

# Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 12 March 2024

## International Travel to Helsinki by CircHive Project

Executive/routine  
Wards

Executive  
All

### 1. Recommendations

---

- 1.1. It is recommended that Policy and Sustainability Committee:
  - 1.1.1. Note that CircHive is an €11.5 million five-year UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Horizon Europe funded project and research consortium that aims to help businesses and the public sector recognise, measure and report on the value of nature;
  - 1.1.2. Note that the Council has been awarded £195,332 over five years to meet resource and travel costs to enable the Council to participate in and benefit from this consortium project;
  - 1.1.3. Note that there are three members of the Thriving Greenspaces Team which is involved in this project and whose posts are partially funded by the CircHive grant; and
  - 1.1.4. Approve this request for these officers to travel to Helsinki. This will be fully funded by the CircHive grant and will enable the officers to participate in the CircHive consortium.

**Paul Lawrence**

Executive Director of Place

Contact: Steven Cuthill, Parks, Openspace Development & Visitor Services Manager

E-mail: [steven.cuthill@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:steven.cuthill@edinburgh.gov.uk) | Tel: 0131 529 5043

## International Travel to Helsinki for CircHive Project

### 2. Executive Summary

---

- 2.1. This report requests approval for three officers of the CircHive Project Team to travel to Helsinki to participate in the CircHive fourth Consortium Meeting. The meeting has been arranged by Natural Resources Institute Finland, the CircHive Project Co-ordinator and the lead partner for the project. CircHive is a five-year €11.5 million project and research consortium that will help businesses and the public sector recognise, measure and report on the value of nature. There is a particular focus on biodiversity footprinting and natural capital accounting.

### 3. Background

---

- 3.1. The CircHive Project is a five-year €11.5 million project and research consortium. The project will develop rigorous and standardised methods for combining two approaches to valuing nature - biodiversity footprinting and natural capital accounting - that will help businesses and the public sector recognise, measure and report on the value of nature.
- 3.2. Biodiversity footprints are designed to measure the impact an organisation or area has on biodiversity and the main causes leading to this impact. Natural capital accounting is the process of using an accounting framework to measure and report on the condition of natural capital (ecosystems).
- 3.3. These two approaches are being used by an increasing number of organisations to understand and value the nature that underpins their operations. By combining these methods, the project will provide a more comprehensive approach to valuing nature, improving biodiversity performance and create potential routes for future private investment.
- 3.4. The City of Edinburgh Council is one of 10 case-study partners on the CircHive project. The University of Edinburgh are also involved. There are an additional 15 research partners including the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Institute for European Environmental Policy.
- 3.5. The project started in December 2022, and the Council is benefitting from a grant award of £195,332 over five years, to cover resource and travel costs.

- 3.6. Officers from the Thriving Green Spaces team have been part of the Circhive programme since the start. This includes the Parks and Openspace Development Manager, who also sits on the Circhive General Assembly, and two Greenspaces Development (Ecology) Officers.
- 3.7. The Circhive grant has enabled the Council to retain two full-time Greenspace Development (Ecology) Officers until the end of 2024 to work on the delivery on the Edinburgh Nature Network (ENN) and other associated Parks and Thriving Greenspaces projects.
- 3.8. Nature networks are a requirement of every Scottish Local Authority through National Planning Framework 4 and the ENN is the first urban nature network in Scotland. It is important that Council officers attend and contribute at the Circhive Consortium, where they are presenting, and evidence commitment to this programme, to ensure that grant funding conditions are met.
- 3.9. There are bi-annual consortium meetings and workshops which, in the main, are held virtually, with consortium partners meeting in-person roughly once a year.
- 3.10. In addition, Council officers meet more regularly with green city hubs across Europe to share learning and best practice on biodiversity monitoring and natural capital accounting – both subjects which are a focus of current Nature Emergency Council projects and policies such as the ENN, Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan and FIRNS (Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland).
- 3.11. The next in-person consortium event is in May 2024, and will bring together all Circhive partners from senior research organisations, businesses, and public sector authorities from across Europe to share knowledge and learning about biodiversity footprinting and natural capital accounting to help accelerate the roll-out across Europe, and in Edinburgh, as the city continues to be a leader on these matters in Scotland.

## 4. Main report

---

- 4.1. This report requests permission for the three Council officers involved in this project to attend a three-day consortium event from 21 to 23 May 2024 for the Circhive project. The consortium meeting is in Helsinki and therefore approval for this travel is required. The associated costs (travel, accommodation and meals) will be covered by the Circhive grant.
- 4.2. The purpose of this trip is to:
  - 4.2.1. Present an update to the entire consortium on the Thriving Green Spaces and ENN (alongside associated projects) and hear from other partners in order to build capacity for biodiversity footprinting and natural capital accounting, both of which are emerging sectors in the UK;

- 4.2.2. Attend focussed meetings with other EU green city hubs (like the local authority in Malaga) to learn and share experiences with one another and explore working closely together on our case studies; and
- 4.2.3. Collaborate with consortium partners (such as senior research organisations) to fully develop the case studies that the Council will be taking forward and identify what is required from others (such as the development of methodologies to be piloted) as well as monitoring and evaluation methods and the development of communications for case studies.
- 4.3. Whilst the wider consortium meets regularly, it will be invaluable to meet in person for the first time and build stronger relationships with partners Council officers will be working closely with to deliver our case study pilots and to share learnings.
- 4.4. The three staff members proposed to attend each bring unique skills and perspectives to the CircHive project. The Parks and Openspace Development Manager has been involved in the CircHive project from funding application to current stage, has strategic input to the project and overall responsibility for delivering the city's outputs, and is a member of the General Assembly for the project. The two Greenspace Development (Ecology) Officers are each leading on different strands of work in the project. This includes delivery of nature networks; calculating Biodiversity Net Gain for projects; monitoring and evaluation; communications and education; and natural capital accounting.
- 4.5. Together this team brings a holistic approach to the project, and by attending together they can directly share learning of their respective workstreams and Council projects, and importantly their combined knowledge and expertise will make it possible to fully develop the case studies for the Council while at the consortium event in Helsinki.

## 5. Next Steps

---

- 5.1. If Committee approve attendance at this event, officers will:
  - 5.1.1. Provide feedback to Culture and Communities Committee on the event, the learning and how this can apply to the Council's approach to future project development;
  - 5.1.2. Develop case study methodologies and a project plan; and
  - 5.1.3. Host an online webinar to share learnings with other local authorities in Scotland and across the UK.

## 6. Financial impact

---

- 6.1. The budget for travel to enable in-person consortium meetings is fully funded by the CircHive project grant. All consortium partners have been allocated £3,490 per

annum as a travel allowance to enable attendance at Consortium meetings where these are relevant to the work that the Council is doing. There is no financial impact to the Council.

- 6.2. The estimated cost of the trip includes return air travel from Edinburgh to Helsinki, four nights hotel accommodation (including breakfast and dinner on arrival, on the last evening, and on the day of departure). The cost of all other meals is covered by the Circhive programme, organised by Natural Resources Institute Finland. Approximate costs are set out in Table 1 of Section 6.4.
- 6.3. It is recommended that officers arrive the day before the start of the consortium, which begins at 08:30hrs on 21 May 2024, and leave the day after the consortium, which finishes at 16:30hrs on 23 May 2024 as flight times do not accommodate arriving and departing on the start and end days.
- 6.4. The approximate costs are shown below in Table 1 and will be met by the Circhive Project external grant funding:

Table 1 – Estimate Costs

Details	Cost £
Return flights x 3	1,020.00
4 nights hotel B&B x 3	1,650.00
Meals for 2 evenings x 3	180.00
Other incidental expenses, e.g. bus travel to/from airport.	100.00
<b>Total cost estimate</b>	<b>2,850.00</b>

## 7. Equality and Poverty Impact

---

- 7.1. No equality or poverty impacts have been identified in respect of this event.

## 8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

---

- 8.1. It is proposed that officers fly to Helsinki as there are no direct train services available.
- 8.2. The journey time for a flight from Edinburgh to Helsinki is 2 hours 35 minutes. The carbon emissions associated with the international travel flights for the three members of the team are 1,886.12kgCO<sub>2</sub>e.
- 8.3. Travelling to Helsinki via train and ferry would take approximately 53 hours (not including rest time) and involve approximately nine trains, two ferries, three coaches and travel through four countries in one direction. This is repeated on return. It is felt that the extended journey posed by train and ferry travel would not be practical, would incur additional hotel and meal costs, and would be an ineffective use of

officer time. The carbon emissions associated internationally by train, ferry and coach is 200.48kgCO<sub>2</sub>e.

- 8.4. It is noted that the project, whilst having the carbon footprint outlined above, is important in advancing capacity and knowledge as it will enable the Council to better develop and deliver policies and projects addressing the Climate and Nature Emergencies that the Council has declared. It will also directly contribute to other policies, such as Climate Ready Edinburgh.

## **9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact**

---

- 9.1. There is an expectation that Circhive members will attend some of the consortium's meetings in-person to build stronger relationships across the project partnership. It is recognised that while this could be done online, working in-person helps to build the relationships necessary to collaborate effectively to develop case study projects and create solutions to common problems. There is a risk if we do not attend that Edinburgh will:

9.1.1. Be failing in the responsibility as a grant-holder to unlock the full potential of this project to benefit the city of Edinburgh and the wider country in addressing the climate and nature emergencies; and

9.1.2. Jeopardise the awarded grant funding for this project.

## **10. Background reading/external references**

---

- 10.1. The link for the Circhive project is <https://www.circhive.eu/>

## **11. Appendices**

---

None