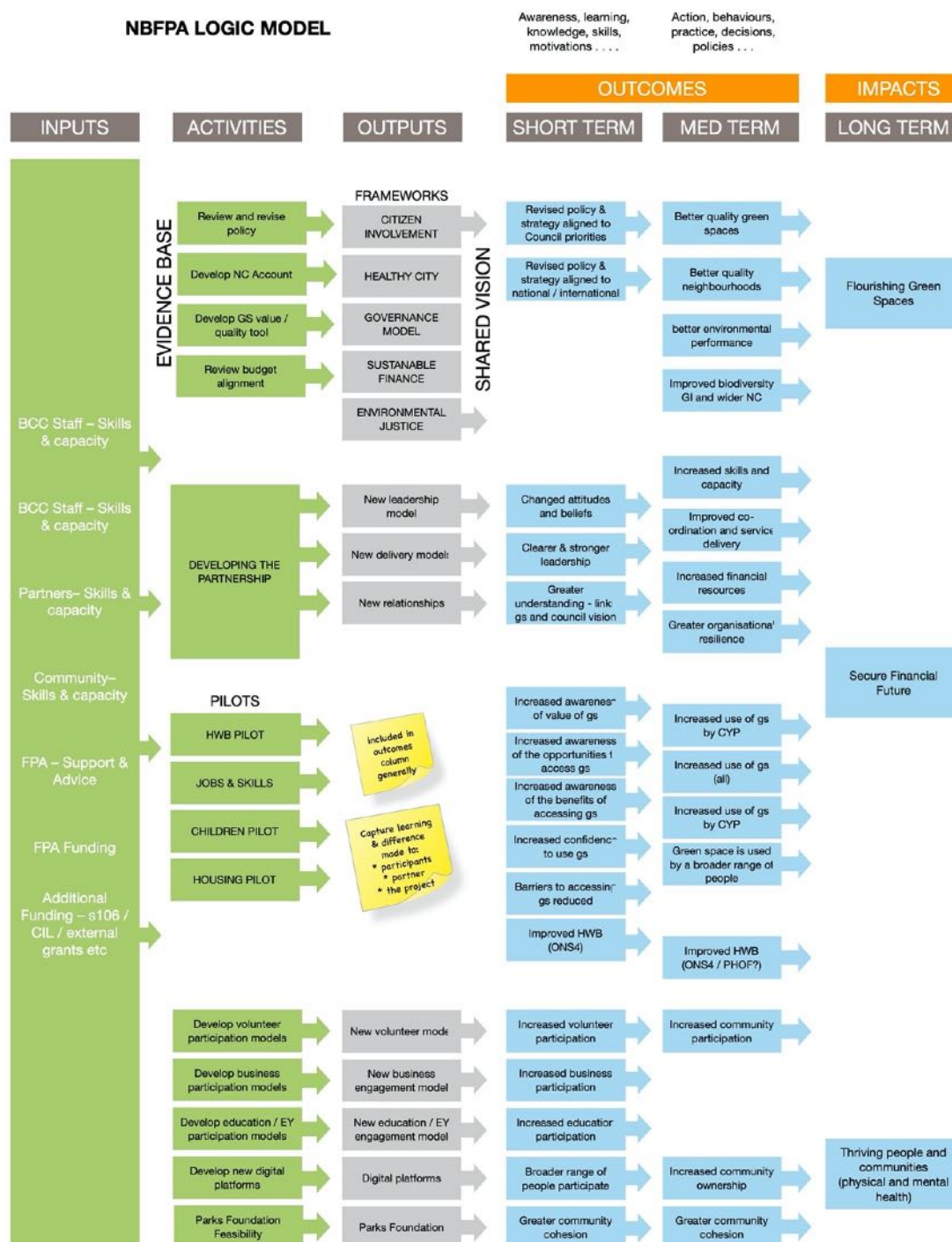








Figure 1 Delivery against the Heritage Fund Outcomes










5.3 Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator Outcomes







As part of the development of the project evaluation framework a Logic Model was developed in the early part of the Co-design Phase. The Logic Model is set out in the Figure below.













The table below is taken from the Evaluation Framework and sets out the project outcomes, highlighting the difference that the project sought to make. These outcomes have been classified as short term, broadly those to be delivered through the Co-design Phase and medium term to be delivered through the Transition Phase. In the section below we consider the evidence to assess the delivery of these outcomes and how this may contribute to delivering the longer term impacts that the project set out to achieve.






Short / Medium Term Outcome (FPA to end Mar 22)	Progress Notes	Status
Environmental Justice Framework		
Greater awareness of training & employment opportunities in the parks and green space sector	The Jobs & Skills pilot has successfully reached new audiences.	
New training and support mechanisms (e.g. National Trust Academy)	There has been some change from the original scope. The project is contributing to the delivery of the Wildlife Trust and BCC Natural Prospects Programme (Green Recovery Challenge Fund). The Kick Start Apprenticeship scheme is also being delivered. The development of Eco Hub at Ward End Park has been achieved.	
New employment and training opportunities created (WMCA Natural Capital Apprenticeships).	There has been some change from the original scope. The project is contributing to the delivery of the Wildlife Trust and BCC Natural Prospects Programme (Green Recovery Challenge Fund). The Kick Start Apprenticeship scheme is also being delivered. The development of Eco Hub at Ward End Park has been achieved.	
New tools developed to audit Environmental Justice across the city	The EJA Tool has been developed and applied to identify priority wards.	
Increased business engagement with parks and green space	The Jobs and Skills pilot has successfully delivered against this outcome. Ongoing work with procurement.	
Healthy City Framework		
Increased knowledge and understanding about developing parks for health and wellbeing (Health & Wellbeing Park pilot)	The learning from the HWB Pilot has been captured.	

Short / Medium Term Outcome (FPA to end Mar 22)	Progress Notes	Status
Improved understanding of success criteria for developing healthy neighbourhoods (Health Impact Assessment tool)	There has been some change from the original scope and this is not being taken forward in this form. An alternative mechanism is being pursued corporately, looking at Healthy Living Zones across the city. This currently sits with the planning strategy team.	
Increased understanding of health & wellbeing benefits of green spaces (including nature connectivity)	Increased understanding can be demonstrated. Nature Connectedness will be key measure - baseline data has been captured (YouGov Survey)	
Increased understanding of the benefits of social prescribing	Learning from HWB pilot has been captured. Simple menu of options recommended.	
Governance Model for Natural Environment		
Dedicated strand of R20 for natural environment & green infrastructure	The CoN Plan has been developed and there are clear links to the Council approach to R20.	
New integrated site assessment tool for Parks (& usable at city GI scale)	Fair Parks Standard adopted and being applied in Bordesley & Highgate.	
New integrated GIS mapping tool for Birmingham (held by corporate GIS team).	Environmental Justice Tool developed. GI strategies to be developed for city centre and East Birmingham Inclusive Growth Strategy	
New land management practices across parks	Green Infrastructure Studies have been commissioned for the city centre and the East Birmingham Regeneration initiative. The Fair Parks Standard is being applied in Bordesley & Highgate and the top five red wards to identify opportunities for changes to land management practices to deliver the vision set out in the CoN Plan.	
New ways of partnership working trialled and implemented	The CoN Alliance has been developed. There is some good evidence of partnership working i.e. through pilot projects.	
New structure for the Parks Service	Appreciative Inquiry carried out to support the restructure. Process working to an extended timescale following positive engagement with BCC Finance Team. However, this is a critical action.	

Short / Medium Term Outcome (FPA to end Mar 22)	Progress Notes	Status
Identified 'Integration Champions' across the Council & with key partners	Integration Champions are members of the Operations Group in the City of Nature Operating Model and the representatives in the Alliance. Some of them are also Green Champions who go "above and beyond" their professional role. There is now a move to more closely integrate CoN with the R20 with dedicated teams to deliver each area.	
BCC Finance to recognise the importance of natural capital account through a parallel balance sheet	Proposals developed for LSRIRC & A Sustainable Finance Framework for Birmingham City Governance for the Natural Environment were adopted in February 2022 when a Treasury Strategy Paper was approved by Cabinet. All BCC investments and major projects will now be subject to a 4th pillar test.	
New FPA Principles tested and adopted by Housing & Planning	Planning checklist currently being developed by Planning in conjunction with BCU. The final draft has been developed for review and adoption.	
Improved baseline data relating to GI, Biodiversity and Nature Recovery	GI strategies for City Centre & East Birmingham to be developed through FPA 1.5.	
Improved partnership working to deliver agreed goals for GI and Nature Recovery	City of Nature Alliance established. GI strategies under development.	
Sustainable Finance Framework		
Improved process and tools for land valuation which recognise ecosystem services functions & alternative funding models	Development of Sustainable Finance Framework has commenced and principles developed. Land valuation formula not yet addressed.	

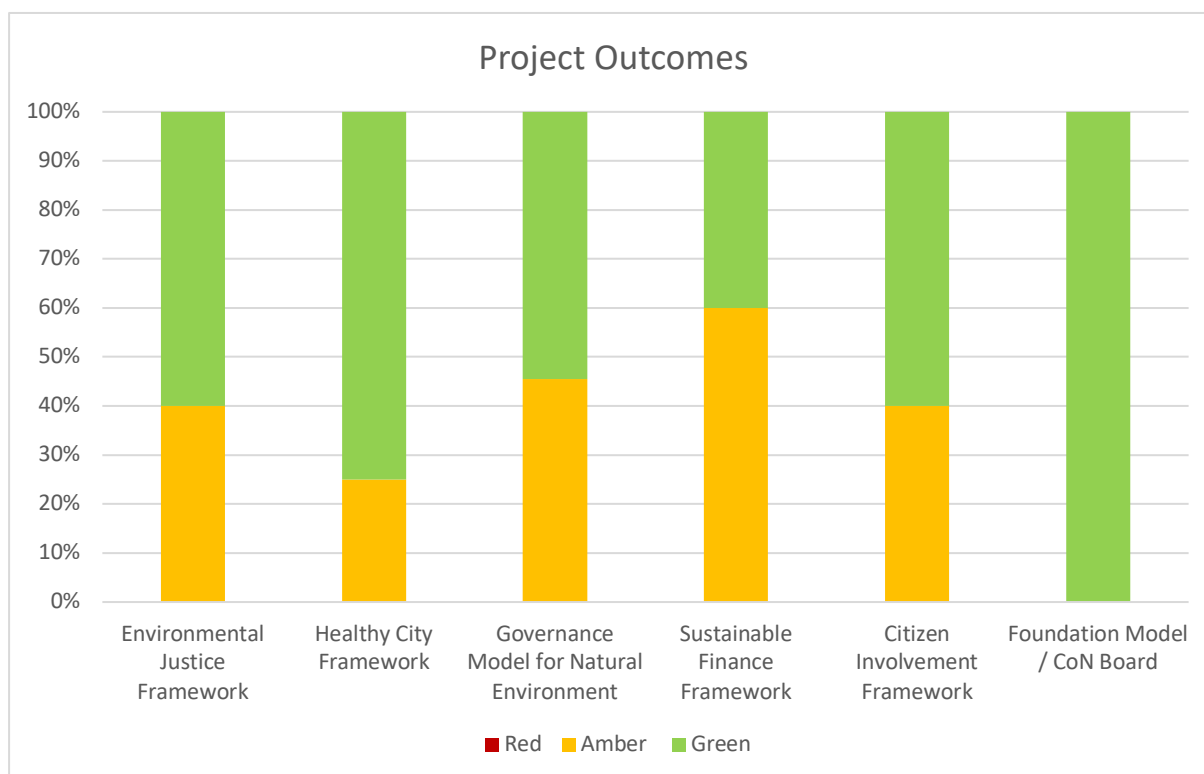
Short / Medium Term Outcome (FPA to end Mar 22)	Progress Notes	Status
GI Investment potential or prospectus ideas for small or large scale	Some early work delivered by Vivid Economics. GI strategies under development for the city centre and East Birmingham. Master planning work is underway for the Con priority wards and in East Birmingham. The CoN Framework & Cabinet Report included acceptance of use of CIL for green space and approved £500k. The delivery models and master plans await implementation.	
Review current BCC Finance practices for value assessment and investment potential using the LISRIRC model	Sustainable Finance Review has been carried out and models and principles set out.	
Better allocation of financial resources aligned to five capitals & across Directorates	Sustainable Finance principles have been set out and were adopted in February 2022. The integrated Climate approach will begin with a Finance Strategy to bring all this work together in one place.	
Senior level buy-in to sustainable finance and participatory budgeting	Sustainable Finance Review has been completed through the Sustainable Finance Steering Group. The March 2022 Treasury Paper commits the city to this approach.	
Citizen Involvement Framework		
Improved volunteer participation model & framework offering better outcomes for participants	The City of Nature Plan sets out a new approach for citizen engagement. The City of Nature Alliance provides a new structure for the city to work with community and voluntary groups to deliver the vision. There has been significant investment in developing a new framework for volunteer participations through the Green Champions programme. This represents an improved volunteer participation model to be delivered by BCC and supported by the CoN Alliance. However, the parks service restructure has yet to be implemented.	

Short / Medium Term Outcome (FPA to end Mar 22)	Progress Notes	Status
Improved promotion and communication with volunteers	New volunteer model development will support enhanced promotion and communication. Social media channels are being used to promote volunteering opportunities across the Alliance and voluntary groups. Whilst the parks service is still unable to offer pre-Covid levels of volunteering due to staff shortages, the mechanisms are in place to share opportunities.	
Reduced barriers to volunteer participation	The Volunteer Survey shows some barriers to participation may have reduced (awareness of opportunities has increased significantly).	
Increased skills and learning through housing led community engagement pilot	Housing pilot delivered successfully with development of Green User Guide and learning from community garden projects. Further work required to fully embed the CoN within housing develop policy and practice.	
Development of digital platform for engagement with parks and green spaces	The Naturally Birmingham project website has been regularly updated. The specification for a new digital platform was developed. However, the BCC website will be developed as the preferred platform. Improved content and promotion of opportunities to get involved with the delivery of the CoN Plan is now published . Other content is under development.	
Increased engagement through social media	The project has successfully engaged with residents through social media. Nearly 30K tweets and impressions during the design phase. Jobs & Skills Pilot developed YouTube channel. Successful engagement around the CoN Plan.	

Short / Medium Term Outcome (FPA to end Mar 22)	Progress Notes	Status
New mechanism to engage CYP through Mentoring and Park Ambassadors	Children's Pilot successfully engaged young people and used green space as a venue of mentoring activity. Park Ambassadors delivered successfully as Green Champions and Little Green Champions.	
Increased awareness of opportunities for CYP engagement through digital platforms	Up to date information is provided on the Naturally Birmingham Project website. The BCC website currently being developed. Social Media is being used extensively to raise awareness of opportunities and to increase levels of participation.	
New mechanism to engage Early Years to use green space to support development and learning	Children's Pilot successfully delivered. Little Green Champions model has been successful.	
New mechanism to develop a community based parks fund	There has been some change from the original scope. A successful Crowdfunding campaign has been run at Dawberry Fields. Through the CoN Alliance, the seed corn fund has allowed significant external funding to be secured for specific projects. The City now agreed a corporate fund partner, Space Hive.	
All		
Feasibility of establishing Future Parks Board / Foundation established.	There has been some change from the original scope. CoN Alliance is the model for partner and citizen engagement building upon existing foundations and structures. CoN Project Board has been established. CoN Operations Group with Integrations Champions is now established and meeting.	

The chart below summarises the delivery against the project outcomes. Overall, the project has delivered against 58.3% of the short and medium term project outcomes and a further 41.7% are currently in delivery or have been delivered in part. It is clear that overall the project is being delivered as intended and the short and medium terms outcomes are being achieved, or that there are mechanisms in place to deliver these changes in the future. Whilst there have been some









changes to the form of project delivery against a small number of outcomes, this has tended to be characterised by a change in the delivery method or process, rather than omission. These changes have often been outside the control of the project team, and reliant on delivery by project partners.














5.4 Longer term impact

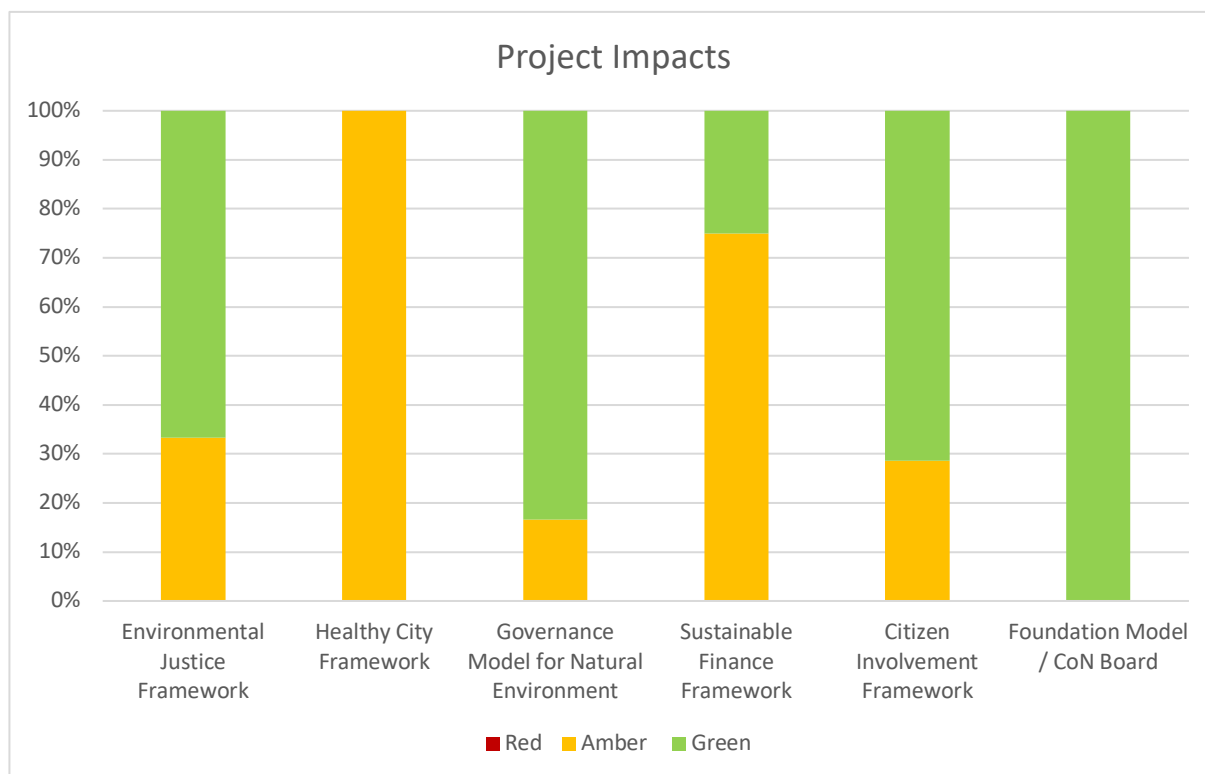
The logic model and evaluation framework set out a series of longer term impacts that the project is seeking to deliver. These impacts were included as part of the original application and demonstrated the longer term changes that the project would seek to affect in the future. The timeframe for these is outside that of Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator and will be delivered through the project strategy and legacy: The City of Nature Plan. Here we review how effectively the foundations for future change have been progressed.

Longer Term Impacts	Progress Notes	Status
Environmental Justice Framework		
A more diverse workforce reflecting the city's communities.	Parks restructure has commenced albeit with a longer timescale. Baseline data about workforce now captured. The ambition to have a workforce more reflective of the city's communities will be delivered over the longer term.	
Greater organisational capacity and skills to deliver the five Frameworks.	CoN Plan sits within Housing and Inclusive Growth. Delivery sites across whole BCC organisation	
Reduced inequalities relating to Environmental Justice	EJA tool used to highlight priority wards. Now being addressed through pilot in Bordesley & Highgate and 'top' 5 red wards.	
Healthy City Framework		
Increased availability and capacity of activities and programmes to improve HWB.	The project has tended to focus on finding solutions and testing these through the pilot projects. The foundations have started to be laid for future delivery. Recent initiatives include: Daily Mile; BOSF Tai Chi, Fair Standard actions include Healthy Parks actions.	
Increased availability & capacity of social prescribing.	There is learning from the HWB pilot and the value of green space in delivering HWB outcomes is better understood. Increased capacity has yet to be delivered. A programme of engagement with Link Workers and training for Green Champions is currently in delivery.	
Increased use of parks and green spaces for HWB.	Use of parks and green spaces as a result of Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns has been observed. The Earth Stories project demonstrated that the use of parks for improved health – especially mental health has increased. The Health and Wellbeing Strategy has now been developed and adopted and recognises the role of parks and green spaces in increasing physical activity and providing mental health benefits. Models to increase the use of parks and green space for HWB are still being developed.	

Longer Term Impacts	Progress Notes	Status
Improved public health outcomes	The Health and Wellbeing Strategy has now been developed and adopted and includes indicators for the Green Space and Sustainability Theme. Improving public health outcomes is a longer term impact that cannot currently be demonstrated, although positive action can be demonstrated which will support future change.	
Governance Model for Natural Environment		
Increased use of green space by residents	Covid-19 showed increased use of parks and open spaces and increased appreciation of green space. Fair Parks Standard will provide mechanism to increase quality, remove barriers, increase participation and in the longer term achieve this outcome. Fair Parks Standard will deliver increases on green space quality.	
Corporate growth & decision criteria fully reflect the importance of green infrastructure	GI strategies currently being developed. Some shift in thinking and approach can be demonstrated towards this longer term impact.	
Leadership and governance structures embedded within the organisation	CoN Board being established. FPA structure now sits within Housing & Inclusive Growth. Some evidence of positive change through the Staff & Partners Survey data.	
BCC Departments change their working practices to accommodate FPA changes	CoN Board being established. FPA structure now sits within Housing & Inclusive Growth. Some evidence of positive change through the Staff & Partners Survey data.	
Biodiversity Net Gain through planning and development process Improved access and connectivity of GI	Environment Bill adopted, now a statutory requirement. Planning Development Checklist has now been drafted and is awaiting adoptions and implementation.	
Improved access and connectivity of GI	GI strategies for City Centre & East Birmingham to be developed through FPA 1.5. Longer term impact.	
Sustainable Finance Framework		
Improved policy and strategy context relating to planning, development and green space & possible	Early work to establish more sustainable funding model has been undertaken. CoN Plan adopted by BCC. Longer term impact cannot be demonstrated at this point.	

Longer Term Impacts	Progress Notes	Status
establishment of an independent Parks Fund		
Resources are used more effectively to deliver increased Natural Capital	EJ Tool has identified the priority wards and Fair Parks Standard will identify action at a site specific level. GI Strategies will also identify opportunities for increasing NC.	
Effective financial appraisal mechanism for environmental justice and greener neighbourhoods	Sustainable Financial Framework developed along with principles to guide implementation.	
Increased resources for parks, green infrastructure and biodiversity; supported corporately drawn from many sources.	More people across the organisation are now working to enhance parks and green spaces. City of Nature Plan adopted with new governance structure to oversee this.	
Citizen Involvement Framework		
Increased participation through friends groups	New friends groups have been established. Work has started to broaden participation. New volunteer model developed. Foundations have been laid for future change.	
Increased participation through more flexible volunteer opportunities and programmes	Significant work to develop a more responsive volunteer model. Operating model for Green Champions is under development. The Green Champions Model has been developed to the point of delivery in Bordesley and Highgate. The programme will continue to be reviewed with Green Champions and this is an ongoing process and will continue through the life of the plan.	
A broader range of people are engaged in voluntary activity reflecting the city's diversity	The Earth Stories project gained participation from a broad cross section of the city's communities. The Jobs & Skills pilot reached new audiences. The 2022 volunteer survey gained responses from a more diverse range of groups working to Improve parks and green spaces. Some initial positive signs against this outcome.	
Increased skills and capacity to support children and young people's engagement	Children's Pilot can demonstrate positive results and approach has now been embedded within BCT. Measures to reduce barriers (bureaucracy and financial) have been introduced. Marketing and comms	

Longer Term Impacts	Progress Notes	Status
	enhanced through revised BCC / Naturally Birmingham website and social media. Foundations laid for greater change over the longer term.	
Increased skills and capacity to engage schools in learning outside the classroom	Little Green Champions and Green Champions programme developed. Links made with extensive network of Forest Schools practitioners across the city. Work to reduce barriers to schools using parks has been carried out.	
Greater reach of marketing and promotion	Earth Stories reached a diverse audience. The Green Ground Map is innovative and has gained traction. The process to update the BCC website is now in place and will continue through the life of the plan. However, this marks a change from the original ambition to develop a standalone 'green website'. The BCC website structure is constraining and the lack of images limits impact. A section encouraging involvement with the delivery of the CoN Plan is encouraging, but there is a disconnect between the CoN Plan and Parks. Use of social media channels has been extensive and has established a greater reach than before the project.	
Increased citizen involvement and greater financial resources	CoN Alliance as vehicle to increase participation and local funding has been established. This should provide a good structure to increase citizen involvement.	
All		
Functions of the FPA project are mainstreamed and embedded within the wider organisation	CoN Plan is owned by Housing and Inclusive Growth. Links to R20 across the Council.	



The project can clearly demonstrate good progress against the longer term outcomes and impacts with 56.0% of these starting to deliver positive change or the foundations put in place for future change. Partial progress against a further 44.0% of the longer term outcomes can also be demonstrated, although further work is required to fully implement and embed these actions with the organisation. The overall picture is a positive one and there are threads running through the activity and project delivery and the direction of change is evident. There is evidence that the foundations for future longer-term change have been laid and that there is some progress towards these goals.

5.5 Process Evaluation

The project funding has allowed a small team to be created to be established to plan and deliver the Pilot Projects, supplemented with existing staff and through working with partner organisations and to then take forward this learning through the transition phase. The project has been led by the Project Director supported by the Project Officer and Project Advisor (Green City Manager BCC & Senior Research Fellow University of Birmingham). Each Pilot Project has had a nominated project lead officer reporting to the project director and Project Board.

Stakeholders have been positive about the participation on the Future Parks Accelerator project and qualitative evaluation has shown that the project has been effective in providing a space and resource for individuals and organisations to work together. It has successfully addressed the problems of silo working and opened up communication channels within Birmingham City Council and externally with partners organisations. This has supported peer learning and some participants reported valuing this process. In addition, those participating have been able to make connections with others interested in green space and allowed people to incorporate this into their day to day roles.

There have been further positive responses about being empowered to work with others through the Co-design Phase to find solutions. The wider project partnership is described and reviewed in in section 5.6.

Overseeing the project has been the Birmingham FPA Board which has had the strategic oversight of the whole programme, representing the executive and political authority of the Council and its key FPA partners. It has typically met quarterly.

The key responsibilities of the Board include:

- The FPA Board formally agrees the Milestone Report ahead of its submission to National Trust;
- The FPA Board oversees the financial accountability of the programme;
- The FPA Board seeks to ensure a Council wide and citywide approach is maintained at all times, avoiding any parochialism that might otherwise arise within such a programme;
- The FPA Board looks to approve each of the planned next steps of the programme and seeks to offer support to the project team where necessary with the delivery of the project.

In addition, the project has reported regularly to the Council Extended Cabinet Leadership Team and sought to involve senior officers and elected members in identifying issues and solutions and shaping the longer term strategy proposed through FPA.

The process has generally been a successful one, and Project Board met regularly during the Co-design Phase. The Project Board tended to meet less frequently during the Transition Phase

when the focus for the project changed to support the development of the City of Nature Plan. However, there was extensive engagement, both horizontally and vertically across the organisation, to manage and shape the development of this framework. This engagement took place over approximately twelve months. The process to adopt the City of Nature Plan included twenty nine meetings at a high level within the authority. A significant number of other meetings with external partners and stakeholders also took place during this time. The process proved successful with the City of Nature Plan being adopted in February 2022 and with the agreement that Housing and Inclusive Growth would be responsible for leading on the delivery of the plan.

5.6 Partnership Evaluation

Baseline data about partnership working to deliver the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project was gathered in June 2020 through a Staff and Partners Survey and a further Survey with Directors and Assistant Directors through the ECLT Survey. These surveys were repeated in February 2022 to assess the impact of the project on the partnership and to establish if there had been any change from the baseline.

5.6.1 Staff and Partners Survey

The Staff and Partners Survey was an online survey that was promoted to Birmingham City Council staff across a range of service areas that were involved in the delivery of the project along with a range of partner organisations. The 2020 survey gained 147 responses and the 2022 survey 57 responses. Participating organisations included:

- BCC Elected Members
- BCC Employment and Skills
- BCC Parks Service
- BCC Planning and Inclusive Growth
- BCC Public Health
- Birmingham Children's Trust
- Birmingham City Council (Other)
- Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust
- Birmingham Open Space Forum

- Landscape Practice Group
- NHS Birmingham and Solihull CCG
- The Active Wellbeing Society
- Wildlife Trust
- Witton Lodge Community Association

The survey required respondents to rate statements (using a five point Likert scale: Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) about the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator projects as set out below.

Messaging about the Value of Green space

- a. There is a clear leader (person or organisation) promoting parks and green spaces in Birmingham;
- b. Improving the quality / accessibility of green space is a priority in Birmingham;
- c. The message about the value of parks and green spaces being promoted within the city is the right one;
- d. There is consistent messaging about the value of parks and green spaces across my organisation/ department.

About the Partnership

- a. Improving parks and green spaces (in Birmingham) is a collective responsibility that includes public, private and the third sector;
- b. Improving parks and green spaces contributes towards the goals of my organisation/ department;
- c. Partner organisations across Birmingham are currently working together to improve parks and green spaces;
- d. I am currently taking action within my role to improve parks and green spaces.

Barriers to Embedding the Value of Parks and Green Spaces

- a. There is insufficient policy and guidance to improve parks and green spaces;

- b. There is a lack of political will to improve parks and green spaces within Birmingham;
- c. There is insufficient coordination to improve parks and spaces;
- d. There are sufficient resources to improve parks and green spaces;
- e. My department does not recognise how improving parks and green spaces could contribute to our divisional priorities / Council vision;
- f. Improving parks and green spaces is not part of my role;
- g. I do not know how to contribute to improving parks and green spaces through my role.

The results are summarised in the radar charts below.



Figure 2 Messaging and Partnership responses

There is evidence that the vision and messaging about the value of parks and green space has increased during the project delivery period. The score for the “message about the value of parks and green spaces being promoted within the city is the right one” increased from 46.5% to 74.0% (based on responses “Strongly Agree” or “Agree”). Similarly, the statement about consistent messaging regarding the value of parks and green space across the organisation and within my department increased from 32.2% to 52.8%. Allied to this there was greater confidence about

there be a clear leader promoting parks and open spaces in Birmingham (increasing from 28.1% to 44.5%) and an increased score relating to improving green space being a priority in Birmingham (increasing from 61.0% to 70.9%).

There has also been a significant increase in the responses relating to activity to improve parks and open spaces in the city. The proportion of respondents that agreed with the statement "Improving parks and green spaces contributes towards the goals of my organisation/ department" increased from 69.2% to 92.7% and the proportion of respondent taking personal responsibility to improve greens space increased from 48.0% to 77.8%. There was greater agreement that partnership work in the city to deliver improvements to green space had increased from 45.2% to 56.4%. That improving parks and green space was a collective responsibility involving the public, private and the third sector remained high, consistently cited by more than nine out of ten respondents (increasing from 91.1% to 94.5%).

The statement "there are sufficient resources to improve parks and green spaces" showed a very slight increase from the baseline of 28.7% to 29.1%. However, the proportion of respondents that disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement increased significantly from 46.6% to 63.6%.

In terms of barriers to embedding the value of parks and green space within the organisation and being able to deliver positive change there was a positive shift from the baseline against four of the six indicators shown in Figure 3. The responses shows that there is perceived to be greater co-ordination across the Council and with partners, with the proportion of respondents suggesting there was a "lack of co-ordination" declining from 53.4% to 46.3%. Similarly, the proportion of those reporting a "lack of political" will reduced from 47.9% to 41.9%. On a more personal level, the proportion of respondents reporting it was "not their role to improve parks and green space" reduced from 30.1% to 16.7% and those reporting that they "didn't know how to contribute" reduced from 32.2% to 25.5%.

However, the proportion of respondents indicating that "My department does not recognise how improving parks and green spaces could contribute to our divisional priorities / Council vision" increased from 17.1% to 25.0%. Similarly, the proportion of respondents reporting "insufficient policy and guidance to improve parks and green spaces" increased from 42.5% to 47.3%. This may be as a consequence of the work that has been carried out through NBFPA to audit policy and strategy within the organisation relating to parks and green spaces and the realisation that the current policies and strategies provide conflicting guidance and priorities. Furthermore, NBFPA has highlighted the need for greater recognition and inclusion of green space and green

infrastructure and increased expectations about how this is integrated within housing and regeneration initiatives.

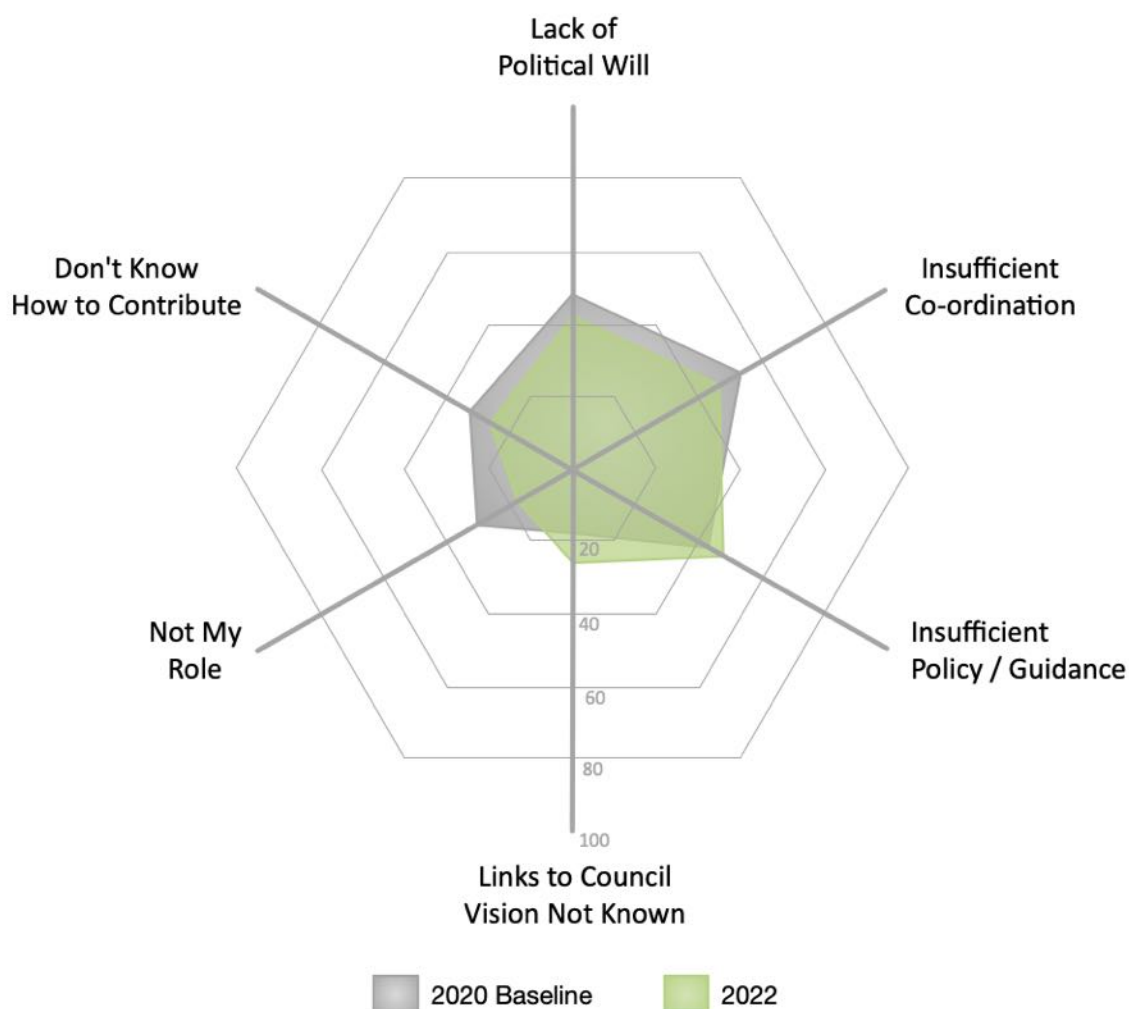


Figure 3 Barriers to embedding the value of green space within the organisation

5.6.2 ECLT Survey

The ECLT Survey gained responses from a relatively small sample of Directors and Assistant Directors across the organisation. There were 12 responses in 2020 and 7 responses in 2022. Overall, the proportion of respondents suggesting that they had a fair understanding of the value

of parks and green spaces remained at around seven out of ten. The proportion of respondents that agreed that improving parks and green spaces was a priority increased from 66.7% to 85.8%.

The quantitative responses and qualitative comments suggest that there remain strong connections between their role and enhancing parks and green spaces and that there is now a high level of awareness of the connections between environmental justice, Covid-19 recovery, Route 2 Zero and green spaces.

5.6.3 Volunteer Survey

An online survey was carried out in August 2020 to understand the experiences of local people involved in voluntary activity in parks and open spaces. The survey was promoted to known volunteers, partners supporting volunteer participation and a range of community based organisations. The survey results have been used to inform the development of the volunteer offer and operating model. The survey gained 76 response sin 2020 and a further 80 responses when repeated in February 2022. The key findings are summarised below.

The baseline survey found that 43.6% of respondents worked with friends groups, 25.6% with community organisations and 17.9% with parks / rangers. Many of the respondents had been volunteering for a long time with almost half of the volunteers who had helped out in parks or green spaces had been volunteering for more than three years. Respondents said they volunteered in a variety of ways. Almost half took part in activities organised by others but many also took part in regular activities organised by others, one-off activities or carried out tasks on their own.

Improving the local environment and giving something back, as well as enjoying being outdoors, and nature were the most popular reasons for volunteering. Although still popular, gaining new skills and meeting new people were less important to many volunteers.

By far the most common barrier to volunteering in parks and green spaces was uncertainty about how to get involved. This reflects a comment by a volunteer who said there was often a misconception that volunteers worked for the Council, which acted as a barrier to additional support.

A range of improvements to the volunteer offer were supported including better promotion of opportunities (72.7%), training opportunities (44.2%), one-off activities (42.95), a wider range of activities (32.5%), having a single point of contact (31.2%), gaining a qualification (29.9%) and

offering an easy recruitment process (28.6%). There was also support for volunteer participation through workplace and corporate social responsibility options.

The Volunteer Survey was repeated in 2022 and gained a response from a similar size sample to the baseline survey in 2020. It should be noted that the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown restrictions severely limited volunteer participation in much of 2020 and 2021. Volunteer participation was only reintroduced slowly following this, although with friends groups and community groups taking the lead and then later ranger supported activity returning.

The 2022 survey gained much greater responses from volunteers from Asian or Asian British backgrounds which made up nearly one in five responses (19.5%), up from less than one in twenty (4.3%) in 2020. Consequently, the number of respondents from east Birmingham increased along with a greater number of responses from north Birmingham.

The 2022 survey found that respondents were indicating that the frequency of reported activity had increased with over one in four (27.8%, up from 13.9%) volunteering on a weekly basis and a further one in four (29.1%, up from 12.7%) volunteering several times per week.

Volunteer satisfaction remained high with 95.9% of respondents being satisfied or very satisfied with their experience in 2022, although a slight decrease from 97.3% in 2020. However, the level of recognition afforded volunteers that was reported in 2022 had fallen to 63.0% from 80.6%.

The motivations for volunteering remained broadly similar across the two surveys, albeit with a slightly increased level of response to "improving the local environment", "giving back to the local community" and "improving the local community" (with responses between 85.1% and 95.5%).

In terms of barriers, the survey in 2022 found that travel costs, confidence about the support offered, confidence about getting involved and "not seeing people like me had all increased". Suggested improvement to the volunteering programme found significant similarities with the baseline survey although a "wider range of activities" (43.1% up from 32.5%) and gaining a qualification (35.4% up from 29.9%) and volunteer expenses (32.3% up from 26.0%) had increased in popularity.

The number of respondents who thought a volunteer registration and reward scheme would make a positive difference has increased since 2020, encouraging them to volunteer more frequently or take part in future activities.

5.7 Qualitative Assessment

Qualitative evaluation through 1-2-1 stakeholder interviews (at Interim and End of Project Evaluation Stages) has been carried out with a range of participants representing the following services or organisations:

- BCC Elected Members
- BCC Employment and Skills
- BCC Parks Service
- BCC Planning and Inclusive Growth
- BCC Public Health
- Birmingham Children's Trust
- Birmingham City Council (Other)
- Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust
- Birmingham Open Space Forum
- Landscape Practice Group
- The Active Wellbeing Society
- Witton Lodge Community Association

The findings are included throughout the analysis sections of this report.

6 Project Review

6.1 Successes

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator has been successful in raising awareness of the value of green space within the Birmingham City Council and the links to climate change mitigation and adaption, nature recovery and Covid-19 recovery. In this sense the project has helped broaden the influence of parks and green space within the city.

The project has been successful in substantially delivering the outputs that were set out in the original application of the Future Parks Accelerator programme. The methods for delivering some of these outputs, and associated outcomes has evolved and responded to local circumstances and new opportunities, but the project has to a large degree been delivered as intended. There are clear threads that run through the project linking the original objectives to project delivery. The project has substantially delivery against the National Lottery Heritage Fund outcomes and has built the foundations for longer term change to ensure that:

- Heritage will be Better Managed;
- Heritage will be in Better Condition;
- Your Local Area / Community will be a Better Place to Live, Work or Visit;
- Your Organisation will be more Resilient;

And through this process there is evidence that “People have Developed Skills’ through working together to explore solutions and deliver activities which support the project aims and objectives. The project has also successfully delivered against the short and medium term outcomes set out in the Evaluation Framework with 72% delivered in full and 28% either in progress or delivered in part.

The Pilot projects have tested new ways of working and provided a structured approach to test new activities and approaches through a process of co-design and peer learning. This has resulted in finding new ways to work together, breaking down silos and sharing skills. The activities have engaged new audiences and focused on areas of the city where there have typically been lower levels of participation. In delivering the pilot projects the project can demonstrate improvements in how residents engage with green spaces across the pilot sites.

The project can clearly demonstrate innovation with:

- stronger linkages developed with housing management to support and make existing green spaces in housing more usable and accessible by residents and tenants;
- development of skills showcase (online and physical) to highlight the range of jobs available in green spaces and how to access them;
- finding new ways to connect residents to nature through virtual means and improving their wellbeing through doing so;
- development of a green spaces training pack for use by mentors supporting our most vulnerable young people in the city;
- embedding green space thinking within the Early Years team at the Council, and in settings, improving awareness and understanding of nature for children;
- developed a Little Green Champions and Young Green Champions digital pack for use by education settings and families;
- Included nature and Green Infrastructure as part of the Birmingham City Design Guide;
- running a Green Champions leadership course for 80 Birmingham citizens and employees to support them in leading for nature.

The project has been successful in building a new cohort of professionals within Birmingham City Council working to deliver improvements to green space, with greater understanding of how this aligns with their departments goals and that of the Council. There is evidence to show there is now greater leadership and greater co-ordination and barriers to delivering future change have also been reduced. Stakeholders, both officers and members have noted that there is now a greater political will to deliver positive change for parks and green spaces across the city and to realise their potential.

One stakeholder noted that the Future Parks Accelerator had been particularly effective in the policy arena. *"More has been done in the last one or two years in setting strategic direction that has been achieved in a long, long time".*

These significant changes have underpinned the development of the City of Nature Plan, development of the City of Nature Alliance and a new city wide governance structure to support

this. This work has formed the keystone to the Transition Phase and the project has developed a long term strategy to establish Birmingham as a City of Nature through five frameworks

- A Green city;
- A Healthy city;
- A Fair City;
- An involved City;
- A Valued City.

The development of the Environmental Justice Audit tool and map is a key success of the project and is a model that can be replicated by other local authorities across the UK. This has allowed the concept of Environmental Justice to be explored and quantified, helping to identify priority wards across the city. A case study examining the Environmental Justice Audit tool can be found in Appendix A. Linked to this the development of the Birmingham Fair Parks Standard will identify improvements at a site specific level and allow a costed plan of improvements to be developed.

The City of Nature Alliance provides a new framework for greater citizen involvement and participation and will provide a vehicle for partner organisations to contribute to the delivery of the City of Nature Plan and to have a voice in this process. The development of the City of Nature Alliance, with Terms of Reference and a Memorandum of Understanding reflects a change from the original intent to investigate the establishment of a Foundation model. However, it is a model that reflects the local context and the scale of community engagement that already occurs in some parts of the city and provides an agreed vehicle to deliver greater change in the future. The Case Study in Appendix B describes the development and function of the City of Nature Alliance.

The project can also demonstrate a commitment to engaging citizens and communities in thinking about what a City of Nature may comprise and providing an opportunity for highlighting the importance of green space to individuals. The Earth Stories project was particularly effective in reaching communities and individuals that do not usually respond to standard consultation techniques. These Earth Stories capture powerful personal connections to green space and nature and are a strong element running through the City of Nature Plan. A Case Study about the Earth Stories project is found in Appendix C.

The Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project is part of an approach to find long term sustainable solutions to the management and funding of parks and green spaces. The

Sustainable Finance Model has been a challenging area to develop. It is a complex area and many of the concepts associated with innovation and looking at a broader financial model, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Thriving City Index, 5 Capitals Model, Doughnut Economics, and Environmental, Social, and Governance criteria are not well understood in the context of local authority finance. Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator was ambitious in seeking to develop a sustainable finance model that was embedded within the core of Birmingham City Council. The project sought to innovate and develop some 'big ideas' in order to secure a more positive financial future for green spaces and the natural environment. Similar to other FPA projects this has proved 'a tough nut to crack'. The Sustainable Finance Steering Group has explored these concepts and turn thinking into a practical and deliverable financial model. The Group can clearly demonstrate progress in scoping a Birmingham Sustainable Finance Framework and developing principles that support its application. This has now been adopted by Cabinet and will be applied to all major projects and investment decisions. This is a considerable achievement at a strategic level.

With respect to immediate funding pressures, there have been some positive achievements that the project can demonstrate in the relatively short time frame that it has operated. These include:

- Cabinet approval to invest £500,000 Community Infrastructure Levy Funding to the delivery of the City of Nature Plan in Bordesley and Highgate and the 'top' five red wards;
- £150,000 funding through the Commonwealth Games to support the development of greater volunteer participation and the infrastructure to support this as a legacy for the games;
- £10,000 seed funding for the City of Nature Alliance to secure additional external funding for local projects which has now been used to secure over £100,000.
- Proof of concept for a crowd funding project at Dawberry Fields that raised £2,360 for a project with the Wildlife Trust to create suitable habitat for slow worms;
- Agreement that sponsorship and commercial income generated through parks and green spaces can be reinvested into the service (rather than being directed to the centre);
- Development of wider sponsorship packages with the corporate team that will generate greater income for parks and green spaces;

- Work with procurement to develop a Social Responsibility Charter that will bring additional funding and help in-kind.

6.2 Challenges

There were some initial challenges with the Pilot Projects progressing at different speeds and to a degree this reflects the complexity of the programme and the breadth of activity that was planned. The project team have commented that at times significant resource was having to be directed to get one or more pilots moving, or back on track, and that at times the lack of demonstrable progress was challenging. This also added pressure in terms of administration and monitoring and at times hampered the opportunities for shared learning across the Pilots.

The Impact of Covid-19 on the development and delivery of Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator has been significant:

- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has limited our ability to deliver face to face engagement, and activities as originally planned for pilot testing – most of the work therefore switched to online;
- The Ranger service has not been as available to support project work due to Covid-19 duties;
- Covid-19 in itself has made the Environmental Justice Audit even more important;
- Engagement with schools became very difficult with Covid-19 and the introduction of home schooling;
- Some Pilots could be redesigned, or more readily delivered in alternative ways, than others

However, whilst Covid-19 impacted ways of working and slowed some delivery it has offered opportunities for new ways of working to be explored including digital engagement which has been successful. During the various phases of the lockdown restrictions, the importance of local parks and green spaces and awareness of the value of green space was for many people increased. The Covid-19 pandemic has helped increase understanding about the value of green spaces, nature and public health, both physical health and wellbeing.

The breadth of the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator programme and scale of activity has presented some challenges in terms of resources and prioritisation. Stakeholders

referred to the number of plates that were spinning, in particular during the Co-design Phase which required systems in place for monitoring and regular management and prioritisation to keep the project on track. From the qualitative evaluation, there is some evidence that the Transition Phase was more successful with this prioritisation process, perhaps helped with clearer communication about the development of the City of Nature Plan and the citizen involvement framework the City of Nature Alliance.

Stakeholders have spoken about the need to recognise and be responsive to new opportunities, if they appear to offer promise and are a good fit with the overall vision. With a small team and limited resource there is the need to focus on delivery of the agreed outputs but to also be responsive. This is particularly pertinent when developing cross cutting policy in a dynamic environment. To add further complexity to the project, the Council was undergoing a radical reorganisation from the top down and the whole organisation appeared to be in a state of flux whilst trying to develop a long term strategy and find a structure and home that would embed the City of Nature within the organisation. To have developed the City of Nature Plan, have this adopted and find a 'home' within Housing and Inclusive Growth is a significant achievement.

Language and terminology have been raised by some participants and stakeholders as having been a barrier to participation, particularly in relation to the Children's Pilot. Whilst many of the terms are commonly used their meaning is open to interpretation and sometimes perceptions and understanding of terms was off-putting. For example *"we had to look at the wording we were using because if I was to say to a twelve year old what does green space mean to you, they'd probably look at me like what is she talking about ... actually just say to them 'do you go outside, do you go to the park with your friends' so really changing the wording we were using so that they could understand what we were doing"*. Finding simple ways to communicate what the project is about and what it is seeking to achieve, or at times what is being offered has presented some issues particularly during the early stages of project delivery. However, there are also notable successes such as the response from a wide range of participants to the 'Earth Stories' project.

As discussed above the Council has developed a macro-level Sustainable Funding Framework which will be applied to all major projects and investment decisions. Now that this model has been adopted, it will need some time to embed this within the organisation and have this established as normal operating procedure with appropriate monitoring and reporting mechanism in place to demonstrate the effectiveness in the longer term.

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator has sought to change the culture and the structure of the Council and to build external support to deliver long term positive change. There is evidence that the project has developed a cohort of 'Integration Champions' (now also referred to as Green Champions) across the Council and there are more people seeking to improve and enhance parks and green spaces within the Council than before the project commenced. However, at times the project has struggled to secure buy-in from all service areas. There is more work to be done to work with Housing and Inclusive Growth to develop policies and procedures (supported by appropriate financial valuation and management tools) to develop better place based solutions that recognise eco-system services and deliver Green Infrastructure benefits and deliver nature recovery.

In addition, the Mid-Point Review noted that *"buy-in from the Parks Team and the way the Parks Service fits into the planning and the transformation is not yet evident, either in what the operating structure will look like (though we understand a restructure will take place in due course) or whether and how they will be successfully and positively engaged with the proposed change of role and culture. This feels crucial to delivering the project"*. Qualitative evaluation and discussion with members of the parks service shows that there is still commitment to the Future Parks Accelerator project and its ambitions and a recognition that policy changes and new systems often take some time to deliver benefits. However, there is a sense that the tangible benefits that Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator has delivered are not immediately apparent and do not help address the day-to-day challenges many experience. The timetable for the restructure of the parks service has been extended, in order to allow more time to examine what a stronger, better resourced and more responsive service may look like and to allow engagement in this process with staff. The change in emphasis of the restructure, whilst positive, does not in the short term reduce uncertainty about the future. At the current time, it feels that a key element of the Future Parks Accelerator project is not yet in place.

6.3 Lessons Learnt

Having Dedicated Project Resources Has Been Critical to The Success of the Project

FPA funding has allowed the project to build a dedicated team with additional resources that are responsible for delivering the outcomes of the project. This is provided much-needed additional resources to both manage the project as well as coordinate and deliver the pilot projects and later develop the legacy plan: The City of Nature Plan.

Even having a small core team dedicated to working solely on an accelerator project can deliver significant benefits. Many stakeholders have commented positively that having a senior lead from outside the parks service, and with a background in public health, has given the project a higher corporate profile. In addition, many stakeholders spoke positively about the greater leadership that can be demonstrated here and the success in building a team of 'Green Champions' across the organisation.

The additional resources the FPA has provided has created dedicated resource and space to innovate, try new things and deliver test and learn projects. This is within the context of local authorities typically being risk averse and having limited resources, or freedom, to try new things without guaranteed or known outcomes.

Communicating the Scope of the Project

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator is an ambitious project seeking to deliver systems change over a short period of time within the dynamic environment of a large local authority that was also restructuring. Whilst the project set out defined aims and outcomes at the outset, the complexity of the project means that readily conveying what the project was seeking to achieve and to define succinctly what success would look like has been challenging.

During the Co-design phase there was extensive engagement activity with community based organisations and Birmingham residents to promote and explain the ambitions of the project and the Naturally Birmingham website has been updated regularly with new content. There was also a further focus on briefing sessions and other engagement activity within BCC. Regular newsletters have also been published, typically on a monthly basis, providing updates about activity.

The project has faced the challenge of trying to develop clear messages and ensure that these are understood by project partners and external stakeholders. This is for a project that seeks to deliver systems change and where the outcomes are uncertain. Trying to achieve clarity of messaging in this context to ensure that the ambition of the project is fully understood by all stakeholders, by its very nature challenging.

Build on Existing Structures and Partnerships

The project was originally going to look at developing a Foundation model to operate alongside BCC and internal partners and to harness greater citizen involvement. Given the context of the project as one of eight national FPA projects this ambition seems entirely reasonable.

However, it was apparent mid-way through the project that establishing a new model that did not recognise and complement the existing community networks and infrastructure would at best risk duplication and at worst risk competition or competing priorities developing. Recognising that the existing structures and community based organisations are already well established and that there are significant skills and capacity across many areas of the city was an important pivot point. Engagement with the voluntary and community sector, listening to concerns and jointly working to develop solutions that recognise local circumstances is critical to long term success. NBFPA can clearly demonstrate flexibility in this area and a commitment to working with the sector to co-design future models and structures that seek to deliver better outcomes for all parties. This has not necessarily been a straightforward or easy process, but from discussion with stakeholders there is a confidence that the model that has been developed is one that can deliver positive change, deliver greater citizen involvement and offer independence from BCC whilst supporting partnership working that adds value.

The Long Road to Sustainable Finance

A key ambition of Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator is to develop and implement a sustainable finance framework that ensures that the vision of the City of Nature Plan (and allied policy aims such as Route to Zero) and are sufficiently resourced to deliver the potential environmental, social and economic benefits. For many stakeholders this is the key challenge to be addressed following long periods of ever declining resources.

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator has been ambitious in seeking to change the current policies, procedures and tools that don't fully recognise the value of green infrastructure, eco-system services and public health benefits. There has been considerable progress in developing an overarching Sustainable Finance Framework and principles that support this long term goal. These innovations in local authority finance, appear to have had a positive reception, resulting in a greater understanding of the concepts and greater levels of support for sustainable finance in the longer term. The authority has now adopted the Sustainable Finance Framework and this will be applied at a macro level to major projects and investment decisions supporting longer term change.

What the project has been able to achieve is a policy commitment and allocation of £0.5m of Community Infrastructure Levy Funding to delivering the City of Nature Plan, £150,000 through the Commonwealth Games to support volunteer participation and changes to how sponsorship income can be used to support enhancing green spaces. In addition, a successful crowdfunding campaign has shown proof of concept for local fundraising for specific projects, and seed funding for the City of Nature Alliance has resulted in securing much greater sums for other local projects.

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator can demonstrate positive achievements at these different scales, and has laid the foundations for further change, however, there remains a long distance to travel to realise a truly sustainable funding model.

Strategic Alignment is Key to Delivering Lasting Change

A key feature of Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator has been around creating a greater understanding of the value of parks and green spaces and how investing in green infrastructure and nature can deliver against the organisation's policy goals. The project has invested time and resource in 'winning hearts and minds' and bringing about cultural change to create a team of Green Champions across Birmingham City Council and within partner organisations.

This has been underpinned by the development of policy and strategy through the City of Nature Plan that aligns with the Our Future City Plan, the Birmingham Development Plan, Corporate Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Embedding the work and legacy of Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator in policy and strategy is important since it established the foundations for further future change and builds in resilience and a mechanism for addressing changes in staffing and political leadership. It is positive to see that as part of the new Be Bold marketing campaign that Be Bold: Be Green forms one of the key strands.

Moving from Innovation to Business as Usual

Naturally Birmingham is a short, time-limited accelerator project. The key challenge is to take the learning and the outcomes from the innovation and move towards embedding this as business as usual. The project has now set out a transition and legacy model in the form of the City of Nature Plan focused on realising greater value of parks and green infrastructure and building social capacity, initially in Bordesley and Highgate and the 'top' five red wards.

Developing the City of Nature Plan, underpinned by the learning from the pilot projects and the development of the Environmental Justice Tool was the key project focus throughout the transition phase. This was in tandem with the development of the City of Nature Alliance and governance structures to provide a vehicle to deliver longer term change.

Capitalise on Participation in National Programmes and the Value this Brings

Participation in a national accelerator project has been noted by stakeholders as having brought kudos and prestige at a local level and has provided the opportunity to involve a range of senior stakeholders across the partner organisations. Participating in a national programme, that was subject to competitive bidding, has 'opened doors' and provided the opportunity to start conversations about the value of parks and open spaces, alignment with policy and strategy and how the future may look. It is unlikely that the degree of buy-in would have been achieved without the participation in a national programme and the resources that this provided to build a new dedicated project team.

In addition, the national Future Parks Accelerator programme has a well-defined structure with the Co-design Phase leading into a gateway review and then the Transition Phase. Interviews with stakeholders has identified that this process provides a good structure for developing and delivering test and learn projects and then embedding this learning and the key successes into models that can be taken forward. The role of the central FPA team in providing support and challenge has been viewed positively, as has the opportunity to meet with other projects and the wider FPA cohort to discuss project delivery and reflect on the learning.

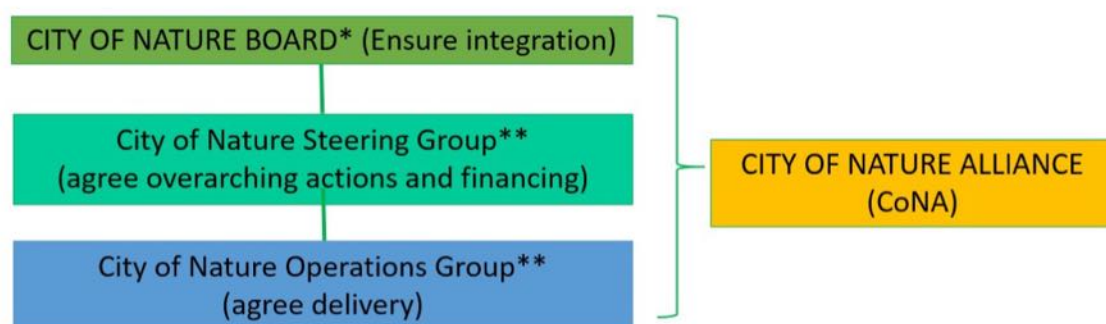
7 Project Legacy

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator can clearly demonstrate that through the Transition Phase the project has developed plans for the future and that these are embedded within Birmingham City Council and partner organisations. The learning gained as part of the Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator project now forms part of a new governance model for the natural environment, the City of Nature Plan which was adopted by Birmingham City Council in February 2022.

The City of Nature Plan is a direct response to the City of Nature theme within the Council's Our Future City Plan 2040. It goes beyond just parks to encompass all aspects of the natural environment in the city and people's engagement with it. This becomes a major strand within the Route to Zero Climate Emergency Plan and represents a substantive part of the city's adaptation response to climate change.

Naturally Birmingham Future Parks Accelerator was led by the project team located within Birmingham City Council Public Health. This was a short term measure to facilitate the delivery of the accelerator project. The City of Nature Plan is now 'owned' by Housing and Inclusive Growth alongside the Our Future City Plan, however delivery of the City of Nature requires a partnership approach with other service areas and external partners. The partnership approach is underpinned by the development of the City of Nature Alliance bringing together key voluntary and community based organisations across the city.

A new governance structure has been developed to oversee the delivery of the City of Nature.



Chaired by Cabinet Member for Parks and Streetscene

* Chaired by AD for Development who will bring together other ADs from across the Council and CoNA

The City of Nature Board will 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.

The City of Nature Steering Group will 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.

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.

This new governance arrangement for the city intends to achieve continuous and better integration of services and wider recognition of the value of preserving and improving the city's natural environment. 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 intended 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.

In terms of delivery, the City of Nature Plan is currently being implemented in Bordesley and Highgate ward to test the tools and develop effective implementation mechanisms and to develop social capacity.

Additional funding has also been made available through the national Future Parks Accelerator programme. Birmingham FPA 1.5 will develop Green Infrastructure Strategies for the city centre and for the East Birmingham Regeneration Initiative.

8 Conclusions

The Evaluation Questions set out as part of the development of the original proposal are set out below and addressed in turn.

1. What have the 4 pilot themes achieved with respect to how green spaces are being used differently?

The project has delivered the following benefits through the Pilot projects:

- development of skills showcase (online and physical) to highlight the range of jobs available in green spaces and how to access them;
- finding new ways to connect residents to nature through virtual means and improving their wellbeing through doing so;
- development of a green spaces training pack for use by mentors supporting our most vulnerable young people in the city;
- embedding green space thinking within the Early Years team at the Council, and in settings, improving awareness and understanding of nature for children;
- developed a Little Green Champions and Young Green Champions digital pack for use by education settings and families;
- running a Green Champions leadership course for 80 Birmingham citizens and employees to support them in leading for nature.

2. Which key partners are being engaged and how successfully? What makes the engagement successful?

The City of Nature Alliance has widespread support from a range of key organisations that are active in the city. These include:

- Witton Lodge Community Association
- The Active Well-being Society
- Birmingham Open Spaces Forum

- The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country
- Birmingham Children's Trust
- RSPB
- Canals and River Trust
- Birmingham Tree People
- Legacy WM

Key organisations have signed up to the Terms of Reference and the Memorandum of Understanding for the Alliance.

The Model has been developed with reference to the Harvard Business Review which recommends five principles for making an alliance work:

1. Focus less on defining the Business Plan and more on how you'll work together.
2. Develop metrics that deliver not only alliance goals but alliance progress.
3. Instead of trying to eliminate differences, leverage differences to create value and impact.
4. Go beyond formal governance structures to encourage collaborative behaviour.
5. Spend as much time on internal stakeholders as external ones.
6. **What building blocks are being put in place to ensure the 25-year strategy is successful?**

The City of Nature Plan is structured around:

- A Green City - We will ensure that green spaces, nature and the environment are safe, clean and sustainably managed
- A Healthy City - We will make sure every citizen in Birmingham can access green spaces to improve their health and wellbeing as part of the foundations of a Good Life

- A Fair City – We will make sure every citizen has access to good quality green space wherever they live; that there is fair access to green jobs and that our workforce reflects our diverse communities
- An Involved City - Citizens will be able to know, love and protect green spaces and nature.
- A Valued City – We will develop an innovative funding model that seeks to use public funding to lever-in additional resources as part of a 'blended' finance model.

The delivery of the City of Nature Plan will be overseen through a new governance structure comprising a City of Nature Board, Steering Group and Operations Group.

The project will complement and contribute to the delivery of the West Midlands National Park.

7. Is there public awareness of the 25-year strategy and what is the response?

The City of Nature Plan was based on extensive engagement during the Co-design Phase to identify key issues affecting the use of green space and barriers that affect their use. Ten community conversations took place with 117 people more generally about the project.

Public consultation on the City of Nature vision included:

- Information webpage created on the Naturally Birmingham Website which included:
 - 5 videos to convey main messages
 - Summary Document
 - Online survey
- PowerPoint slide deck presentation created
- Sharing weblink via FPA and BOSF newsletter distribution and via social media; Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.
- 3 x Online Public Consultation Conversations in February and March 2023 attended by 26 people.

The online survey gained 50 responses with 88% of respondents agreed with the City of Nature approach outlined in the Plan. Only 4 responses were negative, with the primary concerns that: the plan did not sufficiently encourage residents to take action in their gardens (as tenants or homeowners); a perception that the plan did not address lack of green space in deprived wards; and a further comment about a lack of detail for how the plan would be delivered.

8. How are perceptions of parks and green spaces changing both in the community / public as well as within BCC staff for each of the four pilot themes?

Parks and green spaces now enjoy a higher profile within Birmingham City Council and the City of Nature Plan embeds green infrastructure and nature within the core business of Birmingham City Council. This Evaluation Report provides evidence that the perception of parks and green spaces has been impacted positively.

9. How is the approach to parks and green spaces changing within Birmingham City Council?

Birmingham City Council has adopted new approaches to managing parks and green spaces as part of wider Green Infrastructure and as a fundamental part of the response to climate change, biodiversity and Covid recovery.

Appendix A

Environmental Justice Audit Tool Case Study

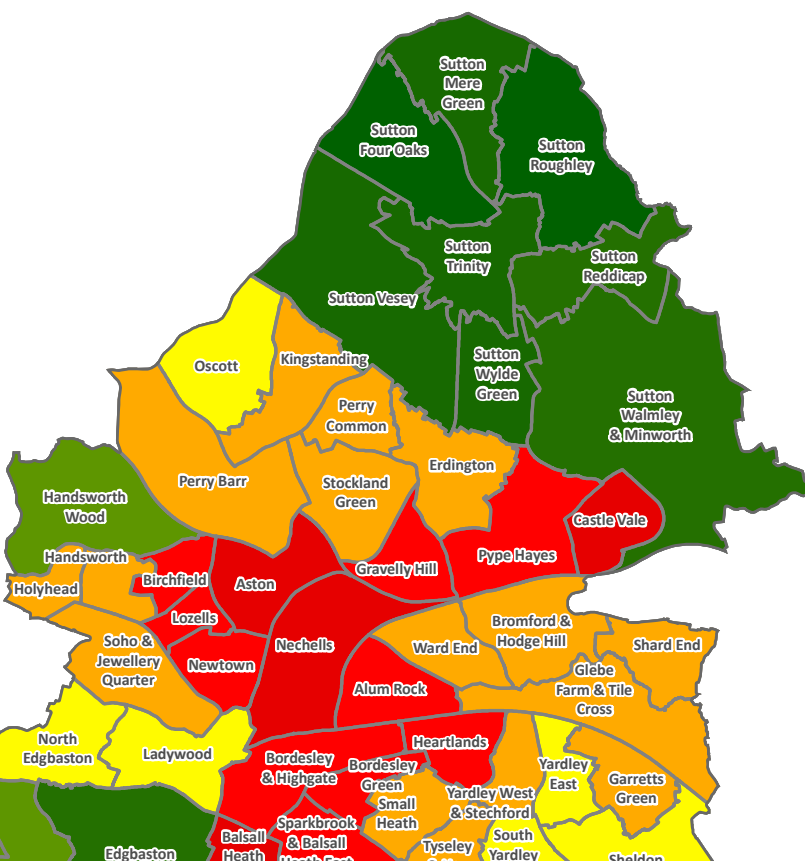
Environmental Justice Tool

Project aims and objectives

The Naturally Birmingham FPA programme aimed to provide a new context for the natural and green environment in Birmingham by establishing a common thread across the agendas of climate emergency, ecological emergency, and the Covid-19 global pandemic.

Initially a site audit tool for planning and thinking during the co-design stage of the FPA programme, this evolved into the development of a wider Environmental Justice Tool that linked environmental quality with demographic data highlighting social inequalities.

The audit results would allow the Council to know where resources needed to be prioritised and provide evidence for developing further actions and policies. An Environmental Justice Map which considers access to green space, health inequalities (through excess years of life lost), flood risk, urban heat island effect and the indices of multiple deprivation was produced to show where in the city these compound issues are being felt most. The analysis was carried out at a Ward level for all 69 wards in Birmingham.



Environmental Justice is about ensuring that there is an equal distribution of environmental benefits, resources and opportunities across society and the natural world. This can be achieved when the natural world is used to create quality environments that both support our health and wellbeing and help to mitigate the effects of climate change.

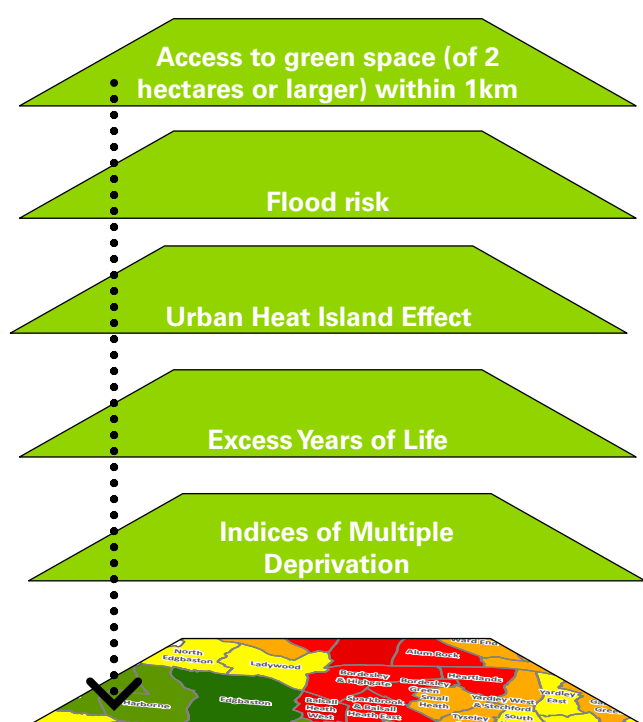
Why was the project important?

People living in more deprived areas have poorer health and wellbeing, poorer educational outcomes, poorer access to work, poorer air quality, and suffer more from the impact of climate change. The impact of Covid-19 on cities has exposed the inequity of access to urban green spaces and nature and it is these same communities who are more likely to face increased risk to climate change and its related effects and consequences.

Access to green space across the city is not equitable and some sections of Birmingham's diverse population of over 1 million people face barriers in accessing green spaces, participating in activities, or making full use of facilities on offer and the multi-faceted benefits this can provide.

The development of an audit tool that included but went beyond the IMD (Indices of Multiple Deprivation) to include additional indicators would allow the Council to set new priorities to reduce the gaps in provision and increase Environmental Justice in the City.

Those areas of the city where there is least environmental justice for citizens living there are shown on the Environmental Justice Map in red. Access to green space is lowest for these 'red wards' - these are areas are urban heat islands, a flood risk, have high levels of deprivation, and have worse health and wellbeing. The Green wards are converse to this. The City of Nature vision will address this inequality by taking those parks and open spaces within red wards, and through collaborative and co-ordinated actions, help to improve their quality and support the ward to turn green.



What was trialled and tested as part of the project?

The FPA programme allowed the Council to look at how other cities around the world have responded to this issue of unequal access to green space. The approach of combining existing IMD with other indicators was initially piloted in the East Birmingham Corridor, as well as ecological mapping and testing the national DEFRA Green Infrastructure tools.

From looking at similar responses by cities around the world and trailing the metrics, five additional indicators for calculating Environmental Justice scores for each ward in the City were chosen:

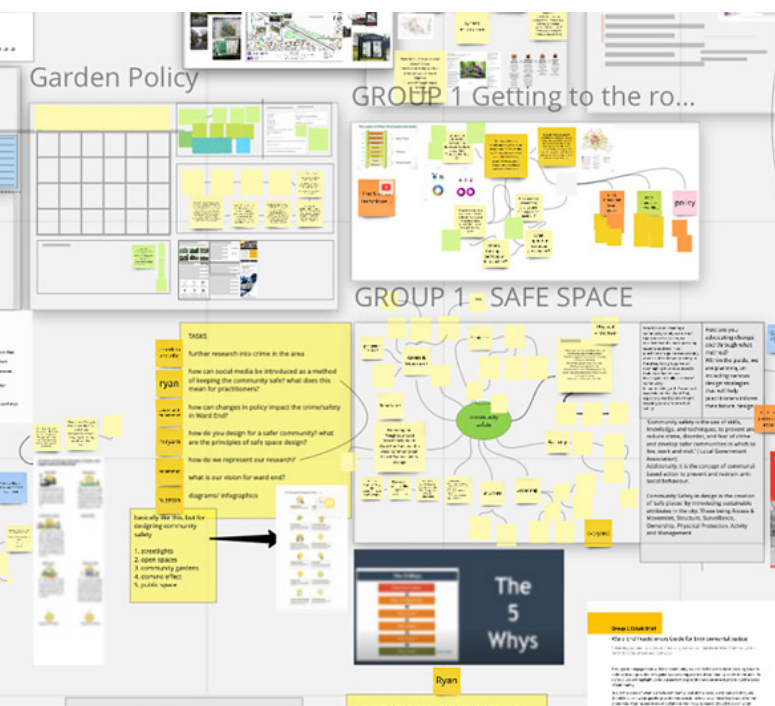
Activities to engage people

In summer 2021, the Council worked as a project partner to Co.LAB, an interdisciplinary design and research initiative within the Birmingham School of Architecture & Design, Birmingham City University. In collaboration with the Council, students examined frameworks for Environment Justice and Green Infrastructure to improve the quality of life and environment specifically for the Ward End Community in the north-east of the City.

As a result of the Co.LAB project, students produced a 'Practitioner's Guide: Frameworks for Environmental Justice'. The project allowed the students to look at:

- what defines Environmental Justice;
- other city's concepts of Environmental Justice;
- the need for and identifiers of Environmental Justice
- barriers to considering Environmental Justice for practitioners

A toolkit was then developed based on the Ward End community case study.



Key achievements

Birmingham is the first city in the UK to develop a tool to highlight the inequalities in accessing green space alongside other key measures and produce an Environmental Justice Map which considers access to green space, health inequalities, flood risk, urban heat island effect and the indices of multiple deprivation.

The application of the Environmental Justice Tool has provide new evidence to set new service priorities for the Parks Service, and for the Council it has been one of the building blocks of the 'City of Nature' vision. The information derived from the audit and mapping

has fed into the Council's 25 year City of Nature plan which aims to fast track all parks and open spaces identified as 'red wards' i.e. having less Environmental Justice, and has set a new direction for city policy in an urgent response to climate change, nature recovery and people's wellbeing. The plan aims to move these Wards from their current standard to reach a standard that will directly address climate change, nature recovery and wellbeing. At a site level this is being assessed using the new Birmingham City Fair Parks Standard which will be applied to highlight actions that need to be taken to raise quality and turn red wards green.

Evidence to show success

Six wards identified as 'red wards' as a result of the Environmental Justice Tool will have the Fair Parks Standard applied to them and action plans put in place. This is already being piloted in the Bordesley and Highgate Ward where an action plan and costings for improvements have been put together.

Following the pilot in Bordesley and Highgate, the use of the Fair Parks Standard will be rolled out to five more red wards: Castle Vale, Nechells, Gravelly Hill, Balsall Heath West, and Castle Vale.

Challenges and barriers

One of the main challenges in developing the tool was selecting and testing the right options to develop a resource that was meaningful and drew on existing data and standards. For example, for measuring access to green space, the tool was initially going to be aligned with Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt). However, this was changed to use the standard set out in the Birmingham Development Plan of access to a green space (of 2 hectares or larger) within 1km.

It also became apparent that for the Tool to have a practical application at a site level and to effect change, the Fair Park Standard needed to be developed and so further resource was required to create this.



Garrison Lane Park,
Bordesley & Highgate Ward

Future plans and actions

The Environmental Justice Audit methodology has been built upon via the development of 'Birmingham Fair Parks Standard. This standard aims to increase environmental justice in terms of the city's parks offer to citizens by assessing each park at a local level against the same 5 city wide themes in the City of Nature Plan. These are:

- **Fair:** is it welcoming, accessible, clean and safe?
- **Green:** are there different trees and plants, are there habitats for wildlife, is it managed sustainably?
- **Healthy:** are there walking routes, quiet areas, activities, is the park used for social prescriptions; and play value?
- **Involved:** can you find out what's happening in your park, can you influence what is happening?
- **Valued:** do we know the worth of what the park provides, is that shared, are there ways to raise extra funds?

Over the course of the 25-year period of the Plan, all parks will be assessed against the Birmingham Fair Parks Standard and action plans will be created for all those not meeting the Standard.

This approach will first be trialled in one of the red wards – Bordesley and Highgate Ward. It will then be subsequently piloted in five other red wards to bring together council departments and community organisations to focus on the green spaces in these wards.

The Bordesley and Highgate Ward pilot will be delivered by the City of Nature Alliance which was also an outcome from the FPA programme.

Work is also being done to see how the information in the Environmental Justice Tool can be converted into a Climate Risk Assessment for use in development decisions and to highlight mitigation measures.

Lessons Learnt

Breaking down silos

As with the NBFPA programme as a whole, the Environmental Justice Tool was not just about the Parks Service or led by Parks people. It was essential to involve and engage staff across the Council, although due to Covid-19 it was not always easy to keep the Park Service engaged throughout the process. This will be imperative going forward as the Parks Service will be working much more closely with Health, Housing and other parts of the Council (and vice versa) to deliver actions on the ground. Working with GIS teams was also vital as the Tool became a very technical piece of work, but one that is now robust and transferable elsewhere.

Being responsive to research

The FPA programme allowed the project team to be very responsive and evolve and change as opportunities arose. Although the programme did not set out to create an Environmental Justice Tool, it came out of the research and process, and became a very effective way the Council to see the city in a different light.

Appendix B

City of Nature Alliance Case Study

City of Nature Alliance



Project aims and objectives

Birmingham City Council (BCC) aimed to establish an alliance of existing organisations to help deliver actions on the ground in parks with this becoming a city-wide approach to achieving environmental justice across Birmingham. The Birmingham City of Nature (BcoN) Alliance is the new vehicle for citizen engagement to help support the delivery of the City of Nature Plan.

The objectives of the BCoN Alliance are to:

- Continue to identify organisations across Birmingham that deliver outcomes in line with the aims of the council's 25 year plan for parks and invite them to join the Alliance membership to help with the delivery of actions.
- Establish and maintain a forum for BCoN Alliance members to come together.
- Communicate information between BCoN members, communities, and other stakeholders.
- Maintain relationships with people interested / involved with the project, including but not limited to volunteers.
- Help deliver opportunities for volunteers to be involved in site development and management not already resourced.
- Deliver educational establishment engagement not already resourced.
- Deliver community engagement activities.
- Identify Community Leads (Green Champions), who are individuals willing to train to lead community activities on a voluntary basis.
- Help to identify funding opportunities and investment to develop a sustainable funding model for the delivery framework including but not limited to, paying for assistance with bid writing for any established groups.
- Delivery of actions required to bring parks up to the Birmingham Fair Standard - even in areas that do not have established Friends of groups. The standard aims to increase environmental justice by improving the city's parks offer to citizens.

CITY OF NATURE



BCoN Alliance Vision

" Working together The City of Nature Alliance aims to support all Birmingham's green spaces to be the best they can be. That could mean connecting more people with their park, reducing social isolation or providing eco-therapy through social prescribing. It might be a well-loved feature of a park that needs protection or repair or a project that will enhance nature and biodiversity.

Working together with a growing community of passionate Green Champions, the City of Nature Alliance strives to ensure that all people are able to discover their own personal connections to parks and green spaces as places to meet, play, learn, grow, breathe, and enjoy nature – together. Because they don't just stand for where Birmingham has been – they inspire us to see how we go forward. "

Why was the project important?

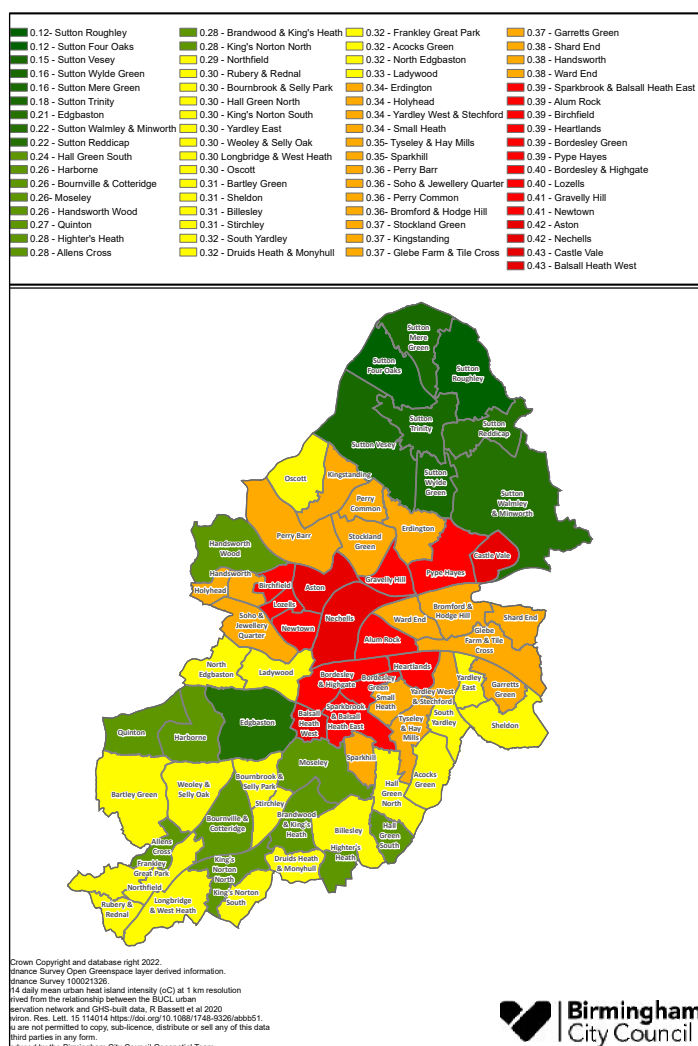
Parks and green spaces, including blue infrastructure and water-based assets, provide considerable value. Together, these are sustaining the city's biodiversity; improving and sustaining health & wellbeing; community cohesion & quality of life; as well as mitigating and adapting to climate change. However, access to green space across Birmingham is not equitable and some sections of the city's diverse population of over 1 million people face barriers in accessing green spaces, participating in activities, or making full use of facilities on offer.

Birmingham is the first city in the UK to develop a tool to highlight the inequalities in accessing green space alongside other key measures and produce an Environmental Justice Map which considers access to green space, health inequalities (through excess years of life lost), flood risk, urban heat island effect and the indices of multiple deprivation. The map

identifies "red" wards which have the lowest environmental justice.

To address these inequalities and the significant challenges posed by climate change and further highlighted by Covid-19, the council recognised it needed to put in place new ways of working across the organisation. Climate change adaptation and addressing environmental justice will require new leadership and governance and action across the whole organisation. This will need to be backed by a new funding model based around developing sustainable funding from a range of sources

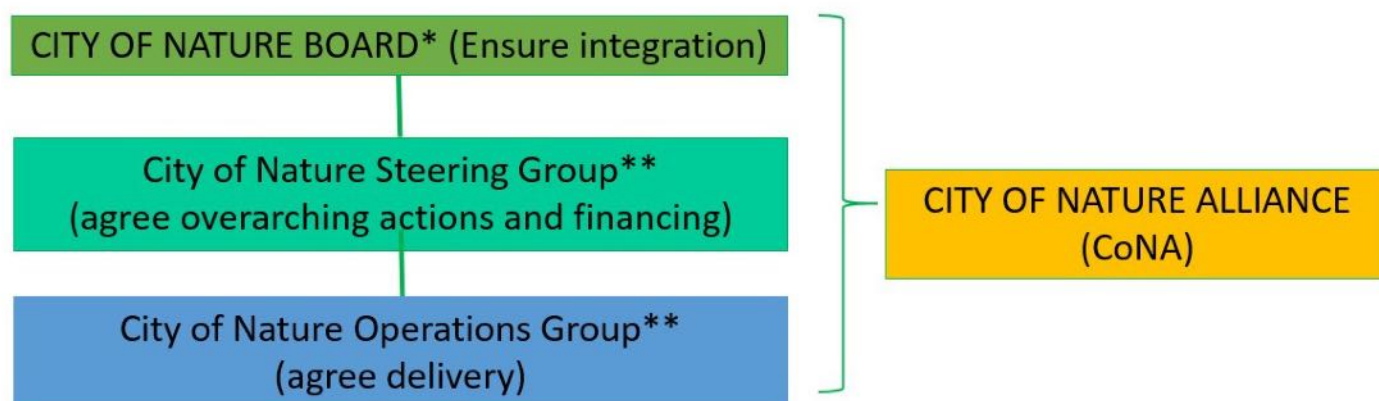
A partnership approach with external organisations was seen as critical and so to underpin this the adoption of a new way to support communities to be more engaged through the Birmingham City of Nature Alliance was developed.



What was trialled and tested as part of the project?

During the co-design phase of the FPA programme the feasibility of the Parks Foundation and initial work to review options was undertaken. Engagement work was also undertaken with Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF), a network organisation that brings together all the community groups in Birmingham with an interest in green open spaces to support volunteers.

The FPA programme proposals originally included establishing a Parks Foundation charity. However, as a result of consulting with FPA partner organisations and considering feedback from public consultations, a collaborative alliance approach was concluded as being the best option for Birmingham to bring together the many organisations already operating in green spaces across the city. The Alliance would develop a new vehicle for collaborative working that builds upon existing structures and organisations and adds value to them and their outcomes. Proposals for an Alliance and how it could be effectively structured were refined during the transition phase of the programme.



Chaired by Cabinet Member for Parks and Streetscene

* Chaired by AD for Development who will bring together other ADs from across the Council and CoNA

Activities to engage people

Initial consultation with partners was undertaken during the co-design phase which resulted in the conclusion that an Alliance rather than a Parks Foundation was most appropriate for the City.

The process of establishing the Alliance took place via a series of workshops through spring/summer 2021. Partners were equally actively engaged and involved in how the Alliance should function and be structured and the next steps to take it forward.

By the end of summer 2021 a memorandum of understanding was drafted, and an action plan for establishing the Alliance was created, including having a project manager to facilitate a BCoN Alliance Establishment project in place by winter 2021.

Key achievements

The Alliance is now embedded in the Birmingham City of Nature 25 year plan as a policy “to provide a new civic voice and engagement mechanism.”

Evidence to show success

The Alliance has also begun work on applying the Birmingham Fair Parks Standard in one of the ‘red’ wards identified using the Environmental Justice. A five year action plan with costings has been developed. Following this pilot, the Alliance will work on increasing the quality of greenspaces in a further five red wards.

Challenges and barriers

- Covid-19 – impacted ways of working and slowed some delivery, although this also offered opportunities for digital engagement
- Workstreams and pilots developing at different speeds
- Being responsive to new opportunities with limited resources and spinning lots of plates.
- Effective communication and time to develop relationships, both internally and externally.

BCC overcame these barriers by developing a series of digital workshops in place of in-person events, and drawing on the value of parks that was being highlighted during the pandemic to engage with partners and organisations.



Future plans and actions

A BCoN Alliance Establishment Project has been developed to fund officer time in partner organisations to help develop the Alliance and deliver a framework for the city's green spaces based on the five key themes of A Green City; A Healthy City; A fair City; An Involved City; and a Valued City.

This approach is being piloted initially in one of the "red" wards, Bordesley and Highgate Ward, identified in the Council's Environmental Justice Audit. Funding has been secured from the Commonwealth Games Legacy fund for the further development of the Alliance Model and delivery of the pilot in the Bordesley and Highgate Ward. The next steps for members of the Alliance are to continue to work on the objectives of the Alliance and to achieve the following outcomes:

- Action plan for delivery of the pilot in Bordesley and Highgate Ward, including identification of existing resources to support delivery.
- Action plan for delivery in 5 other "red" wards.
- Identify, engage, and involve Green Champions for each of the parks in Bordesley and Highgate Ward. Green Champions are

members of the community who will help deliver actions on site and or advocate for environmental justice and green spaces. They may be volunteers or professionals such as teachers who have a green focus.

- Community Involvement activities with early years children and local schools.
- Community involvement activities for individuals and families including Healthy Parks, walks, exercise, and mental health mindfulness activities.
- Physical landscape improvements including wildflower areas and tree planting appropriate for each site – being developed through the action planning process.
- Sustainable Finance Strategy to ensure there is funding to keep communications, engagement, volunteer point of contact and CRM in operation. A proposal of how the Alliance could raise money for the 5 subsequent wards to deliver some elements of place and people.
- Communications Plan and delivery to engage local residents and businesses.

Lessons Learnt

Building on pilots

The pilot is allowing the Alliance to work out how partners will work together to deliver improvements on the ground and to evolve this before rolling it out and applying it to other Wards.

Allowing for different starting points

When forging partnerships and talking with members of the community, it was important to remember that not everyone is fully aware yet of the multiple benefits that parks can provide.

Direction of communication

The Alliance has needed to work across all hierarchies to connect into communities and change the usual direction of communication and decision making to find out what groups want and need.

Appendix C

Earth Stories Case Study



Birmingham
City Council

EARTH STORIES SUMMARY REPORT: MARCH 2022

Authors: Daniel Lloyd, Hayat Nur, Adrian Spray, Debbie Needle, Alex Anderson, Sarah-Jane Hampton and Humera Sultan



Made possible with

Heritage
Fund



**NATURALLY
BIRMINGHAM:
FUTURE PARKS
ACCELERATOR**

ABSTRACT

As part of the development of a 25-year City of Nature Plan, it was essential we found a way to capture the views of local and diverse community groups regarding their green spaces. We also wanted to go beyond asking the usual suspects or asking people to complete a survey – so we took a different approach.

Our parks are more than just patches of greenery. They are places where so many of our memories were made, and where so many more will be formed in the future. From childhood to adulthood, green spaces are where we connect with both nature and each other, shaping memories that last a lifetime. We wanted to hear these Earth Stories from our residents, and collected them as below:

- Many of our stories were submitted to us directly via email in response to our call to action, most of these took the form of a short story/ recollection typed out by a resident, but others took the form of photographs/drawings, testimonials, videos, and blog posts.
- Residents could submit their Earth Story via an online questionnaire to input their demographic data, followed by their Earth Story in a free form text box. There was also the option to submit the story as an image, video, or PDF file via this option.
- To aid us in reaching underrepresented groups, we offered small grants via the local Council grants process to specialist community organisations who were better equipped to engage with such residents.

Our 247 stories came from people with a wide range of backgrounds – not typical of usual green space respondents:

- 51% under the age of 30. Ages ranging from under 10 to over 80.
- An almost perfect 50/50 split across respondents.
- 55% of respondents representing BAME backgrounds.
- 70% of responses coming from Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities.
- Nearly 50% of responses came from people with physical/mental health conditions.
- 4% of stories collected were from people from LGBT communities.

Analysing stories of varying formats from 247 residents is challenging. To collate and compare such a broad range of information necessitated the use of qualitative analysis to help categorise the data into more manageable 'chunks' for review.

The key themes that came out are summarised below and were woven into our City of Nature Plan:

- **Environmental value:** The role of our parks in enhancing biodiversity and offsetting the impacts of Climate Change
- **Community value:** The vital role our green spaces play as community and social hubs.
- **Future aspirations:** The clear message from our residents that our parks and green spaces must be protected and enhanced for generations to come.
- **Covid-19 impacts:** The newfound appreciation of the value of our green spaces throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Health & wellbeing:** The benefits of green spaces to physical and mental health.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Naturally Birmingham Team would like to thank all participants who shared their fantastic stories, experiences, and memories with us; without you, this work would not be possible. We would also like to thank all the community groups who worked with us to collect these wonderful stories – Black Arts Forum, Stechford Village Neighbourhood Forum, Welsh House Farm Green Grafters, The Friends of Georges' Park, Footsteps, Northfield Arts Forum, Queen Alexandra College, Over 50s Go Getters, Stirchley Snowflakes Festival, Norton Hall and Brownfield Road Allotment Garden Association as well as all those who have shared their earth stories via our blog page:

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

We would also like to thank our funders, Heritage Lottery Fund and the National Trust, as well as Karen Cheney, Ruby Dahya and Birmingham Voluntary Sector Council (BVSC) too for their help.



CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Page 2

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Page 3

INTRODUCTION

Page 5

METHODOLOGY

Page 6

FINDINGS

Page 10

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Page 15

INTRODUCTION

The Naturally Birmingham Programme is one of seven UK cities to be part of the national Future Parks Accelerator funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Trust. Birmingham City Council received funding in 2019 to find ways to embed the value of nature across the whole organisation and within local communities. As part of this, it was essential we found a way to capture the views of local and diverse community groups regarding their green spaces.

Our parks are more than just patches of greenery. They are places where so many of our memories were made, and where so many more will be formed in the future. From childhood to adulthood, green spaces are where we connect with both nature and each other, shaping memories that last a lifetime.

We wanted to hear these stories from our residents. Each of Birmingham's 600-plus parks has a memory attached to it and knowing how these green spaces make our residents feel - good or bad, is essential to the creation of our City of Nature Delivery Plan. Our 'Earth Stories' project collected 247 memories, experiences, and thoughts for the future from our residents - giving us a fantastic insight into how our parks are used, and how they have impacted on our residents' lives. With the aid of a range of community partners we were also able to gather stories from a range of oft-underrepresented groups to help highlight the barriers that many sections of our population face.

The fantastic variety of experiences that were shared with us highlighted just how different not only our individual parks are, but how people interact with these spaces. We received stories that covered a huge range of topics, from beloved childhood memories of a first cricket game, to finding a new appreciation of nature during daily lockdown walks. It was clear throughout the course of this project that the residents of Birmingham hold their parks close to their hearts, and that it is the duty of the Council to protect and enhance them for generations to come.

Throughout the course of the Naturally Birmingham project, we have experienced time and time again the importance of stories (and storytelling) in championing green spaces and nature. We all know the benefits of spending time outdoors, walking, or connecting with nature, but relating this to people's lived experiences and memories is so much more powerful than listing facts and statistics that we often just block out day by day. The Earth Stories project has been vital in our work to put parks at the forefront of several related, but often unconnected agendas: Children's Education and Care, Health and Wellbeing, Employment and Skills, Governance, and Finance - sometimes all it takes is a story. We also wanted to use an approach that would be inclusive and accessible enabling the voices of our city's diverse communities to be heard. This has allowed us to collect stories from a range of participants and audiences that do not usually participate through more traditional forms of consultation.

People need parks and parks need people.

METHODOLOGY

RATIONALE

Traditionally when gathering data around use of green spaces the focus has been on quantitative data gathering, how many people visit parks, how many times a week for how long. Or very directed data gathering, “Why do you visit the park?” and answers are from a dropdown list. Using story telling as a method of collecting data allows collection to be focussed on qualitative data instead and gives control of the sharing of data completely to the person sharing it.

Why stories?

Stories are fascinating and they are one of the best ways to capture our imagination. From childhood to adulthood, people are attracted to stories and the lessons they teach, the journeys made, and the knowledge gained. They allow us to feel what something was like and to empathise with the storyteller.

Stories celebrate the fact that people are social creatures with language as their means of communication. So, essentially, storytelling is the oldest form of knowledge transfer. People have been telling stories ever since the spoken language evolved, and possibly even before through sign language and drawings - with the Chauvet cave in France being the oldest representation of stories found thus far dating back to approximately 36,000 years ago.

Initially, stories functioned to tell of danger, set examples, or just relate events, but they also lead to attempts to explain the seemingly unexplainable through fairy tales and fiction.

Stories providing qualitative data

Qualitative data is information which comes from observation, description or other non-numerical sources. Stories providing words are a common form of qualitative data, which, unlike quantitative data can't be counted. The data requested from participants comprises people's opinions and views expressed in their own words. The qualitative data collected also includes what people told collectors in interviews or focus groups, videos or photographs, and through other means including poems, drawings and photographs.

Every item of qualitative data will be unique, so we weren't able to compare them to each other directly like the quantitative data from surveys. But we still analysed sets of statements and narratives together to find themes and patterns to gain a deeper understanding of how green spaces may be affecting people.

METHODOLOGY

COLLECTION

We collected our 'Earth Stories' via a series of methods. We announced our plans for the project in early 2021 and began an open call for people to submit their experiences. All submissions were collected in accordance with data privacy laws and anonymity was preserved where required/desired.

Direct Submissions

Many of our stories were submitted to us directly via email in response to our call to action, most of these took the form of a short story/ recollection typed out by a resident, but others took the form of photographs/drawings, testimonials, videos, and blog posts.

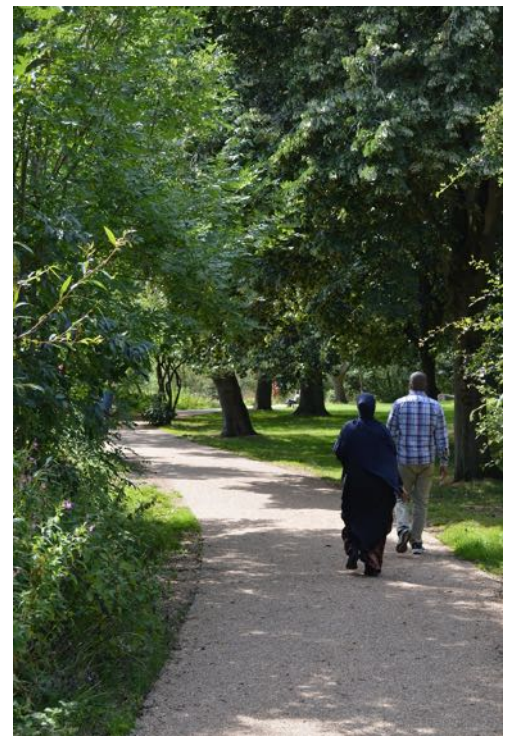
Online Survey

We also provided the option for residents to submit their Earth Story via an online questionnaire – this method allowed respondents to input their demographic data, followed by their Earth Story in a free form text box. There was also the option to submit the story as an image, video, or PDF file via this option.

Targeted collection alongside community groups

A key outcome for this work was to gain insights from communities that are often underrepresented in matters relating to green spaces and the natural environment. To aid us in reaching these groups, we offered small grants via the local Council grants process to specialist community organisations who were better equipped to engage with such residents, which included:

- Particular ethnic groups (from Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Arab, Chinese, Eastern European (including Polish community and Roma Gypsy communities), Black African – Caribbean descent)
- The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community
- Young people (under the age of 16)
- People with disabilities, as per the social model of disability
- Faith groups (Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Jewish and Buddhist)



We issued these organisations with a small grant to aid in the collection process, the stories were then returned to us via the methods above.

METHODOLOGY

ANALYSIS

Collecting stories of varying formats from almost 250 residents is not what you might call a 'usual' dataset. To collate and compare such a large range of information necessitated the use of qualitative analysis to help categorise the data into more manageable 'chunks' for review.

Process

Qualitative, or thematic analysis is an iterative process that is extensively used by researchers when dealing with qualitative (i.e. non-numeric) data. A series of collate-review-reflect phases are used to gradually familiarise and categorise large, subjective datasets into smaller 'themes' to allow for trends to be identified.

Preparation

Once the collection phase of the project ended, we organised and prepared the data for analysis – sorting direct submissions and extracting data from surveys. Demographic information was separated and analysed separately. We also performed a brief review of each story to check for any duplicates and to allow ourselves an initial familiarisation with the data.

Transcription

As several of our submissions came in photo or video format, the information had to be transcribed into a standard format. In most cases this involved inputting the text or speech into a standard word processing format to allow for easier review.

Familiarisation

The next stage of the process involved deeper familiarisation with the data. This involved a closer analysis of each story, or a 'sweeping review' of all the submissions we had received. The aim of this stage was to observe and make notes of the initial themes and categories that were emerging in the data, as well as identify any gaps or limitations that were present. This was the first step in developing a coding structure that would enable us to analyse the data in full.

Forming a coding structure

After familiarising ourselves with the data, we were able to start to form a coding structure. This involved a series of cycles aimed at reviewing the submissions and identifying key themes and categories that started to emerge. This started with assigning 'codes' (identifiers) to important statements or experiences in each story, and these codes later grew into 'categories', and then 'themes' - grouping similar sets of identifiers over several review cycles, increasing levels of inference and relevance with time. These cycles were continued until a final set of themes and codes were agreed; this allowed us to view the data at varying levels of detail by tallying the occurrence of certain codes, categories or themes.

METHODOLOGY

QA Coding

An abridged version of our coding structure can be seen below:

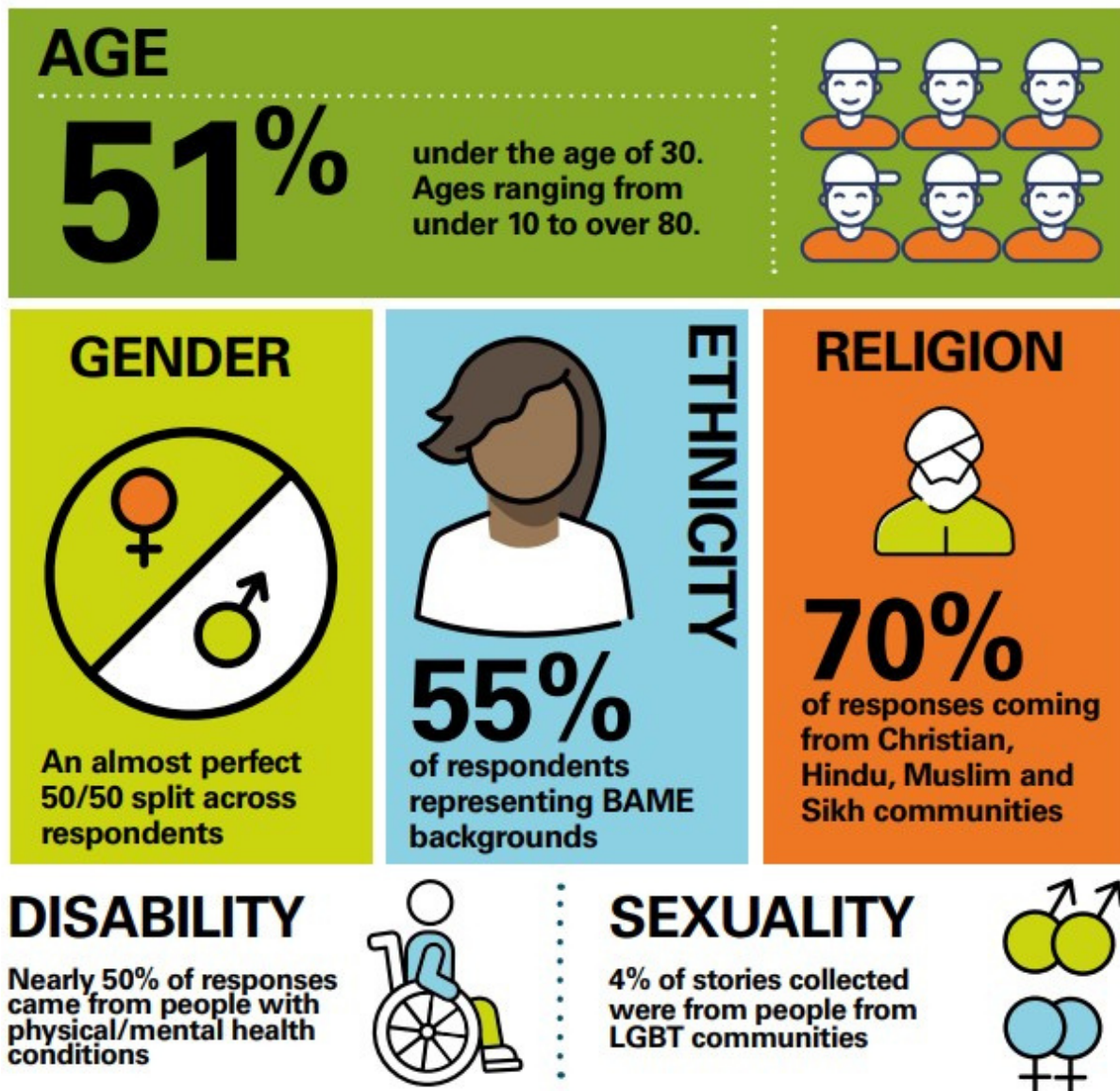
Theme	Category (Subsection)
Health & Wellbeing	Physical Wellbeing/Physical activity Mental health/ headspace/ calm Nature connectedness
Social Cohesion & Community Integration	Socialising / meeting friends & neighbours Joining in with events/ activities Volunteer participation
Memories and Experiences	Childhood memories Adulthood memories New experiences/ New activities
Economic Benefits	Improves local area/ land value New skills/ employment
Environmental Benefits	Living Environment Physical Environment
Future Aspirations	Preserve and improve green spaces Reducing physical barriers Reducing socio economic barriers
Covid-19	General mention of pandemic Positive impact due to Covid-19 Negative impact due to Covid-19

FINDINGS

DATA

Demographic Data

Ensuring we spoke to as many people from varied backgrounds as possible was really important to us in this project. All too often the voices that we need to hear the most are not given the chance to express their views and experiences, and this is something we wanted to change when undertaking our Earth Stories project. To aid us in this, we worked alongside community organisations in Birmingham to specifically target traditionally underrepresented groups in green space sectors which really helped us hear from a broad range of individuals. A summary of the demographics of those who shared their stories with us can be found below:



FINDINGS

In-depth breakdown:

Note – submitting demographic information was optional, and a number of participants chose to withhold this information.

Age Range	%
0-9	0.7
10-19	23.1
20-29	28.6
30-39	11.6
40-49	8.2
50-59	10.9
60-69	12.9
70-79	3.4
80+	0.7

Responses: 147

Gender	%
Female	47.7
Male	52.3

Responses: 149

Sexual orientation	%
Bisexual	1.5
Gay/Lesbian	0.8
Heterosexual / Straight	86.4
Other	1.5
Prefer not to say	9.8

Responses: 132

Ethnicity	%
Asian or Asian British	32.4
Black or Black British	20.4
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	3.5
White: British or non-British	40.1
Prefer not to say	3.5

Responses: 142

Religion	%
Christian (all denominations)	38.1
Hindu	1.4
Muslim	29.5
No religion/Agnostic	20.9
Sikh	1.4
Other	2.9
Prefer not to say	5.8

Responses: 139

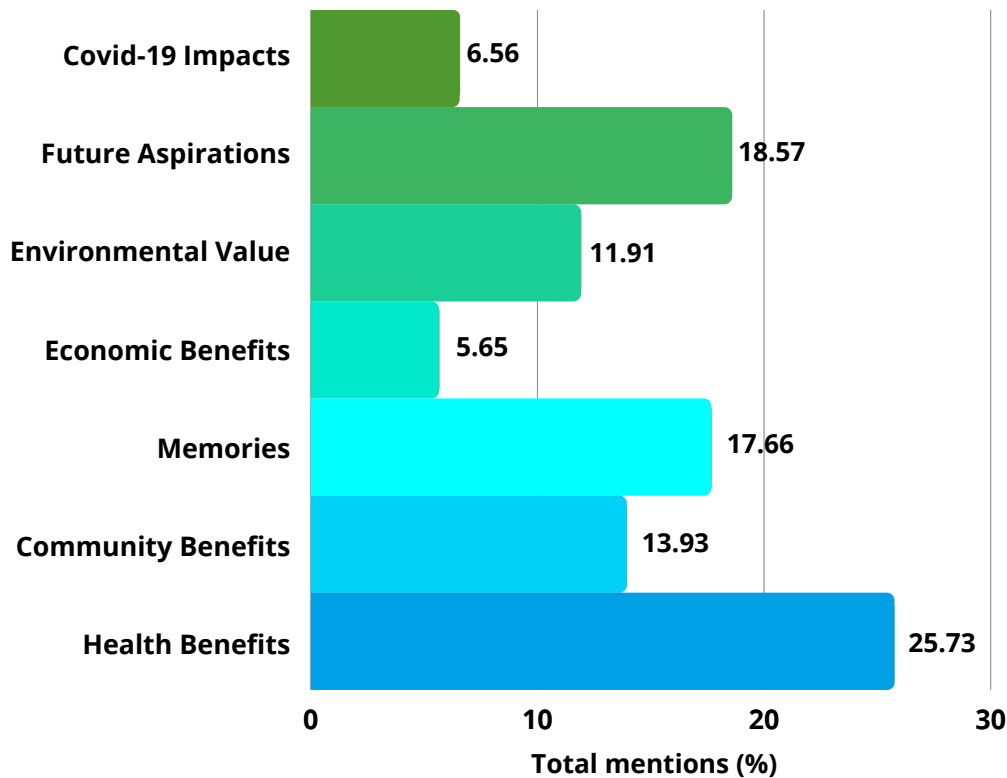
Physical and/or mental health conditions	%
No	49.6
Yes	48.2
Prefer not to say	2.2

Responses: 139

FINDINGS

THEMES

Earth Stories Content



Covid-19 Impacts

Despite the challenges the Covid-19 pandemic has brought, our analysis found that many residents shared that they discovered a newfound appreciation for nature as a result of the pandemic, re-connecting with green spaces locally and even wider afield. Many of the stories have mentioned that our parks have been a lifeline, providing a means of escape from the indoors, and acting as a way to maintain social relationships away from the computer screen. A smaller but not insignificant number however expressed a longing for a return to normality, where running clubs, events, volunteering groups and gatherings are allowed once more in our green spaces. It is clear from our analysis that the pandemic has had a strong, lasting impact on the way we view our parks and green spaces, with many using this challenging time as a way to reconnect with nature in a way that may have never been possible pre-pandemic.

FINDINGS

Future Aspirations

The message from residents is clear – an overwhelming majority expressed a desire for our parks to be preserved and improved long into the future. The pandemic has not only strengthened people's love for parks and green spaces but also allowed new visitors to spend time outside and connect with nature. Many people shared their concerns that despite all our action to tackle Climate Change, our parks and open spaces still seem increasingly at risk from development or disrepair. Many told us of the need for our parks to become more accessible, not just physically, but also in terms of reducing barriers to those from less well represented socio-economic backgrounds – whether through fostering an increased confidence to visit green spaces, or challenging the ingrained image of who traditionally uses parks. Parks are for everyone, and our approach in the future should reflect this.

Environmental Value

Many stories displayed a passion for preserving our green spaces and their benefits to both the living and physical environment, from the surprising presence of common lizards and slow worms in Dawberry Fields, to the vital flood management benefits of the green areas surrounding the River Rea. There was a consensus that we should be doing as much as possible to address the current biodiversity crisis that the world is facing, and that Birmingham, as a City of Nature, should be at the forefront of addressing this in the UK. The stories also highlighted the impact of plant life on air quality and carbon emissions, though they recognised that tree planting alone is not the solution to Climate Change. Many also expressed a joy at their time spent in our parks simply experiencing nature - watching squirrels climb trees, listening to the birds sing, the excitement of seeing a fish breach the water. This connection to nature is vital for the health and wellbeing of our residents, yet this would not be possible without the wealth of biodiversity found in our green spaces.

Economic Benefits

A small number of stories highlighted the economic benefits of green spaces in Birmingham. Much of this highlighted the perhaps surprising wealth of jobs and skills opportunities linked to parks and green spaces, and the range of careers that tie-in to the environment – with many of our younger residents expressing how excited they were to work with animals and the environment in the future. Many stories also highlighted the link between access to parks/nature and economic development, and how closely linked the two outcomes are in Birmingham, with many poorer areas having much lower access to good quality green spaces. Parks are something that everyone should have access too, and addressing these inequalities is key to our work as a City of Nature.

FINDINGS

Memories

There is an incredible range of memories people have in our green spaces. Many of these link to childhood – taking a trip down to the lake to see the tadpoles spawning, recalling being in awe at the size of the unending span of trees in a forest, or spending countless hours just exploring. There were so many fantastic personal stories shared with us, and it really proved the value in protecting these spaces to ensure that future generations can experience all that we have for themselves. Many also recalled more recent memories in adulthood; from the first time they took their child to a park, moving to a new area and making friends in outdoor painting sessions, to getting involved with tree planting and habitat restoration. Our analysis really helped show how many happy, long lasting memories are made in our parks – not just in childhood, but all the way into adulthood and old age. Nature brings us all together, no matter your age or background.

Community Benefits

A significant proportion of stories focused on the community aspect of green spaces – for many, meeting in our parks was the only way to interact with friends and family during lockdowns; others fondly recollect festivals, events and gatherings that took place in more normal times. What really shone through in the stories submitted to us was the passion people had for our parks, through volunteering time and effort to help maintain and sustain them as part of our many wonderful Friends of Parks groups. Our analysis really helped show that parks truly act as the centre of a community, somewhere for us to gather and connect as a society in times where we are increasingly feeling more isolated from each other. It is clear that parks are not just a ‘destination’, they are an intrinsic part of our community.

Health Benefits

By far the most common theme in the stories we analysed was the impact of parks on our health and wellbeing. A majority of stories shared how essential green spaces were to their physical health, providing a pleasant space to get active alone or in groups. We heard stories of people discovering outdoor yoga, dance classes, trying new sports, lunchtime walks, and running clubs – things many only do because our parks. Many others also focussed on the benefits to mental health, using their time in nature as a way to escape the pressures of life and really focus on the things that matter. There is a wealth of literature on the benefits of green spaces and nature on our health and our analysis only adds to the support of these findings. Green spaces provide unquantifiable benefits to our mental and physical health, and their benefits are felt across our entire population. It is clear that these spaces take a key role in improving the health of our residents, and will be vital in the race to tackle obesity and ill-health as a result of inactivity, as well as the ongoing mental health crisis that is being felt nationally.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

DISCUSSION

Overview

The data we processed provided a fantastic insight into the way our residents think about and interact with our green spaces, and how this has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. One thing that really shone through during our analysis was the amount of passion people had for our parks – not just the larger ‘signature’ parks, but the smaller spaces, the grass verges, the meadows, and the avenue trees too.

What became increasingly apparent throughout our analysis was the role of green spaces and nature beyond the physicality of the space itself – parks are spaces for people to connect, socially and with nature. They are spaces for people to de-stress, to escape from the ruminations of life, and in many cases they are the cornerstone of the community, somewhere for people of all ages and backgrounds to come together and experience the natural world. Our analysis really helped show that which we perhaps all knew already – parks and green spaces are not just something to ‘maintain’, they are not simply something that is nice to have, they are an essential, intrinsic part of our lives, and something that residents truly value.

Furthermore, in times where Climate Change is high on the global agenda, and governments race to mitigate the effects of a warming world – parks and green spaces form a vital resource in our fight against these adverse impacts. Our analysis showed that our residents share these concerns, and understand the vital role of preserving and enhancing these spaces in the aid of reducing our emissions and enhancing biodiversity in our city. Our natural capital not only aids in the reduction of our impact on the planet, it also aids us in mitigating some of the impacts of a changing climate. The more we protect nature, the more it protects us.

Limitations of the work

There were several challenges we faced while undertaking this work. Collecting and processing such a large, diverse range of stories was a big task in itself, however the submissions came in a large range of formats and styles – as well as text submissions, we received videos, voice recordings, photos, and drawings. While this approach allowed us to be much more flexible in receiving submissions and made it as easy as possible for those sending us their stories, it added a large burden of work in making sure these were all transcribed, organised and processed correctly. While specialist qualitative analysis software exists for work of this nature, it was not considered for this project – however, should similar work be undertaken in the future with a larger dataset, this would vastly reduce the amount of time required for analysis.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

To reduce the likelihood of any bias in our analysis, we took a number of precautionary steps. All coding categories were agreed upon by committee, and several 'test' stories were analysed at the same time by the group to calibrate the accuracy of our analysis. Names and demographic information were also kept separate from the stories themselves where possible to ensure any stories were viewed through a neutral lens. Despite this, there is always the possibility of some element of bias when undertaking this sort of research, as the classification of qualitative data differs from person to person.

We also encountered difficulty in our grants process – we were keen to ensure that the community groups we worked with were rewarded for their help, yet in some cases this was also a barrier to them working with us. In many cases, the scale of paperwork required to apply for the small grants meant that some providers chose to not undertake the work, meaning we lost out on some potentially crucial voices due to bureaucratic processes. At the time of the project's inception, the grants were seen as an extra incentive for the work, but for future projects of this nature, the grant process itself would need to be simplified and made more accessible – especially to smaller voluntary providers that may not have the time to work through masses of process to access such grants.

TIPS FOR FUTURE WORK

- Don't be too rigid with initial coding and analysis framework, spend time reading the responses before and familiarise yourself with the content before leaping into the analysis.
- Qualitative analysis is an iterative process so use this to refine the coding and themes in each review.
- Recruit a small team to assist with review and analysis and talk through the findings with others to refine the process and check for any potential bias
- Build in appropriate time for organisation and analysis, it will always take longer than you expect
- Use a range of media, early video examples help inspire and encourage others to participate
- Be flexible and open and allow participants to talk about what is important to them
- Working with community networks and local representatives help extend the reach of the project / research and the range of participants