

REPORT TO: Executive Board Sub Committee
DATE: 25th September 2008
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Environment
SUBJECT: Wild About Halton and The Artery of Life
WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report is to seek approval to make an application for future funding to build on the successes of the Wild About Halton project whose current funding comes to an end in March 2009. A new grant scheme from Natural England called 'Access to Nature' appears to present an ideal opportunity that would allow the Landscape Services Division to continue with the most successful elements of 'Wild About Halton' but as a new project called the Artery of Life.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

(1) the Artery of Life project is progressed to a detailed application stage, which would be submitted to the Natural England 'Access to Nature' grant scheme so that the most successful elements of Wild About Halton can be continued;

(2) the application is made as a joint bid with Warrington Borough Council.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The successful Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) supported 'Wild About Halton' project comes to an end in March 2009. The project has been running for 6 years, and has established Halton as a leading local authority on biodiversity matters in urban areas through the promotion of nature reserves and in the particular issue of re-connecting people with nature. Recognition of the project has recently appeared in the Heritage Lottery Fund leaflet on Priority Area Development Work. Without the post of Wildspace Project Officer who has promoted a partnership approach throughout the authority the project would not have been so successful.

3.2 Funding is now required to carry on with the Wild About Halton theme. As with all new grant schemes, a new project needs to be submitted rather than continuing with an existing one. Wild About Halton has been evaluated externally on a couple of occasions and it is likely that the new grant scheme called Access to Nature distributed by Natural England

has been modelled partly on the successes that have occurred in Halton. An application to this grant scheme seems an obvious choice.

- 3.3 It is proposed to take the most successful elements of Wild About Halton into a new project called the Artery of Life. The project is to create an Upper Mersey Estuary nature reserve with good access, interpretation material and an opportunity for local people to enjoy it. It is a joint project with Warrington Borough Council. Natural England has indicated that joint bids will be considered in a more favourable light. A joint bid would make the most of the greatest natural asset that unites both areas. Such a partnership approach will make links to other major initiatives connected to the estuary including the Mersey Gateway, Mersey Forest and the Mersey Waterfront Regional Park. The largest part of the project area lies within Halton.
- 3.4. There will be new elements to the grant scheme but it will retain a Project Officer based on the role of the Wildspace Officer who will be employed by Halton Borough Council within the Landscape Services Division. The project will include new access to the Mersey Estuary from residential areas: a new community wetland at Manor Park, Runcorn: new educational programmes including a priority to Key Stage 3 and 4 levels: outdoor education classes and Wild "Ark'ive", a free multi media resource for people of Halton and Warrington and beyond to use to promote our local natural environment in a not-for profit way.
- 3.5 The application can seek up to £500,000 over 4 years, which is the maximum allowed under the Access to Nature grant scheme. Of this, £300,000 would be revenue based to pay for a Project Officer and related activities. The remainder of the application would be for £200,000 for capital works. Match funding from the applicant is also required: in this case, a number of landfill tax schemes totalling £200,000 have been included, as permitted under the guidelines. This leaves a shortfall in the region of £26,000 per year, £13,000 of which would have to be found from existing Halton Borough Council Landscape Services Division budgets and £13,000 of which would have to be found from Warrington Borough Council's Environment and Regeneration Directorate budgets to complete the package.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Within the Corporate Plan, 2006-2011, the value of enhanced local nature reserves is recognised under Halton's Urban Renewal Area of Focus 12. Examples of future planned activity include "Creating local nature reserves and wild spaces that support the Council's efforts to deliver urban renewal and a better quality of life in Halton."
- 4.2 The more detailed policy justification for the Artery of Life application comes from the Natural Assets Strategy, Action 33; "The Council will create a significant new nature reserve which supports the Council's efforts to deliver urban renewal through the Mersey Gateway" and Action

46: "Subject to appropriate budgetary provision, the Council will continue to deliver the Wild About Halton programme and to employ a Wildspace Officer beyond 2009"

- 4.3 Part of the application will be to deliver a community wetland reserve at Manor Park, Runcorn, which is already an aspiration within the Landscape Services Divisional Plan and which will have environmental benefits in connection with the Mersey Gateway.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The application will provide a further 4-year funding for a project officer who would otherwise have to be put at risk. It is also in line with the aspirations of the Mersey Waterfront rejuvenation projects, and with a long-term vision for a regional park in the Upper Mersey Valley through the Mersey Forest Plan.
- 5.2 If successful, it will provide an immediate tailor-made project to engage local people with the environmental opportunities of the Mersey Gateway and 3MG. It will use the construction period to explain the range of protective measures to maintain high environmental standards during a period of disturbance, to be followed by the longer-term operational period of creative conservation and improvement to monitor how nature can exist and thrive as part of large scale infrastructure projects. The Artery of Life will make real the value of Halton's improving environment to local residents

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 6.1 **Children and Young People in Halton.** There will be opportunities to contribute to Key Objective E: To ensure that all children and young people in Halton have positive futures after school by embracing life-long learning, employment opportunities and enjoying a positive standard of living. In particular, the Artery of Life can contribute to the attainment of Key Stage 3 and 4 targets.
- 6.2 **Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton.** There will be an indirect contribution to Key Objective B: To develop a culture where learning is valued and to raise skill levels throughout the adult population and in the local workforce.
- 6.3 **A Healthy Halton.** There will be opportunities to contribute to Key Objective C: To promote a healthy living environment and lifestyles to protect the health of the public, sustain individual good health and well-being, and help prevent and efficiently manage illness.
- 6.4 **A Safer Halton.** There will be opportunities to contribute to Key Objective C: To create and sustain better neighbourhoods that are well

designed, well built, well maintained, safe and valued by the people who live in them, reflecting the priorities of residents. The Artery of Life project will be targeted towards certain postcode areas, as demanded by the application guidelines.

- 6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal.** There will be opportunities to contribute to Key Objective E: To enhance, promote and celebrate the quality of the built and natural environment in Halton. Tackling the legacy of contamination and dereliction to further improve the Borough's image. In particular, in Area of Focus 12, examples of future planned activity include "Creating local nature reserves and wild spaces that support the Council's efforts to deliver urban renewal and a better quality of life in Halton." Artery of Life will be a main delivery mechanism for this Area of Focus.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

At this stage, there is no risk to applying to the grant scheme. At the more detailed stage of a funding bid, a full risk assessment will be included in the business case for the project. Failure to secure this bid could put at risk the Wildspace Project and its project officer as there is no funding in place after March 31st 2009.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

All equality and diversity issues as required by the funding body will be addressed.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Natural Assets Strategy	Picow Farm Road	Paul Oldfield