

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Report to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Resources

11th October, 2006

**Living Landmarks: Application by Black Country Consortium for
Black Country as Urban Park**

1. Summary Statement

- 1.1 In January 2006 the Black Country Consortium submitted an application for £48m to the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) under its Living Landmarks: People's Millions programme (LL:PM). Partners include the four Black Country local authorities.
- 1.2 The project, entitled "Black Country as Urban Park" includes three flagship sites which are:
- the green corridor between West Bromwich and Walsall Town centres;
 - restoration of the Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve and Seven Sisters Mines in Dudley;
 - developments at a range of canalside sites throughout Wolverhampton.
- 1.3 BIG has awarded up to £500,000 for the Black Country Consortium to develop its proposals to a full Stage two bid by May 2007.
- 1.4 The estimated cost of developing the Sandwell and Walsall elements is £200,000. Although no match funding is actually required by BIG, only £160,000 is available from the LL:PM award of £500,000. £40,000 has been identified from within existing budgets to meet the shortfall. £30,000 would be provided by Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council (WMBC) and £10,000 by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC).
- 1.5 The Stage two bid would go forward, with just five others, to be considered for inclusion in a nationwide public vote to award the final single grant.
- 1.6 If the grant is awarded, SMBC would receive approximately £8.5m. The major element of this would be to enhance the existing road bridge across Reform Street, linking West Bromwich Town Centre to Dartmouth Park.

- 1.7 The initiative requires match funding of 25%. SMBC's match funding (£2.125m) would come from the £2.7m that has been allocated in the capital programme, subject to achieving external funding, towards the restoration of Dartmouth Park,
- 1.8 An application for grant aid towards the restoration of Dartmouth Park has been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Notification has been received that a Development Grant has been awarded to further develop the project and submit an application for £4.4m under the Parks for People (PfP) programme.
- 1.9 PfP is a joint initiative between HLF and the Big Lottery Fund (BIG), administered by HLF. This means that any award would not be eligible to be used in full as match funding for the LL:PM project because of the BIG funding element. Confirmation of whether any part of an award could be used is being sought from BIG.
- 1.10 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to undertake development work and prepare the stage two bid in partnership with WMBC on the local component of the Urban Park project called Green Bridges, costs to be contained within identified budgets.
- 1.11 A further report would be submitted to the Cabinet Members for Strategic Resources, Regeneration and Transport and Culture and Leisure following appraisal of the full project.

Further details attached for your information

2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 That expenditure up to £200,000 be incurred from within identified budgets in order to develop the local component of the Urban Park project, called Green Bridges, ready for the stage two submission
- 2.2 That subject to 2.1 above, development work be undertaken and preparations made for the stage two bid for the project, in partnership with Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council.
- 2.3 That prior to the submission of the Stage two application to the Big Lottery Fund, a further report be submitted to the Cabinet Members for Strategic Resources, Regeneration and Transport and Culture and Leisure following appraisal of the full project.

In accordance with the authority delegated to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Resources, the following course of action has been agreed, which will be set out in the formal record of the decisions taken by the Member:

- (1) the recommendations above is/are approved.
- (2) the recommendations above is/are approved as now amended.
- (3) the recommendations above are not approved.

Cabinet Member for Strategic Resources

11th October 2006

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3. Strategic Resource Implications

- 3.1 BIG has awarded up to £500,000 for the Black Country Consortium to develop its Black Country as Urban Park proposals to a full Stage two submission by May 2007.
- 3.2 The estimated cost of developing the Sandwell and Walsall elements for the Stage two submission is £200,000. A breakdown of these costs is given at Appendix 1. Although no match funding is actually required by BIG, only £160,000 is available from the LL:PM award of £500,000. £40,000 has been identified from within existing budgets (£30,000 from Walsall and £10,000 from Sandwell). Sandwell's contribution will be met from existing budgets in the form of staff time of existing employees.
- 3.3 If the full grant is awarded, Sandwell would receive approximately £8.5m. The major element of this would be to enhance the existing road bridge across Reform Street, linking West Bromwich Town Centre to Dartmouth Park.
- 3.4 Match funding of at least 25% would be required to deliver the Black Country as Urban Park project. SMBC's contribution (£2.125m minimum) would come from the restoration of Dartmouth Park. £2.7m has been allocated in the capital programme towards the restoration of Dartmouth Park, subject to securing external funding.
- 3.5 An application for £4.4m has been submitted to HLF towards the restoration of Dartmouth Park. Notification has been received that a Development Grant of £295,000 has been awarded by HLF for SMBC to develop a stage two submission for £4.4m under the Parks for People initiative. Confirmation of whether any element of such an award, if granted, could be used to match the LL:PM Black Country as Urban Park project is being sought from BIG.
- 3.6 Additional maintenance costs would be incurred should the Black Country as Urban Park project proceed. These will be assessed during the development stage together with how any additional costs could be met. A further report would be submitted to the Cabinet Members for Strategic Resources, Regeneration and Transport and Culture and Leisure before commitment to proceed with the capital development is made,

3.7 The Black Country Consortium will act as the Accountable Body in relation to this grant, however each partner will be expected to account for its own expenditure. In respect of the development work on the Green Bridges element, SMBC would account for the £80,000 feasibility on Green Bridge and WMBC the £40,000 feasibility on Barr Beacon. It is anticipated that WMBC would lead on the primary route and secondary route to Barr Beacon, and probably Arts Development, so would account for those elements. SMBC will probably lead on the secondary routes within Sandwell.

4. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

4.1 The Council is required to comply with any conditions, contracts, agreements, etc. entered into with external funding bodies or external partners. Agreements will be needed with the Black Country Consortium and the other partners to proceed with the Black Country as Urban Park project.

5. **Implications for the Council's Corporate Priorities**

5.1 The improvement of the linkage across Reform Street and the routes through the green corridor would improve the safety and appearance of this area of the environment, thus assisting in meeting the key priorities of providing safer, cleaner, stronger communities for all citizens of Sandwell.

5.2 Although the development of the proposals will not directly improve the environment it will be helpful in developing the area, even if BIG funding is not secured on this occasion.

6. **Background Details**

6.1 The Black Country Consortium submitted an outline Stage 1 application in January 2006 to the Big Lottery Fund's Living Landmarks: People's Millions programme. This was the first step in applying for a grant of £48 million towards a £90 million project: 'Black Country as Urban Park', an environmental project involving several partners including the four Black Country local authorities.

6.2 The Black Country project proposes an intensive five year programme of unparalleled community involvement in transformational environmental projects at flagship and local sites across the Black Country.

- 6.3 The project includes three flagship sites which are:
- the green corridor between West Bromwich and Walsall Town centres, including full restoration of Dartmouth Park and Walsall Arboretum, and the inspirational remodelling of the Reform St bridge in West Bromwich;
 - restoration of the Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve and Seven Sisters Mines in Dudley along with related new visitor and interpretation facilities;
 - exemplary developments at a range of canalside sites throughout Wolverhampton.
- 6.3 In addition, other local sites in each authority are to be selected for inclusion as exemplars of inspirational environmental renewal at the neighbourhood level.
- 6.4 The active involvement of communities throughout the Black Country, and of children and young people in particular, will be a key feature of both the development work to May 07 and of the subsequent five year implementation plan.
- 6.5 The Black Country as Urban Park has been selected by BIG to proceed to the next stage. BIG has awarded up to £500,000 for the Black Country to develop its proposals to a full Stage two bid by May 2007. This £500,000 award requires no match funding. However, BIG appraisers will need to be assured that there is sufficient funding to complete the development stage.
- 6.6 A Next Stage Plan has been requested by BIG to set out the development planning activities the Consortium will undertake to prepare a full Stage two submission by May 2007. This next stage plan and the Consortium's formal acceptance of the £500,000 development award needed to be received by BIG by 29 September 2006.
- 6.7 Acceptance required the Consortium to indicate how it would achieve, within the timescale:
- Detailed feasibility and design work on the flagship projects
 - Consolidation of funding packages
 - Black Country-wide promotion, education and community engagement activities
 - Research and recruitment of the best environmental and landscape design expertise
 - Development of local community models with specialist input and training for local community groups
 - Project management and co-ordination

- 6.8 The Walsall and Sandwell component (Green Bridge) provides a pedestrian and cycleway link between Walsall and West Bromwich through the green belt of Walsall Arboretum and Sandwell Valley with links at both ends across highways to the town centres, in particular the Walsall Art Gallery and THE pUBLIC in West Bromwich. This route is to be of a high standard with tarmac surface (appropriately finished for a rural situation) and with links off to attractions along the way. The proposed links along the way would be to Sandwell Park Farm, the Priory archaeological site, the Sandwell Valley RSPB bird reserve, the Oak House and along the Tame Valley canal to Tame Bridge Railway Station, as well as improved links to adjacent housing areas.
- 6.9 The route uses the Rushall canal as it crosses the border between the two Boroughs. In Sandwell the route follows much of the Sustrans cycleway past Sandwell Park Farm and Forge Mill Farm and would link up with the proposed works to Dartmouth Park, which are subject to a HLF application.
- 6.10 A major innovative element in Sandwell is the creation of a Green Bridge to bring the route across the Expressway into the town centre and thus along routes to be provided by Tesco development to THE pUBLIC. The crossing would be at Reform Street to provide the most direct route and would involve doubling the width of the current bridge with a grass, shrub and tree finish to bring the park into the town centre.
- 6.11 In Walsall the route threads its way through the Arboretum and the Arboretum extension to the Rushall canal which goes through into Sandwell. A corresponding pedestrian bridge to get people into the Arboretum from the town, as a counter balance to the West Bromwich green bridge, was originally proposed, but this has been subsequently found not to be feasible. Walsall are instead refocusing their part of the submission on a major spur leading off to Barr Beacon and the construction of a new Visitor Centre.
- 6.12 Given the end destinations at the Walsall Art Gallery and THE pUBLIC, public art is one of the over-riding themes throughout the scheme. This will manifest itself not only as a major visitor attraction at the start and finish of the route, but also at points along the route with the siting of new commissions at key locations. The local community will be heavily engaged in determining the type and nature of artistic input into the scheme, which will be looked at holistically in terms of process and other non-sculptural artistic expression.

- 6.13 The estimated cost of delivering the stage two plan as regards Green Bridges is detailed at Appendix 1.
- 6.14 The time allowed for progressing to the stage two bid is limited and it is important that it is progressed without delay. The feasibility of the Reform Street Green Bridge is on the critical path and the tenders are already being sought. To achieve exceptional public consultation the Next Stage Plan envisages that consultation commences in November by which time some clarity on the proposals needs to have been achieved. Lottery funds will not be released until approval is given in October 2006 to the next stage plan. It will be necessary to commit to certain path and bridge design around the middle of October in order to meet the prescribed timetable for the Stage two submission.
- 6.15 That bid will then go forward, with just five others, to be considered for inclusion in what is likely to be a series of national TV programmes in the autumn of 2007. This will then culminate in a nationwide public vote to award the final single grant. The Black Country's competitors for the final single grant comprise the Eden Project in Cornwall; The National Museum of Science & Industry in Swindon; Nottingham's Sherwood Forest project; a waterways project in Somerset; and a nationwide cycleways scheme proposed by Sustrans. Therefore, although there is no certainty of securing the eventual award, the opportunity for promotion of the Black Country and of this Borough is significant.
- 6.16 Match funding of 25% is required towards the total Black Country as Urban Park project, if approved. A high proportion of proposed partnership funding comprises already earmarked expenditure for improvements at these sites and substantial contributions from the Heritage Lottery Fund for particular components.
- 6.17 A significant element was anticipated from applications under the Public Parks Initiative towards the restoration of Dartmouth Park and Walsall Arboretum. However a new lottery initiative, Parks for People (PfP), has now been launched. This is a joint initiative between HLF and the Big Lottery Fund (BIG), administered by HLF. This means that any award would not be eligible to be used in full as match- funding on the LL:PM project because of the BIG funding element. Confirmation of whether part of any such award could be used is being sought from BIG.
- 6.18 The realistic prospect of further partnership funding will need to be demonstrated by the end of the next stage of development planning. It will fall to each partner to meet any shortfall on their element.

Source Documents

- Application by the Black Country Consortium to the Big Lottery Fund.
- Offer letter from Big Lottery Fund awarding development grant.
- Report “Black Country as Urban Park Living Landmarks Bid“ to the meeting on 5th September 2006 of Guarantee Members of Black Country Consortium Limited.
- Report “Black Country as Urban Park living Landmarks Bid” to SMBC Capital Strategy and Asset Management Group on 7th September 2006.

APPENDIX 1

DELIVERY FUNDING WALSALL / SANDWELL GREEN BRIDGE EXPENDITURE ELEMENTS	BLF Development Funding - Walsall / Sandwell Allocation £	Walsall MBC Funding £	Sandwell MBC Funding £	TOTAL DEVELOPMENT BUDGET £
Landscape Masterplan (Primary Route from Walsall to Dartmouth Park and Secondary Route to Barr Beacon)	10,000	20,000		30,000
Landscape Masterplan (Secondary Routes to main path in Sandwell)	10,000			10,000
Barr Beacon Visitor Centre - Feasibility	40,000			40,000
Sandwell A41 Green Bridge Feasibility Study	80,000			80,000
Arts Development Work	20,000			20,000
Project Management		10,000	10,000	20,000
Total	160,000	30,000	10,000	200,000