



## **TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE**

**Monday, 23 November 2020**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>BIRKENHEAD PARK: HERITAGE PROJECT REVIEW AND UPDATE</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES</b>

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to:

- i. provide an update on progress and achievements regarding the Birkenhead Park heritage project;
- ii. set out the currently anticipated 'route map' ahead for achieving the aspirations for the Park, along with the estimated financial resource requirements;
- iii. outline the scope of the elements to be included in a future grant application to the Lottery Heritage Fund for the further conservation and improvement of the Park; and
- iv. seek approval for the future allocation and provision of Council funds to realise these ambitions.

In 2017 the Council's Cabinet and Strategic Leadership Team agreed to establish a revenue reserve budget of £244,224 to take forward its aspirations for Birkenhead Park:

- to support an application for World Heritage Site (WHS) inscription for the Park; and
- to make associated grant bids to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) for the Park's continued improvement.

A small staff team (project manager and project officer) was subsequently engaged towards the end of 2018 for a period of two years (until the end of November 2020) to take forward these aspirations. Much progress has been made during that time, despite the recent impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The proposals for Birkenhead Park described in this report are extremely relevant to the Council's aspirations set out in the Wirral Plan, particularly in respect to:

- looking after our environment for future generations to enjoy;
- creating economic opportunities by attracting enterprise and investment; and
- striving to close the gap in health inequalities.

Birkenhead Park is within the Claughton ward. Immediately adjacent wards are Birkenhead & Tranmere, Bidston & St. James, and Oxtan. Ultimately, the aspirations for Birkenhead Park will have a positive impact for all wards in the Borough.

This is not a key decision.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That Committee notes the progress made regarding the Birkenhead Park heritage project.
2. That Committee supports the proposals to progress: (i) the aspiration for Birkenhead Park's ultimate inscription as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO; and (ii) the further significant regeneration of the Park, including through the submission of a grant application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), as set out in this report.
3. That the Policy and Resources Committee considers submitting a Capital bid in future. This will cover the ongoing running costs associated with the NLHF Round 1 grant application and ensure that funding is secured until 2023/24.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The benefits of Birkenhead Park becoming a World Heritage Site are potentially enormous for Wirral and its communities, including:
- increase in international awareness;
  - increase in community and civic pride;
  - growth of local visitor economy;
  - increase in inward investment and significant positive impact on local regeneration;
  - as well as the protection and improved management of this unique heritage asset for future generations.
- 1.2 Birkenhead Park is historically and culturally significant not just to Wirral but to the UK and to the World. It is therefore important that it is appropriately restored, improved and maintained. Ensuring that the Park is in the best possible condition will enable local residents to feel a greater sense of pride in their area. It will also increase the number of people who visit it and will support the bid to gain WHS status.
- 1.3 An application for WHS recognition for Birkenhead Park will benefit the Wirral by placing its flagship Park on the global stage in the same category as attractions such as the Great Wall of China and the Statue of Liberty. It will consequently attract visitors from across the World. Socially, it will serve as a great source of pride in Birkenhead as all residents would live in the knowledge that they have a completely free and accessible WHS on their doorstep.
- 1.4 In June 2020 the UK National Commission for UNESCO published a report titled *'The National Value of UNESCO Designations to the United Kingdom'*. This was based on new research and reveals that UNESCO designations (most importantly World Heritage Sites) are significant contributors to the UK economy. The report states that UNESCO projects in the UK generate an estimated £151 million of financial benefit to local communities each year and help bring them together to protect and conserve some of the most important places across the country. It also shows that UNESCO projects help build a greener, more equal and more peaceful world. It is evident that continued investment in UNESCO projects is critical in helping the UK to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 1.5 A successful application for WHS status would also bolster the international brand of the Liverpool City Region, an ambition laid down in its Visitor Economy Strategy, with its target of achieving four million extra visitors, and the underpinning of jobs this will provide.
- 1.6 The beneficial impacts of achieving WHS inscription on the wider regeneration of Birkenhead should not be underestimated. The journey towards such recognition will evidence the Council's high ambitions and provide an important catalyst for regeneration, contributing to increases in local property values (particularly in the

immediate surroundings), growth in the visitor economy, and a more diverse and higher quality retail offer.

- 1.7 It is important to emphasise that the aspirations for Birkenhead Park described in this report are very much aligned to the Council's Climate Emergency Plan. The Park provides many opportunities to make significant contributions in achieving that strategy (as further outlined in 10 below). Indeed, the need for projects to address Climate Change is also of great importance to both UNESCO and NLHF and evidenced by the requirements of those organisations when developing submission documents for their consideration.
- 1.8 A critical element of the Park's heritage significance is its extensive population of trees – there are more than 4,000 trees in the Park today. The Park's continued regeneration will involve the preparation of a comprehensive and detailed, long-term tree strategy and management programme. This will seek to restore and enhance the originally intended structure of trees and attain a safe, healthy and diverse tree stock which is fit to face the challenges of our changing climate conditions. As such, the project will make a significant contribution to achieving the Council's Tree Strategy.
- 1.9 Birkenhead Park is greatly valued, particularly so by the local communities. It is currently visited by nearly 2 million people every year and, like parks and green spaces throughout the UK as well as further afield, it has been even more important in recent times, providing a much-needed sanctuary for people during the coronavirus pandemic. It has proved that it continues to serve the purpose for which it was created – supporting the public health and recreational needs of the local population. The Park already plays a significant role in delivering many elements of the Council's Leisure Strategy. With additional investment of the scale described in this report, along with the attainment of WHS status, visitor numbers will undoubtedly increase substantially and there will be an even greater impact on achieving that strategy's priorities for (i) promoting and celebrating Wirral's parks, coast and countryside for leisure activities; (ii) encouraging people to take part in sports, leisure and social activities; and (iii) increasing pride in Wirral's communities and encouraging more residents to volunteer.

## **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 An appraisal of a range of options has been undertaken. Various levels of public investment are assumed, with a view to establishing a preferred option that maximises future benefits and outcomes.
- 2.2 Key objectives of the project are to seek to achieve WHS status and to undertake significant, high quality restoration and improvements to the historic Park – its special landscape features and heritage structures. This will enable its future protection and recognition (locally and much further afield) as a pioneer in the development of public parks in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It will also ensure that it can perform the role of such an important park with the range of facilities, activities and events expected. Anything other than the preferred option will not address this and other key project objectives.
- 2.3 The short-listed options considered are as follows:

#### 2.4 Option 1: Leave the Park as it is (Do Nothing).

This option assumes that current management and maintenance levels continue. This will result in the continued decline of elements of the Park's infrastructure with the associated resulting impacts on the important heritage asset as well as on the enjoyment of visitors. It would delay the inevitable time when considerable and costly remedial action is unavoidable. Consequently 'do nothing' is considered to be an unrealistic option at this time.

#### 2.5 Option 2: A minimal project utilising existing available resources and potential external investment to refurbish the Park's fabric and facilities (Do Something).

This option is a minimal project based on retaining the existing levels of management and maintenance. Opportunities will be taken to secure external funds (e.g. Section 106/CIL funds) and other investment which may become available for the piecemeal restoration and improvement of the Park and its facilities. It assumes no additional funding from the Council. It is considered that although this option might achieve some valuable ad hoc improvements over time, it will not be sufficient in achieving the WHS ambition for the Park (and the benefits that brings), nor is it likely to achieve the continued future management and repairs required of such an importance heritage asset.

#### 2.6 Option 3: An ambitious and comprehensive approach to regenerating the Park, which fully recognises its important heritage significance, including seeking to attain WHS status (Preferred Option).

This is further described and detailed in this report and it is proposed to take forward this option.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3.1 Birkenhead Park is reputed to be the World's first publicly funded municipal park. It was created for the growing population of Birkenhead using public money. It signified a critical stage in human development in response to the declining health conditions brought on by the Industrial Revolution in the mid-nineteenth century. Opened in 1847, Birkenhead Park represents innovation, both through its design (incorporating features from cultures across the world and which subsequently influenced the creation of urban parks worldwide) and through its vision of providing a community space where the barriers of social class, age, colour and creed are non-existent. It is one of the UK's most significant and important parks and is listed Grade I on Historic England's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.

3.2 In recognition of its worldwide significance, the intention is to seek to achieve WHS inscription from UNESCO. A committee consisting of UK experts on WHSs, individuals from local community groups and Council staff have been in the process of earnestly pursuing this aspiration for the last three years.

3.3 Birkenhead Park is highly valued by the local community and those further afield across Wirral. It is estimated that the number of visitors to the Park each year is

nearly two million. The Park is incredibly important in continuing to provide for their enjoyment and recreational needs.

- 3.4 The Council's Cabinet and Strategic Leadership Team meeting in February 2017 agreed to:
- support an application for World Heritage Site (WHS) inscription for Birkenhead Park; and
  - make associated grant bids to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) for the Park; and
  - embed these aspirations into the Council's growth plans and tourism agenda.
- 3.5 At a subsequent meeting in December 2017 Cabinet and Strategic Leadership Team agreed that a suitable dedicated resource was required to take forward these twin aspirations for Birkenhead Park, i.e. to seek WHS inscription, and to make progress in securing significant Lottery grant funds. Towards this end a revenue reserve budget of £244,224 was made available for:
- project staff support – a project manager and project officer (for a two-year period); and
  - associated costs of set-up, stakeholder engagement, promotional activities, commissioning professional support, training, etc.
- 3.6 Progress to date
- 3.7 Work towards the project's ambitions has continued, although the public health crisis has understandably had a significant effect on progress, and will no doubt continue to do so for some while to come.
- 3.8 The new team (project manager and project officer) to take the project forward were appointed and subsequently commenced in post by mid-October 2018. The following month they moved into the previously vacant North Lodge of Birkenhead Park's Grand Entrance as the team's office base. Since that time the following progress has been made:
- a comprehensive Landscape Condition Survey of the Park has been undertaken by a professional consultant. The resulting report plays an important role in informing both the case for WHS status and the development of a package of physical restoration and improvement works to be included in a grant funding application to the NLHF;
  - a draft preliminary WHS nomination document has been developed to support the application for WHS status. This is a 'working document' and has continued to be further refined and developed with a view to finalising the current version by the end of November 2020;
  - during the last 12-18 months, we have been raising awareness of the WHS intentions for Birkenhead Park with influential national and international heritage organisations. The responses have been very encouraging;
  - a formal 'expression of interest' for circa £5million grant funding was submitted to NLHF, and consequently we were invited to submit a Round 1 grant application;
  - a comprehensive Round 1 grant application to NLHF's Heritage Grants programme for circa £5million was developed and submitted in February 2020. Unfortunately, in March 2020 it was withdrawn by the funding body (along with all

applications at the time) due to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, and the consequent need to divert its funds into emergency grants programmes. The Heritage Grants programme currently remains closed;

- a programme of community engagement has commenced which is aimed at: increasing awareness about the aspirations for Birkenhead Park; encouraging community input and gathering support; and seeking active commitment (e.g. through volunteering) in helping to make progress on the project. Amongst other things community engagement events and activities have included a successful park anniversary (172nd) celebration in April 2019 (a heritage-based family fun event) attended by over 500 people, and visits by Merseyside Civic Society and the Cheshire Gardens Trust;
- promotional activities continue to develop through a growing social media presence and the production of promotional displays, leaflets, postcards, etc. We are also currently working on the development of an improved website.

### 3.9 Future programme

3.10 The project timeline is included at Appendix 1 for information.

3.11 In terms of the aspiration to achieve WHS status, the first stage is to be invited onto the UK Government's Tentative List for potential WHSs. This requires a formal application once the invitation process is announced. Currently there is no firm timescale as to when this will be, although it is expected to be in early 2021. It is understood that it may then take 18 months for the applications to be reviewed and the revised Tentative List to be drawn up. We are therefore at a key stage. This is a rare opportunity as the UK's Tentative List is typically only reviewed at 10-yearly intervals.

3.12 The development of the preliminary WHS nomination document for Birkenhead Park (to support the application for WHS status) continues with the aim of 'finalising' this 'working document' by the end of November 2020.

3.13 The process for seeking a large heritage grant (£250,000 to £5million) from NLHF is a two-stage process. Although the programme is currently closed to new applications, generally NLHF has four closing deadlines each year for submissions – March, May, August, and November. We currently await news as to the reopening of the programme and are ready to make a resubmission as the comprehensive bid package of information has been prepared.

### 3.14 Proposed scope of future physical improvement works package for Birkenhead Park

3.15 As outlined above, an initial bid to NLHF for significant funds (circa £5million) has been developed and is ready for resubmission. Securing such a level of investment for Birkenhead Park would enable its continued restoration and development. It would also support the application for WHS status and demonstrate to UNESCO that Wirral is committed to retaining the integrity of the Park and its continued maintenance and management.

3.16 Despite previous significant Lottery Fund investment in the Park in the mid-2000s, key elements of its infrastructure and parkland elements are still in need of

comprehensive improvement and/or restoration. This will be particularly important in making a successful case for our WHS ambition. We will need to develop a new 'masterplan' of physical enhancement and improvements for the Park as part of the project's development phase. This will essentially be focused on:

- i. restoring and keeping in good repair the historic parkland and its many heritage features, so that their significance can be better appreciated and enjoyed; and
- ii. improving the range and quality of the Park's facilities for all visitors.

At the present time the range of such improvements to be considered will include the following elements:

<b>A. Restoration works package</b>
*Parkland tree management/replacement (succession planting strategy)
*Extensive shrub and understorey replanting programme
*Reinstatement of vegetation on eroded mounds (surrounding lakes)
*Reinstatement of marginal vegetation to lakesides
Relocation of works depot from current central position (and reinstate area as parkland) to a less sensitive area. (This will assist in regaining the physical/visual integration of Upper and Lower Parks).
*Park/neighbour boundary and gateway restoration and edge treatments (e.g. Edward Kemp Garden, East Field)
*Grand Entrance area – refurbishment of external public realm and internal drive
*Restoration of entrance treatment/surfacing adjacent to Lodges
*Restoration of Park Drive footpath (in key locations)
Lower Park Lake – replace existing timber footbridge with iron to original design
Upper Park Lake – introduce two footbridge links to the island as Paxton's original plan, along with associated footpath
*External repairs and restoration of the Grand Entrance and its two lodges
*Restoration of the Jackson Memorial
Restoration of the Warrior's Rest shelter
*'Wildlife' area management improvements (Park Road East)
<b>B. Visitor facilities enhancement package</b>
*Education and learning centre accommodation
Creation of an International Centre for Public Parks, and conference/function room
*Improvement of volunteer facilities and accommodation
*Provision of additional catering and refreshment facilities (Consider a range of facilities throughout the Park, including a large

café/restaurant, tea rooms, and kiosk facility adjacent to the play area)
*Provision of additional toilet facilities
Provision of a new Palm House (Such an attraction could potentially be combined with an Education facility / International Centre for Public Parks)
Existing Visitor Centre improvements (To be considered in light of its future role alongside accommodation needs listed above)
*Boothby Grounds overall redesign / improvements (including new tennis pavilion) (The future role that this area plays in the overall Park needs to be considered)
Provision of a new bandstand/performance area
*New extensive play and multi-use games facilities
Improvements to sports pitch drainage
Provision for vehicle parking arrangements (cars and coaches) (The current and future impact of vehicles in the park to be considered, and options for changes in management, e.g. car park provision)
Provision of power (and other services) to events/activities areas
*Park Drive lighting installation (in key locations)
*Additional security / CCTV installation
*Boathouse – provision of improved access and power supply
*Improvements to the ‘Forest School’ activity area
*Provision of new signage / information boards / interpretation

### **C. Enhancement works external to the Park**

Improvements to pedestrian route and approach to the park from Birkenhead Park railway station

\*Ashville Road and public realm

(Improvement of physical and visual integration of Upper and Lower Parks and Boothby Ground, reducing vehicular impact)

- 3.17 The anticipated total cost of such high-quality and extensive improvements as those listed above is yet to be fully detailed. However, it is likely to be at least £15m, depending on the specification for future accommodation needs and requirements. This level of investment may be beyond the capacity of the Council at this time and so a phased approach to delivering this scale of improvements is proposed. Such an approach should be aligned to the programme to seek WHS status. This report therefore proposes that the historical significance and wider regeneration potential of the Park are capitalised upon and used to form the basis of an initial significant grant application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) – that is those elements highlighted by \* on the previous table.

3.18 Generally, the NLHF, through its Heritage Grants programme, awards grants of between £250,000 and £5million (and up to 90% of total project costs), through a competitive bidding process. Historic parks and gardens are among the types of heritage that NLHF will fund. The NLHF seeks to support the best restoration projects, particularly those that can be proven to provide a range of associated benefits. The restoration and improvement of Birkenhead Park would form the basis of a very strong funding application to the NLHF and this potential has already been recognised by both NLHF and Historic England.

#### 4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The project is currently funded by a revenue reserve budget of £244,224 which was made available to cover project staff support (a project manager and project officer for a two-year period), and associated costs of set-up, stakeholder engagement, promotional activities, commissioning professional support, training, etc.

4.2 NLHF’s Heritage Grants programme has been closed since March 2020 as a result of the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. It is anticipated that it will reopen at some point in the future although exactly when that will be is still unknown. However, for the purposes of this report it is assumed that the programme will be reopened for applications in March 2021.

4.3 The NLHF funding application process is in two stages. The cost of preparing the Round 1 funding bid has already been met from within the Council’s currently available project budget.

4.4 Assuming a successful outcome of a Round 1 funding bid, 24-month project development costs (including additional staff costs, and professional fees for technical work to support a subsequent Round 2 bid) are estimated to be £495,000 (see following table for details).

**Table 1: Estimated revenue budget requirement for the project’s development phase**

(i.e. prior to a Round 2 grant application to NLHF in 2023)

Anticipated Costs (£'000)	Financial Years			
	21/22	22/23	23/24	Total
Project staff	30	85	35	150
Specialist consultancy surveys / support	45	160	35	240
Other ancillary costs	46	0	0	46
Contingency (10%)			44	44
Sub-total	121	245	114	<b>480</b>
Volunteer time (non-cash)	4	8	3	15
<b>Total</b>	125	253	117	<b>495</b>
<b>Funded by (£'000)</b>				



Future increased management and maintenance (max. 5 years)						300	300
Volunteer time (non-cash)	0	50	60	70	80	60	320
<b>Total</b>	24	693	1,603	1,663	841	564	<b>5,750</b>
<b>Funded by (£'000)</b>							
NLHF Grant (80% of total costs)							4,600
Wirral Council (capital or revenue)							530
Wirral Council (revenue commitment to future increased management and maintenance for 5 years – 2027-32)							300
Sub-total							<b>5,430</b>
Volunteer time (non-cash)							320
<b>Total</b>							<b>5,750</b>

### Notes and assumptions

1. The maximum total NLHF grant for both development and delivery phases is £5,000,000.
2. The figures are based on a NLHF grant intervention rate of 80% of total project costs (the same as for the development phase).
3. At the time of writing the delivery phase costs and budget requirements can only be indicative. These will be comprehensively worked up during the development phase prior to the Round 2 grant application.
4. The future increase in management and maintenance costs for 5 years after the project's completion can be used as 'partnership' funds.
5. An assumed annual management and maintenance increase of £60,000 (£300,000 over 5 years), which is met by the Council (and offset by the future generation of additional income).
6. The value of volunteer time for the delivery phase of the project is indicated as £320,000 (which equates to circa 4,500 volunteer days over 5 years).

4.9 As an indication of the potential level of commitment that the Council can anticipate if a Round 2 grant application is successful, in order to draw down NLHF grant of £4.6million the Council would need to allocate funds of at least £530,000 (which can be capital or revenue) across the financial years 2023/24 – 2028/29. In addition, the Council will need to commit to covering the subsequent increased cost of managing and maintaining the Park as a result of the project for 10 years – NLHF grant terms. The value of the first 5 years of these increased costs can be used as 'partnership' funds in drawing NLHF grant.

4.10 The current budget for managing and maintaining the Park is £575,400 per annum (after budgeted income of £98,600). Whilst it is too early to be able to precisely predict the cost of maintaining the enhanced asset, there will undoubtedly be a significant additional cost resulting from the project's implementation. As a minimum this could see a 10% increase in the cost of annual management and maintenance from 2028/29, i.e. £60,000 per annum. This assumption is used as a basis for the figures in Table 2 above. It is anticipated that this cost will be offset by generating higher levels of income from realising a range of opportunities. During the project's development phase, a detailed Business Plan will need to be prepared to provide a focused approach to the park's income generation potential.

## 5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 A successful grant application to NLHF will require the Council to sign up to that organisation's 'Standard Terms of Grant' when formally accepting the grant award.

## 6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The project team has essentially been 'in post' since October 2018 and has made good progress in supporting the preparatory work for the WHS Tentative List application process, and in developing a substantial grant funding bid to NLHF. This staff resource is currently revenue funded by the Council for two years with staff contracts ending in November 2020.
- 6.2 A successful Round 1 NLHF application will receive grant funds to develop the restoration project towards a Round 2 bid as the application requires a considerable amount of work to be undertaken by the applicant. Consequently, the development period can realistically take up to two years for a large project. The significant project development costs to be funded during this period will include the direct employment of a temporary dedicated staff resource (including a project manager and community engagement officer), and professional fees for expert technical work which will be required.
- 6.3 It will therefore be necessary to appoint new temporary staff with the appropriate skills to undertake the necessary roles.
- 6.4 At this time, it is felt that this should be a sufficient staff resource to undertake the tasks necessary to develop the NLHF project element as well as covering any commitments with regard to taking forward potential WHS requirements. Following making a formal application for the UK's Tentative List, it is understood that there is around an 18-month review period prior to the UK Government announcing the 'new' List. It is not clear how much call on staff time there may be during this time. However, if Birkenhead Park is successful in joining the Tentative List in 2022/23 there will undoubtedly be a consequent significant workload and we will need to review staff resourcing ahead of that time.

## 7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 At the present time the main risks to developing and delivering the project are considered to be those set out in the following table.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Mitigating actions</b>
NLHF's Heritage Grants programme is not reopened, or a Round 1 grant fund application is not successful.	The Park's restoration and improvement project cannot go ahead as planned.	Undertake prior liaison with NLHF as far as possible. Consider bid re-submission as soon as possible and amend project timetable.

		Identify other significant funding sources.
UK Government continues to delay its review of Tentative List for World Heritage Sites.	Unable to make a Tentative List application for Birkenhead Park, and consequent difficulty in resource planning.	Continue to build and maintain good relationships with influential organisations such as Historic England, World Heritage UK, and ICOMOS-UK.
Key members of project team (on short term contracts) leave their positions early.	Insufficient staff resource to undertake required roles leading to time delays.	Make contingency plans for the situation where key staff members may leave their positions - to ensure continuity in project delivery.
Anticipated level of Council partnership funds is not available (specifically commitment to significantly future increased management and maintenance costs).	Project is unable to progress.	Identify and secure all partnership funds and income generation opportunities as early in the process as possible.
Project's development phase costs (following Round 1 NLHF approval) prove to be higher than estimated.	Increased cost to the Council.	Ensure appropriate contingency is included and proactively manage finances.
Change in future political leadership of the Council and/or public sector financial pressures result in reduced project priority.	Capital and revenue funds are reduced and project stalls.	Ensure Council is fully aware of the commitment required, and the project sustains a high political profile.

## 8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 A vital part of the development of the regeneration project will be the ongoing involvement of the local community. A comprehensive programme of consultation with visitors, local people, and wider stakeholders will be undertaken to gain a thorough understanding of park use, views and perceptions. The outcome of community consultation and engagement will form a key element in the funding application submissions.
- 8.2 During 2019 consultation with visitors was undertaken by the Birkenhead Park project team as part of the whole range of events and activities which were hosted in the park, including The Tour of Britain, the Food and Drink Festival, The Witching Hour, Love Parks Week, Wirral's Heritage Open Days, and the Annual Celebration of the Park's Opening. Their response to the ambitions for the park – seeking World Heritage Site status and planning further major improvements – were overwhelmingly positive and supportive.

- 8.3 The long-established community group, the Friends of Birkenhead Park, is working extremely closely with the Council in our aspirations for the park and is fully supportive.
- 8.4 Positive conversations have been had with regional representatives of Historic England during the last couple of years regarding Birkenhead Park. That organisation clearly recognises the special heritage value of the Park and has keenly offered advice and support in developing our ambitions further.
- 8.5 In May 2019 a formal 'expression of interest' for grant funding was submitted to the NLHF, and this was subsequently 'approved'. Following that, a meeting was held with a senior regional representative of NLHF in August 2019 and we received a very positive response about the prospect of submitting a Round 1 funding application.
- 8.6 Specifically in terms of the World Heritage Site ambition, we have continued to raise awareness with, and support from, influential organisations and individuals. In October 2019 officers and the Chair of the Friends of Birkenhead Park attended World Heritage UK's annual conference in Llangollen. This was focused on those associated with the UK's World Heritage Sites and was an extremely good opportunity to network with and learn from others.
- 8.7 Also, at the end of October 2019, we gave a presentation in London to members of the Cultural Landscapes and Historic Gardens Committee of the UK's International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), an influential body that, amongst other things, advises Governments and UNESCO on World Heritage Sites. Subsequently, in December 2019 we were invited back to present to ICOMOS-UK's World Heritage Site Committee. Both meetings went very well, and the presentations were positively received, with some very helpful advice and feedback being given.
- 8.8 Finally, formal support for the World Heritage Site aspiration has to date also been received from: Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Lord Hall, the High Sherriff of Merseyside, Liverpool University, Cammell Laird, and the Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 9.2 An 'overview' Equality Impact Assessment has been developed and published for the project. It can be viewed at the following link:  
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>
- 9.3 Parks are provided for the benefit of the whole community and any programme of regeneration and improvement will be undertaken to endeavour that there is no discrimination towards any section of the community.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 At this still relatively early stage it is anticipated that the immediate restoration and improvement project will have the following impacts on the environment and climate. During the project's development phase, we will be seeking to maximise the positive impacts and mitigate the negative ones as outlined:

### 10.2 Energy use

The project will require greater energy use than currently. Primarily this will be associated with new accommodation for educational and volunteer use, and additional visitor facilities, such as refreshment/catering and toilets. In addition, there will be extra energy consumption associated with the future running of newly installed elements such as lighting and security provision, and power supplies for events.

A critical principal in the development of the project will be to be as energy efficient as practicable and to maximise the use of energy from renewable sources. Therefore, during the design development stage we will undertake a thorough assessment of the Park's current energy usage and efficiency and seek to achieve significant improvements where possible.

Additionally, we will explore the opportunities of all renewable energy technologies to lessen the future use of fossil fuel energy, and the introduction of ground source heat pumps is of particular interest.

### 10.3 Water use and disposal

The restoration and improvement project is likely to increase the use of water, most notably associated with new accommodation for educational and volunteer use, and additional visitor facilities, such as refreshment/catering and toilets.

During the design stage we will fully explore the opportunities for minimising such an increase. In terms of new (or refurbished) accommodation, low water consumption fittings will be specified (e.g. aerated taps for hand basins, waterless urinals, low volume flush WCs). For the introduction of new planting (trees and shrubs), as far as possible we will use species able to cope with dry conditions and the anticipated change in climate. We will not introduce irrigation or sprinkler systems, and any watering of plants will be done when absolutely necessary and then selectively. The potential harvesting of rainwater and 'grey' water for future use will also be explored to see if it is a viable option.

In terms of wastewater, and particularly 'grey' water, the sustainable use and/or disposal of this will be explored, as indeed will the continued drainage of rainfall throughout the Park. Existing drainage systems will be identified, and their condition surveyed. Rainwater drainage will be taken to localised soakaways and the lake system.

### 10.4 Building materials

As a design principal, where appropriate, we will seek to reuse building materials, and also use recycled materials. Furthermore, we will seek to use materials that are low in embodied energy and locally sourced.

In terms of specific materials, all timber used will come from verifiable legal sources and sustainably managed forests. Paints, varnishes and other finishes will preferably be natural-oil or water based, and where appropriate we will use lime-based cements, which were traditionally used in the park.

#### 10.5 Construction waste

It is difficult to predict the likely types and quantities of waste produced during construction. However, the minimisation of waste will be an important consideration from the project development stage onwards. A Site Waste Management Plan will be developed to assist this thinking.

#### 10.6 Soil

It is not envisaged that this will be a significant impact. The Council already has a policy of not using peat for soil amelioration. During the design and construction phases the careful management, storage and handling of existing soil resources to prevent damage to its structure will be specified. There will be a preference not to import topsoil unless necessary and to use naturally composted ameliorants instead.

#### 10.7 Biodiversity

In order to ensure that the significance of the parkland is sustained into the future, a key focus of the improvement project will be on developing a comprehensive tree management and replanting programme, along with the associated restoration of understorey and shrub planting, and the reinstatement of lakeside marginal vegetation. This will not only significantly improve the quality and range of habitats and their related ecology but also have a wider positive impact on airborne CO<sub>2</sub> levels.

It is evident that the Park is currently home to a wide range of common birds, small mammals, as well as invertebrate species. They are attracted by the varying habitats which currently exist, and we will seek to protect, enhance and extend these. This will involve commissioning expert advice and surveys to gain a greater understanding of current wildlife interest and the likely impact of the project on it, both during construction and beyond.

#### 10.8 Transport

The project is not proposing to expand the current car parking provision as the Park is considered to be very accessible, well located as it is for public transport (both bus and rail), and for walkers and cyclists.

As part of further development work, we will seek more information about how visitors travel to the Park and monitor this with a view to putting in place future measures to encourage more sustainable 'people-friendly' transport methods.

The transport of materials, people and waste to and from the Park during the construction phase will also have an impact on the environment and we will seek to minimise that as we develop the project further.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Project Timeline

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

UNESCO's 'Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention', July 2019

United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO's 'The National Value of UNESCO Designations to the United Kingdom', 2020

Wirral Council's (Draft) Preliminary Nomination Document for Birkenhead Park People's Garden, 2020

National Lottery Heritage Fund's 'Application Guidance for National Lottery Grants for Heritage £250,000–£5 million', 2019

Ryder Landscape Consultants' 'Birkenhead Park: Landscape Condition Survey', 2019

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Cabinet/SLT</b> (Title: Resourcing required to support World Heritage Site status for Birkenhead Park)	<b>December 2017</b>

## APPENDIX 1 – PROJECT TIMELINE

<b>Financial Year 2018/19</b>	
July 2018	Appointed staff to new WHS/NLHF project team
October 2018	WHS/NLHF project team staff commenced in post
November 2018	Project team moved into office accommodation in North Lodge of Grand Entrance
November 2018	Commissioned professional expertise to undertake a Landscape Condition Survey of Birkenhead Park (to inform and support both WHS and NLHF preparation work)
January 2019	First drafts of preliminary WHS nomination document elements produced
January 2019	National Lottery Heritage Fund (new name of previous Heritage Lottery Fund) issue new Strategic Funding Framework and Grant Fund guidance
February 2019	Landscape Condition Survey and associated report completed
March 2019	Draft preliminary WHS nomination document reviewed and assembled into a single document
<b>Financial Year 2019/20</b>	
April 2019	Anniversary celebration held to mark the Park's opening (172 years old)
May 2019	Expression of interest for grant funding submitted to NLHF. Subsequently invited to submit a Round 1 grant application
June 2019	Commenced preparation of Round 1 grant application to NLHF
September 2019	First comprehensive draft of Birkenhead Park's Conservation Area Management Plan review available.
October 2019	Completed draft preliminary WHS nomination document into first presentation format
October and December 2019	Presentations to influential ICOMOS-UK Committees regarding WHS aspirations
February 2020	Submission of Round 1 grant application to NLHF
March 2020	NLHF announce that the Heritage Grants programme has been closed due to the need to divert funds into emergency programmes to support heritage at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. As a consequence, all grant applications made in the recent Round were withdrawn by NLHF.
<b>Financial Year 2020/21</b>	
April 2020 onwards	Continued development of the preliminary WHS nomination document, including its comparative analysis into second version of the presentation format Drafted a comprehensive design brief for the development of a high-

	quality website for the Park. Identified anticipated cost for website through 'market testing' with website designers.
November 2020	'Final' preliminary WHS nomination document produced
November 2020	Current end of employment contracts for heritage project staff
March 2021 (not confirmed)	Anticipated submission of application to the UK's Tentative List for World Heritage Sites.
March 2021 (not confirmed)	Anticipated resubmission of Round 1 grant application to NLHF
March 2021	Completed review of Birkenhead Park's Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan published
March 2021	Park's new dedicated website is launched
<b>Financial Year 2021/22</b>	
June 2021 (not confirmed)	Anticipated NLHF decision on Round 1 grant application
September 2021 (not confirmed)	Anticipated commencement of project development phase towards a Round 2 grant application to NLHF
<b>Financial Year 2022/23</b>	
April 2022	175th anniversary of the opening of Birkenhead Park
Ongoing	Continuing project development phase towards a Round 2 grant application to NLHF
December 2022 (not confirmed)	Government announces 'new' Tentative List of potential UK World Heritage Sites
<b>Financial Year 2023/24</b>	
August 2023 (not confirmed)	Anticipated submission of Round 2 grant application to NLHF
December 2023 (not confirmed)	Decision of NLHF on Round 2 grant application
February 2024 (not confirmed)	Commence delivery of NLHF funded restoration and improvement works
<b>Aspirations for future Financial Years</b>	
2029	NLHF funded restoration and improvement works are completed
2028	Birkenhead Park inscribed as a World Heritage Site