

## Wellbeing Board

<b>Date</b>	18 <sup>th</sup> January 2022
<b>Report title</b>	Community Green Grants
<b>Portfolio Lead</b>	Councillor Ian Courts, Environment, Energy and HS2.
<b>Accountable Chief Executive</b>	Laura Shoaf, Chief Executive, West Midlands Combined Authority <a href="mailto:Laura.shoaf@wmca.org.uk">Laura.shoaf@wmca.org.uk</a>
<b>Accountable Employee</b>	Jacqueline Homan, Head of Environment <a href="mailto:jacqueline.homan@wmca.org.uk">jacqueline.homan@wmca.org.uk</a>
<b>Report has been considered by</b>	Ed Cox, Director of Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform <a href="mailto:Ed.Cox@wmca.org.uk">Ed.Cox@wmca.org.uk</a>

### Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

#### Wellbeing Board is recommended to:

1. Note the Community Green Grants and the timeframe for implementation.
2. Identify any synergies with work in wellbeing that could support the Community Green Grants, in terms of outcomes and process.

#### 1. Purpose

To update the Wellbeing Board on the Community Green Grants programme being led by the WMCA Environment Team. The grants are aimed at reducing 'green deprivation', which has significant social and environmental consequences.

#### 2. Background

- 2.1 In June 2019, the WMCA declared a climate emergency and in July 2019 a target date of 2041 was established for the region to achieve net zero carbon emissions. In January 2020, the WMCA strategy (*#WM2041: Actions to meet the climate crisis with inclusivity, prosperity and fairness*) was launched. This plan cut across the different actions that would be required to achieve the 2041 goal in a way that supported inclusive growth across the region. Natural capital played a key role in the strategy in terms of supporting resilience and adaptation; providing a route to mitigate climate change; and recognising the importance of green space for people across the region.

- 2.2 The recognition of the multifunctional benefits of natural capital continued in the follow-up paper that went to the CA Board in June 2020 (*WM2041: A Programme for Implementing an Environmental Recovery*). This paper set out the urgent activity and need for the WMCA and stakeholders to produce five-year delivery plans (four in total) in support of delivering the zero carbon target for the West Midlands by 2041. The first of these WM2041 Five Year Plans (FYPs) was approved by the CA Board on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021 and has implications for regional natural capital programmes.
- 2.3 In terms of natural capital specifically, the *WM2041: A Programme for Implementing an Environmental Recovery* paper highlighted the need to address inequalities of access to green space that had been magnified during the first Covid-19 lockdown. In response to this, the WMCA commissioned the New Economics Foundation (NEF) to produce a report on access to green space across the West Midlands. The data provided through the NEF report has now been turned into a publicly accessible data platform (available here: <https://maps.tfwm.org.uk/portal/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/3e4d8d9006c64e74a575b00a08c89c6c>) that highlights parts of the WMCA (by Lower Super Output Area) where there is low access to green space. The work with colleagues in the Data Insights Team will continue to enable us to get a better understanding of what and how we can monitor our progress around improving natural capital, and access to it, across the WMCA. This will be done with other regional stakeholders who also have significant data in this space. The Community Green Grants scheme will be an important route to support action to redress the inequalities identified.
- 2.4 As part of Wellbeing agenda, we recognise the importance placed on access to green spaces for physical and mental wellbeing during lockdown and the NEF report amplifies those inequality issues related to access to safe places and limited available space in areas of poorest health. The Community Green Grants scheme has the potential to significantly contribute to improving access and health outcomes for BAME and vulnerably groups.
- 2.5 With the approval of the Five Year Plan in March, the CA Board allocated a budget of £725k to support a programme of Community Green Grants to improve access to green space. The Community Green Grants Officer started with the WMCA in September and has been developing the grants programme, as well as meeting with community groups to raise awareness of the grants programme.
- 2.6 The WMCA has launched a procurement to appoint an organisation with expertise in grant administration. This organisation will manage the financial elements of the grant, whilst the CA leads on the work to ensure the grants are meeting the outcomes on addressing 'green deprivation'. The overarching aims are to:
- Increase or improve green spaces close to where people live (e.g. within ten-minute walk).
  - Connect people to nature, especially communities experiencing green deprivation
  - Enhance the local environment (e.g. tree planting, increasing biodiversity)
  - Tackle barriers to accessing green spaces, e.g. concerns around safety or the lack of awareness of local green space

- 2.6 We envisage that there will be two different types of grant, with a focus on capital expenditure, but with some allowance for revenue to support grant preparation and staff time. Currently the timeframe for the CGG is 2 years and will end in March 2024. Further funding is being sought to extend the Community Green Grants scheme. The two types of grant are:
- Small grants (£3k up to £25k). There will be 20+ (depending on how much organisations apply for) of these grants and we want to encourage applications from “grass roots” organisations with already established links into communities.
  - Larger grants (£25k - £100k). We envisage running two large grants (possibly more if they are coming in at the lower end of this range)
- 2.7 We are looking for creative ideas that meet the grant criteria, examples of potential projects are:
- Activities run at community gardens/ allotments for example tree planting, gardening, growing fruit and vegetables
  - Turning unused viable land into pocket parks
  - Nature playgroups that give children and families with no regular access to green space an opportunity to experience hands on activities.
  - Development of green corridors linking parks/ community gardens/ other green spaces
  - Development of new community green spaces that increase local access
  - Projects that significantly improve the biodiversity of the area and promote behavioural change on accessing green spaces. The proposal is to run a programme with two types of grant.
- 2.9 As part of the grant criteria design, the Wellbeing Team are working closely with the Green Grants team to apply the learning from for example the Public Space Design trial in Sandwell, Walsall and Coventry and also to connect with the social prescribing network to improve physical and mental wellbeing.
- 2.10 The formal launch is being planned for the end of January 2022 and regular progress updates will be taken to Environment and Energy Board. We are also looking to secure match-funding for the Community Green Grants scheme to sustain it beyond the initial 2 years of CA funding.

### **3. Financial Implications**

- 3.1 The CA Board in March 21 approved the funding of £5.1m from the Investment Programme to support the WM2041 Five Year Plan. Of this total, a budget of £725k was allocated to support a programme of Community Green Grants to improve access to green and blue space.
- 3.2 WMCA is looking to appoint a grant administrator in early 2022 after the conclusion of the procurement process.

### **4. Legal Implications**

None from this paper.

## **5. Equalities Implications to update**

The work that has been undertaken on the natural environment is central to the addressing the challenges related to climate change; the natural environment has a key role to play in both mitigation and adaptation. However, we have been clear from the outset that WM2041 must also have significant social and economic benefits for the region. The natural environment has emerged as an area where there are currently clear inequalities of access to high quality green space, either because of distance or pressure on what is currently available. The work that we will be taking forward will look to address this, driven by data that is available to us.

## **6. Inclusive Growth Implications**

This report links to a number of the WMCA's eight inclusive growth priorities, which are identified as 'a catalyst for improved and sustained outcomes for people place, co-designed with partners and beneficiaries'. Improving the natural environment will support outcomes around:

- reduction of health inequalities;
- addressing climate resilience through the promotion of nature-based solution to dealing with climate change;
- supporting the principle of connected communities through enabling more spaces and opportunities to bring people together in green space; and,
- equality (reducing the numbers of people living in deprivation, which includes lifting people out of 'green deprivation').

## **7. Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

The initial work for the Community Green Grants will focus on the 7 met area. There is potential, if we are able to expand the funding, for this to extend to non-constituent authorities as well.

## **8. Schedule of Background Papers**

None.

## **9. Appendices**

None.