

Environment and Energy Board

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| Date | 28 th September 2022 |
| Report title | Community Green Grant Update |
| Portfolio Lead | Councillor Ian Courts - Environment, Energy & HS2 |
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Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Environment and Energy Board is recommended to:

- a) Note the funding available to not-for-profit groups in the CA area through the small and large grants
- b) Note the support available through the Environment Team to small charities and grass roots groups to look at how they can increase biodiversity through a community green grant
- c) Consider, in your role as local leaders, how you could promote the Community Green Grant especially in areas with low take up.

1. Purpose

This paper provides a progress update on delivery of the WMCA Community Green Grant relating to the Environment and Energy Board remit, covering projects funded, grant take up and wider community engagement.

2. Background

2.1 With the approval of the Five-Year Plan, the CA Board allocated a budget of £725k to support a programme of Community Green Grants to improve access to green space. The overarching aims are to:

- i. Increase or improve green spaces close to where people live (e.g., within ten-minute walk)
- ii. Connect people to nature, especially communities experiencing green deprivation

- iii. Enhance the local environment (e.g., tree planting, increasing biodiversity)
- iv. Tackle barriers to accessing green spaces, e.g., concerns around safety or the lack of awareness of local green space

2.2 There are two different type of grant:

- i. 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.
- ii. Larger grant (£25k- £100k). We envisage running two large grants (possible more if they are coming in at the lower end of this range).

2.3 Currently the timeframe for the Community Green Grants (CGG) is 2 years and will end in March 2024. Further funding is being sought to extend the CGG scheme.

Progress to date

2.4 The Community Green Grants Officer (CGG Officer), who works within the WMCA Environment Team, has led the work to set up the structure of the grant, the administration and assessment process. They now lead on the work to ensure the grants are meeting the outcomes of addressing ‘green deprivation’ and to provide support to applicants.

2.5 Following a procurement process Heart of England Community Foundation was appointed Dec 2021 to manage the administration and financial elements of the grant.

2.6 A GAP (Grant Approval Panel) was established to support the grant assessment process. The panel is made up of WMCA staff, an officer from Heart of England Community Foundation and external trusted organisations. The GAP meet each quarter to assess eligible applications and approve final awards. To keep the 7 local authorities actively involved in the process, a local authority representative was appointed for each area. This local authority representative is informed each quarter on the relevant area applicants, with an opportunity to comment on the project/ make sure it does not adversely affect existing projects.

Grant Support

2.7 WMCA Community Green Grants is a rolling grant, applicants can apply at any point. Support to potential applicants is available through the CGG Officer and the application [support documents](#) available on the Heart Of England Community Foundation website.

2.8 After the initial [grant launch](#) in January 2022 regular “meet the funder” workshops have taken place across the region through the area Voluntary Sector Councils. The Voluntary Sector support organisations such as One Walsall, Dudley CVS and BVSC have been a great source of support to CGG inviting the CGG Officer to take part in relevant forums and promoting the grant through member newsletters.

- 2.9 GAP reviews of the application and processes have refined the support resources available to applicants. A high level of support is available to all applicants through the CGG officer including one to one advice and site visits. Large grant applicants are required to contact the WMCA before a formal submission. Support to large grant applicants is available through the CGG officer and Natural Capital Programme Manager.
- 2.10 Monthly webinars have been delivered through the WMCA to provide support to potential applicants and funded projects on topics focused on ways to increase biodiversity. It is a challenge for small organisations who are not environmental experts to find meaningful and achievable ways to build the requirement of “increasing biodiversity” into their projects. We have been supported by experts including RSPB and Birmingham Tree People to deliver short webinars on a variety of topics. These are recorded and available on the WMCA YouTube channel.
- 2.11 A guide was produced with support and expertise from the GAP on [Top Tips for Increasing Biodiversity](#) and is available on the HoECF application portal as well as on the WMCA website. Through these events, networking, and the regular webinars we have a Community Green Grant database of over 200 organisations or interested individuals.

Promotion

- 2.12 The grant has been positively received with regular initial enquiries. Promotion is mainly through WMCA comms, local authorities, and the relevant area voluntary sector networks. Below is a record of significant enquiries between Sept 22 and August 22, this is where a meeting has taken place either virtually or in person following initial contact.

Grant meetings/project visits:

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Birmingham | 40 |
| Coventry | 17 |
| Dudley | 12 |
| Sandwell | 12 |
| Solihull | 12 |
| Walsall | 18 |
| Wolverhampton | 23 |

Application and Grant Awards

- 2.13 Applications received and approved, Q3 approval will not be confirmed until end of September 2022.

| Area | Received Q1, Q2, Q3 2022 | Approved Q1, Q2 | In progress |
|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Birmingham | 33 | 3 | 19 |
| Coventry | 4 | 1 | 9 |
| Dudley | | | 4 |
| Sandwell | 3 | | 2 |
| Solihull | | | 3 |
| Walsall | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Wolverhampton | 3 | | 3 |

2.14 Two grant tranches' have taken place to date with a total of six projects approved (£105k)

Funded Projects

Q1 2022

2.15 **Kings Rise Academy, Opening KRAKEN (Kings Rise Academy Knowledge and Education in Nature) to Kingstanding £8,494.50 Birmingham.** The development of a school garden to make it available to the wider community. This includes 2 weekly clubs (Little Bugs Club and The KRAKEN Gardeners Club) for new users. There will also be a summer celebration and Harvesting event opening the space to 1000+ plus people over the time of the approved funding.

The WMCA funded portion of the project commenced in June and is due to finish April 2023. Significant progress has been made with the planting of a wildflower meadow. Pictures below show the site before funding and the CGG funded wildflower meadow.

2.16 **Old Hall People's Partnership, The Bentley 'Growing Great' Pocket Park £18,650 Walsall.**

Creation of a pocket park in Bentley, Walsall. The project will provide residents with a green space to enjoy and the opportunity to garden and grow fruit & vegetables. The pocket park will include wildflower areas, raised beds to grow herbs and vegetables. Biodiversity will be encouraged through the inclusion of log piles, hedgehog homes, bird & bat boxes and solitary bee houses. A project coordinator will work with local people of all ages to do the work to establish the pocket park and the maintain it. The project will ensure an accessible green space is established in the area for the community to enjoy for years to come.

2.17 **Sustainable Life, Access to Ten Acres £16.050 Birmingham.** An exciting project that will clear 1.6 acres of brambles on the Ten Acre site to make it accessible to the public and restore a hidden orchard. Sustainable Life have successful cleared areas of Ten Acres and will continue this great work to increase the access to green space in the area.

Volunteers will support the work and activities will include a Plum Festival to celebrate the opening of the orchard area. Other work will include delivering workshops and working with residents to encourage care and maintenance of the site. The project will help to maintain important habitats and help the area become a place where a diverse range of plants and wildlife can thrive.

Q2 2022

- 2.18 **Caldmore Community Garden (Caldmore Village Festival), Let's Meet at the Garden £17,692 Walsall.** Caldmore Community Garden is an established community garden in Caldmore, Walsall. Since the pandemic the amount of people coming to the garden has increased due to the lack of local green space. The garden is always looking for new ways to engage the local community and provide people without gardens with a safe and inviting environment.

The project will focus on increasing the biodiversity of the garden through the cultivation of a new "boggy area". There will also be building and installing bat boxes and working with the Bat Conservation Trust to identify the bat species on site. The funding will also allow the garden to continue their weekly garden Saturdays for local families which provides essential hands-on experience with nature for children in the area.

- 2.19 **Feeding Coventry: Herbert, Kairos and Foleshill Green Project £25,000 Coventry.**

Feeding Coventry is a small charity working to support food resilience across Coventry. They are based in Foleshill Community Centre. They run a social supermarket and education programmes to reduce food waste and encourage sustainable food practices. They have had success with setting up 2 community gardens and want to build on this success with 3 new green spaces.

The funded project will be creating accessible green space in 3 areas of Coventry: Foleshill, Herbert Art Gallery, and Kairos Women's Centre. The work will increase the biodiversity through the planting of community gardens where people can grow food/wildflowers and learn about the importance of natural habitats in urban areas. The aim of the project is to co create urban garden areas with the local community to give greater control over local green spaces and reach people without access to gardens.

- 2.20 **Kingstanding Regeneration Trust: Brookvale's Birds & Bees Project £19,344 Birmingham.**

Kingstanding Regeneration Trust is a charity based in Erdington supporting NEET (not in education, employment, or training) young people in North Birmingham into training and work.

The organisation is situated at the old park keeper's cottage within Brookvale Park they have been funded to clear the 70 square metre cottage garden that is overgrown

and littered. The area can then be used to engage young people aged 16-25 in green skills. The participants will be given the opportunity to complete entry level qualifications to help them get jobs and apprenticeships in the green industry. The wasteland area of the park will also be transformed with significant planting and habitat creation. The work will include regular open days and work with local schools and residents' groups to engage the local community with the project. An outdoor classroom will be established for the future benefit of young people working with KRT.

Looking Ahead

- 2.21 Q3 applications will be assessed by GAP end of September, Q4 assessed December. Currently 3 further quarters are planned for 2023.
- 2.22 It is important the grant is taken up in all areas of the CA. The CGG Officer has spent time this summer visiting projects in Sandwell, Solihull, and Dudley to offer support and encourage applications. Applications are expected to come in from these areas over the next 2 quarters.
- 2.23 WMCA is supported by Heart of England Community Foundation in carrying out the evaluation of the project. Each funded project will complete a detailed project report measuring the impact of the grant. The CGG officer is currently exploring other ways additional benefits can be measured such as wellbeing and engagement with environmental issues.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 This programme is part of the £5.1m funding secured from the Investment Programme at the CA Board in March 21; £725k was specifically allocated to the Community Green Grants programme.
- 3.2 Thus far, just over £105k has been invested across 6 projects during the first 2 quarters of this calendar year. This represents just over 15% of the budget available for grants (after the deduction of administration costs). In addition, the 6 successful applications represent 12% of the overall applications (47).
- 3.3 It is worth noting that there have been no submitted applications from Dudley and Solihull although 7 are in the pipeline. In addition, Sandwell and Wolverhampton have not had any successful applications. This suggests that this programme requires greater promotion/visibility within each of these respective areas in order to increase take-up, as well as sign-posting to the resources available to support applications.

4. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications as a result of this paper. Any legal implications will be considered on a project-by-project basis.

5. Equalities Implications (*)

CGG prioritises applications from projects in areas of high deprivation (IMD 10-20%). A common theme of projects applying is food poverty and incorporating growing food for the community into the project plan. Additional common themes are mental health and isolation, the projects are aiming to provide people with a place of safety where they can find community and support. It is expected that these themes will continue to be strong as the grant continues. The outreach work that is being undertaken by our Community Green Grants Officer is ensuring that we make the grant accessible to as wide a range of organisations as possible who are working to achieve this.

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'. The Community Green Grants will support outcomes around:

- reduction of health inequalities;
- addressing climate resilience through the promotion of nature-based solution to dealing with climate change;
- improving education and learning around the climate emergency;
- supporting the principle of powerful communities through providing support to deliver change and create better places; and,
- equality (reducing the numbers of people living in deprivation, which includes lifting people out of 'green deprivation' and fuel poverty).

7. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

The Community Green Grant covers all constituent local authorities.

8. Other Implications

None.

9. Schedule of Background Papers

None