

# Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 26 January 2021

## Thriving Green Spaces

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### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that the Culture and Communities Committee:
  - 1.1.1 notes the progress made in delivering the Thriving Green Spaces project and supports its extension to March 2022; and
  - 1.1.2 receives further project updates and requests for approval as the project moves beyond its midpoint review, from development phase to transition phase.

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## Thriving Green Spaces

### 2. Executive Summary

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2.1 This report provides an update on the Thriving Green Spaces project.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 As core components of the 20-minute neighbourhood, the city's green and blue spaces have never been so important to Edinburgh's residents. The Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of local outdoor places for people's health and wellbeing, as well as the inequalities found in accessing good quality local green space. People rely on them for daily exercise and mental health and for making the city resilient to the growing global environmental and societal challenges of climate emergency, species extinction and biodiversity loss. Yet, at the same time Edinburgh's green and blue spaces are under unprecedented risk as the effects of climate change already begin to impact on operations whilst resources for their ongoing care, management and maintenance continue to decline markedly.
- 3.2 The Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries service is leading a project to fashion a new vision for the city's parks, green spaces, rivers, lochs and shoreline, to be captured in an ambitious 30-year strategy which aligns with Edinburgh's 2050 City Vision and that delivers a new way of working to ensure their on-going enhancement, protection and care.
- 3.3 The service is working with partner organisations, the public and other stakeholders to understand their needs and aspirations for their green and blue spaces. This will inform what the city's Thriving Green Spaces should look like and what benefits they need to deliver.
- 3.4 The project is currently in the development phase, collecting and collating information, data, ideas, opinions and evidence across eight workstreams:
- 3.4.1 quantifying the ecosystem services provided by the city's green and blue spaces and identifying what needs to be done to improve these further;
  - 3.4.2 creating new relationships between the private, public and third sector and exploring fresh ideas that cut across and remove existing policy and delivery silos to build a sustainable financial model;

- 3.4.3 testing new technologies to improve service delivery, make operations more efficient and bring about social, wellbeing and environmental benefits;
  - 3.4.4 investigating models of governance for green spaces which will give users and stakeholders more opportunities to advocate for and influence their care and management;
  - 3.4.5 sharing outcomes with other bodies and across sectors to build knowledge and influence policy and decision-making at local authority, Scottish Government, and UK levels; and
  - 3.4.6 developing an operational model which will sustain the support and delivery of all these innovations and benefits
- 3.5 Recognising this, an application was made to the National Lottery Heritage Fund - National Trust Future Parks Accelerator programme, and in June 2019 the Council were awarded a grant of £899,500; one of only eight UK local authorities to be successful in securing this funding, and the only one in Scotland. This grant programme is to enable local authorities to develop bold and innovative financial and management solutions for their green spaces against a backdrop of increasing financial uncertainty.
- 3.6 Following the recruitment of a project delivery team, the establishment of a partner advisory board (made up of City of Edinburgh Council as lead partner, Greenspace Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust and the Edinburgh Green Space Forum, the umbrella group for Edinburgh's friends of park groups), and the nomination of Councillor Amy McNeese-Mechan as the Project Champion, work started in earnest to produce a 30-year strategy and action plan by May 2021 to protect, enhance and resource the city's green spaces, so that they benefit people both today and in the future.
- 3.7 As a result of the impact of Covid-19 management measures on the pace of project development, an application was made for additional funding to extend the project. Again, this was successful (subject to passing a midpoint review), an additional £349,223 being secured from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to enable an extension to March 2022. The Council received an 'excel' rating for being a high-performing project that is very well-considered, broad and creative, with the potential for successful and sustainable re-positioning of green/blue space in the Council and its partner's agendas.

## 4. Main report

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- 4.1 Strong themes have emerged following significant research and developmental work across the project's eight interrelated work streams:
- 4.1.1 **People:** Citizens are being asked what the Edinburgh 2050 vision should be for the city's green and blue spaces. This has identified the potential for expanding engagement and volunteering across Edinburgh's green spaces, via improved direct volunteer management, increased support of Friends of

Parks groups, strengthening relationships with third-party volunteer management organisations, youth engagement, and linking to new volunteer routes, such as green health and wellbeing prescribing, climate emergency action, corporate volunteering and employment training. These will be captured in a Thriving Green Spaces Volunteer Strategy.

- 4.1.2 **Space:** A baseline asset register and condition analysis identifying the scale of infrastructure investment required over the Council's outdoor estate is underway. Design-led parks master planning, piloting the use of Spirit of Place placemaking statements, and using a Parks for Health Toolkit and health audit to identify new ways to assess the quality of health outcomes that green spaces provide is also being tested. The Council is working in partnership with health professionals to identify changes to green spaces and the interventions needed to benefit health and wellbeing.
- 4.1.3 **Operations:** The Council is seeking to bring positive cultural change through cause messaging, leadership training and Appreciative Enquiry development, and is also identifying new service structures to bring together city-wide and locally based strategic and operational functions as part of the Adaptation and Renewal programme, as well as reviewing the role of Green Flag Award accreditation, annual Park Quality Assessments, and management planning in creating high quality parks and other green spaces.
- 4.1.4 **Ecology:** In partnership with the Scottish Wildlife Trust an Ecological Coherence Plan (ECP) that maps habitat network and ecosystem services across the city is being developed. It will identify protection and site management measures that maximise multiple benefits for both people and nature, including tree planting locations to support the Million Tree City programme. The project is also working to develop a Natural Capital Account for Edinburgh that will put a financial value on the benefits we receive from green spaces and provide an evidence-based analysis of the economic and social benefits of investing in them.
- 4.1.5 **Finance:** Critically, a sustainable funding model is being developed which will facilitate sustained investment in, and care of, the city's green spaces over the long term. Ideas being researched include an Edinburgh Nature-Climate Bond, a more commercial focus for the Inch plant nursery, sponsorship, crowd funding and donation schemes, carpark charging, sustainable energy income generation, and a fundraising-focused Parks Foundation. These will be captured within a Thriving Green Spaces Income Generation Strategy and Inch Plant Nursery Business Plan.
- 4.1.6 **Technology:** Following the successful integration of ground-source heat pump and micro-hydro power technology in Saughton Park, the service is analysing other green spaces with the potential for renewable energy sources. Not only can these power park buildings and surrounding properties but could generate an income return for park re-investment. The introduction of additional robotic mowers to complement existing trial mowbots is being investigated. A pilot for a new GI Application tool is also underway. This has

a dashboard function which can map all of the habitat types using citizen science and provides data-driven intelligence to assist site management, planning and interpretation.

- 4.1.7 **Governance:** New models of governance are being investigated for the city's green spaces which can give users and other stakeholders greater opportunities to advocate for and influence their care and management. This builds on the community empowerment agenda but crucially recognises that few communities want to own and manage green space assets directly. Innovative Citizen Park Panels are presently being developed and trialled.
- 4.1.8 **Learning and Sharing:** The co-design and collaborative approach fostered by the National Trust means that there is constant project sharing between the Future Park Accelerator cities via webinar events and on-line gatherings, most frequently with the Northern Cohort group - Edinburgh, Birmingham and Nottingham. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has limited engagement with other Scottish local authorities, but this will hopefully come to the fore during 2021.

## 5. Next Steps

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- 5.1 A project mid-point review is due to take place in February, after which the project will move into its transition phase.
- 5.2 Further update reports to Committee seeking consideration of and support for Thriving Green Spaces transition recommendations.
- 5.3 Production of a Thriving Green Spaces Strategy for Council approval.

## 6. Financial impact

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- 6.1 Thriving Green Space project costs are contained within the existing project budget, which is to be enhanced following approval for project extension to March 2022.

## 7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

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- 7.1 Consideration of stakeholder and community impact is a central tenet of the Thriving Green Spaces project. Consequently, there is significant and on-going stakeholder and community engagement and consultation across all the project workstreams, and partners with stakeholder interest and expertise are represented on the project Advisory Board.

## 8. Background reading/external references

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- 8.1 <https://www.thrivinggreenspaces.scot/>

8.2 <https://www.futureparks.org.uk/>

## **9. Appendices**

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9.1 None.