



REPORT TO: SPECIAL MORAY COUNCIL ON 18 DECEMBER 2018

SUBJECT: GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE FUND – COOPER PARK

**BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
PLANNING & INFRASTRUCTURE)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the Green Infrastructure Fund and ask the Council to authorise a funding application for Cooper Park, this is part of the Cultural Quarter Growth Deal proposal.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Council in terms of Section III A (2) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to long-term financial plans

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Council authorises the submission of funding applications to the Green Infrastructure Fund on the condition that:
 - (i) the application is clearly submitted as subject to:
 - a. additional funding being attracted through the Growth Deal Bid and;
 - b. business cases to provide sustainable revenue support for any investments provided through the GIF funding being agreed; and
 - (ii) a further report to Council will be submitted to enable consideration of any final offer of grant, any financial implications for the Council being confirmed at that time.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Part of the Growth Deal proposal is a Cultural Quarter space in Elgin with refurbished cultural offering in the Town Hall; an iconic visitor attraction of national significance, which showcases the history and traditions of the region's most famous products; a new four/five star hotel, public space enhancement and reimagined Cooper Park area.

- 3.2 Phase 2 of the Green Infrastructure Fund has recently opened for applications with a closing deadline of 28 January 2019. This European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is administered by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and has a target to fund one project from within the Highlands and Islands area at an intervention rate of 70%. Minimum eligible expenditure is £650,000. A principle aim of the Green Infrastructure Fund is to increase participation in greenspace. To receive funding, projects must be of a strategic scale with a significant impact and must be located in population areas of 10,000 or more.
- 3.3 The potential future developments within Cooper Park as part of a Cultural Quarter were identified in the Central Elgin Regeneration: Public Design Charrette; assessed as part of the Moray Council Open Space Strategy and compliments the recently completed regeneration work of the Castle to Cathedral to Cashmere partnership.
- 3.4 At the end of August 2018, a well-attended stakeholder event took place to re-imagine Cooper Park and explore possibilities and improvements, which would make it a more attractive space for all the different interest groups, visitors and people of all ages, with a vision to create a community centre without a roof.
- 3.5 The outcome from these discussions, consultation with SNH and exploring other successful transformations of parks like Cuningar Loop at Rutherglen, informed the proposal, which includes consideration of the following;
- Redesign the pond, which caters for sporting activities, acts as a feature in the park and provides a more diverse habitat for wildlife.
 - Create an outdoor gym including bouldering, combined skate and bike park and provision for bike hire.
 - Provide opportunities to learn and explore the natural environment. It includes boardwalks, natural play area, community garden etc.
 - Create an outdoor performance area.
 - Improve the public realm from signage, map boards, seating, lighting, creating an attractive entrance gate to access and parking.
- 3.6 The project is at the stage of initial costings of proposals and their potential being assessed regarding any maintenance implications and/or income generation to ensure long-term sustainability of any investments. A further stakeholder meeting is planned for January 2019.
- 3.7 For the development and delivery of the project, the intention is to build on the success of previous regeneration work and take a place partnership approach involving park users, community groups, local businesses and residents.
- 3.8 If an application can be submitted to the Green Infrastructure Fund, it is anticipated that the outcome will be known by end of June 2019. If successful the project has be completed by June 2022.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

The project will contribute to achieve the corporate plan priority to promote economic development and growth, also the LOIP priority of a growing and sustainable economy.

(b) Policy and Legal

The Council considers support for economic development issues on their merits, against the objective to facilitate sustainable economic growth and the desired outcomes of the Ten Year Plan and Corporate Plan. For any partnership agreement, Legal will be consulted.

(c) Financial implications

The financial details are currently in the process of being finalised. The Green Infrastructure Fund has a target to fund one project at £500,000 from within the Highlands and Islands area with a minimum eligible expenditure of £650,000. Should the request be successful, match funding will be sought through the Moray Growth Bid. Any ongoing revenue funding for activities or developments at Cooper Park not financed through the Fund would require to be addressed in separate Business Cases to accompany each proposed area for investment and these would be addressed in the next report to committee if the application is successful.

(d) Risk Implications

Systems are in place to mitigate risks associated with external funding. The submission of the funding applications does not present the Council with any contractual arrangements until grant offers are signed. In this case, grant offers will not be signed without a further report to the Council setting out the financial risks and benefits as well as business cases for revenue funding. To mitigate any reputational risk, the applications will state clearly that the Council's match funding contribution is reliant on the Growth BID and business case development. It must be recognised that the prospects of having (i) secure match funding through the Growth Deal (ii) clear cut business cases to ensure sustainable future revenue funding will be available for running costs and maintenance and (iii) confidence that project completion can be achieved by June 2022 is currently far from clear, and to this extent the grant application is being submitted on a speculative basis.

(e) Staffing Implications

The work can be accommodated within existing staffing resources.

(f) Property

Under the Deed of Gift, Moray Council is responsible for Cooper Park and its upkeep. If a grant is offered, proposals to generate income to support ongoing running and maintenance costs will require to have been developed by the time the Council would be required to consider whether to accept the offer of grant. If the resulting financial burden upon the Council is viewed as unsustainable, whether due to ongoing

maintenance costs or match funding requirements, officers will recommend that, with regret, the grant is declined.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

At the present an impact assessment is not required. If the funding request is successful, Cooper Park would be restored to today's standards and will be fully accessible.

(h) Consultations

Consultation has taken place with the Corporate Director (Economic Development Planning & Infrastructure), the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, the Head of Development Services, the Environmental Protection Manager, Head of Direct Services, the Director of Corporate Services, the Equal Opportunities Officer, the Democratic Services Manager, the Head of Financial Services and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and their comments incorporated within the report.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Cultural Quarter Growth Deal proposal will support economic growth and cultural expansion within the city and wider region. Cooper Park is the connecting site between the various elements in the Cultural Quarter.**
- 5.2 If the proposal is successful and the financial assurances highlighted in the report can be provided, Cooper Park will become the most attractive green space and resource for all the different interest groups, visitors and people of all ages with the ambition to create a community centre without a roof.**
- 5.3 The Green Infrastructure Fund provides an opportunity to further enhance the Growth Deal proposal and if associated financial assurances can be provided, would transform a key site within the Cultural Quarter space.**

Author of Report:	Reni Milburn, Principal Officer Economic Development
Background Papers:	Documents on file in Economic Development Section
Ref:	