

# Delegated Decision Report

31<sup>st</sup> January 2024

## Partnership Agreement for Durham City Green Corridor Project and associated Funding Contribution



### Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change

#### Electoral division(s) affected:

Elvet and Gilesgate, Belmont, Neville's Cross, Sherburn, Framwellgate, Newton Hall.

#### Purpose of the Report

- 1 To notify of the decision to award the National Trust a contribution of £75,000 over a three year period in relation to a joint project to deliver a green corridor in Durham city arising from the National Trusts' acquisition of Crook Hall and Gardens.

#### Executive summary

- 2 The Durham City Green Corridor (DCGC) is a National Trust (NT) and council partnership project on the eastern fringe of the city covering the Wear river corridor for a length of approximately two miles. The project aims to enhance the exceptional natural environment aligned to the river area whilst providing an accessible resource for both visitors and the local community. The NT's property, Crook Hall, is intended to act as its gateway, acting as a springboard between the urban and semi-rural settings.
- 3 The DCGC project aligns well with the council's corporate priorities and plans, providing an opportunity to support the strategic priorities of promoting health and wellbeing including active travel, as well as contributing to the climate and ecological emergency declarations, and strengthening the visitor economy.
- 4 Project delivery commenced in November 2022 with the appointment by the NT of an officer to co-ordinate and take forward project outcomes. Through the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, the council agreed in principle to contribute to this resource.

#### Recommendation

- 5 The recommendation is to agree to £75,000 of funding to the National Trust as the council's contribution towards the delivery of the Durham

City Green Corridor project; this to be allocated as three annual payments of £25,000, commencing with an initial payment this financial year (2023/24) and terminating in 2026.

## **Background**

- 6 In September 2021, the National Trust (NT) acquired Crook Hall on the eastern fringe of Durham city. Cited in view of the World Heritage Site and within the green belt, the site includes a grade I listed manor house, medieval hall, coach house, and 2.5 acres of gardens with 5 acres of fields, as well as a car park, café and 2 self-contained apartments.
- 7 At the heart of the acquisition was an ambition to create a significant nature and access-rich green corridor to the northeast of the site and the city. This provided an opportunity for collaboration between the NT and the council to secure and develop the green corridor as a resource which offers maximum benefit to both people and nature and is safeguarded from development going forward.
- 8 The Durham City Green Corridor (DGCG) project was initiated in September 2022 as one of twenty green corridors nationally that the NT has strategically committed to. It subsequently approached the council to contribute towards its delivery over the three-year term of the project by providing commitment, expertise and resources to support the enhancement of the potential of this greenspace as a whole and beyond.
- 9 It is envisaged that this significant investment and development of an operational presence will facilitate leverage in more investment and effort from a broader set of partners and investors going forward.

## **Project Outcomes**

- 10 A project officer has been appointed to ensure that the project delivers connected and accessible green space at scale through a strong and successful working relationship between the NT and the council, as well as connecting with wider organisations, stakeholders, and partners who have interests in the area.
- 11 The officer reports to an NT and council partnership board. She is working with NT and council leads in developing a partnership vision and implementing it through a strategy for the green corridor. The primary outcomes are:
  - (a) An improved network of accessible active travel routes providing better links into Durham city through the green space from surrounding residential areas and increased connectivity between existing visitor sites.

- (b) An understanding of the needs of local people, leading to appropriate activation of the site, encouraging more visits by local people, especially those with inadequate access to green space.
- (c) Proposals for improvements to the biodiversity and connectivity of wildlife habitats across the green corridor.
- (d) Proposals for the repurposing the Belmont Viaduct as an active travel route and focal point.
- (e) Development of relationships with landowners, leading to options and proposals for creating routes or rights of way on sites that are essential to connectivity but in private ownership ( including potential acquisitions).
- (f) Promotion of Durham city and the county as a destination attracting tourists to stay, enjoy and explore both city and county through the use of NT marketing reach to promote the work that is underway.
- (g) Embedding the property as the city gateway to the green corridor so that it is regarded as a natural stepping off point for locals and tourists to the west of the property. This will assist in the financial performance of the property as a key heritage asset in Durham.

## **Resource Implications**

- 12 Agreement of the report shall enable the co-funding of the project between the council and the NT, through the employment of the project officer for a three year term to coordinate the delivery of DCGC project outputs and resources and identify legacy arrangements for going forward. The council's contribution is £25,000 per year for a three year duration is to be met from the Neighbourhoods and Climate Change core budget.
- 13 A sustainable funding strategy is to be prepared by the project officer in order to increase and accelerate investment and resource allocation into the area. This will further enable a raised awareness and increased support for the NT in and around the county. Additionally, it will enable project legacy resources to be identified and sought beyond the funding term. It will also promote liaison and dialogue with similar projects, culminating in clear recommendations on how the NT should approach other green corridor opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

- 14 The DCGC project provides a valuable opportunity for enhancing the environmental attributes that characterise the green corridor area whilst contributing to the council's strategic aim of promoting sustainable travel

and growing the visitor and tourism offer across the city and beyond. A key outcome of the project going forward will be to secure the future of the Durham City Green Corridor as a high performing landscape for both people and nature.

### **Background papers**

- None

### **Other useful documents**

- DCGC Outline Strategy



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### **Author**

Steve Bhowmick

Tel: 03000 267122

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

Legal Services are engaged in the preparation of a Partnership Agreement between the council and NT to secure a legal basis for the project partners going forward.

### **Finance**

The NT is seeking a contribution towards the project officer and associated costs totalling £75,000 over three years to ensure the delivery of the project aims and objectives. This amounts to £25,000 per year which is to be met from in-service core budget.

### **Consultation**

Not Applicable.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

Not applicable

### **Climate Change**

The project will enhance the biodiversity quota of the project area and so contribute to the offsetting of carbon emissions in line with the corporate priority of responding to the climate emergency declaration.

### **Human Rights**

Not applicable

### **Crime and Disorder**

Not applicable

### **Staffing**

There is existing internal cross-service staff to support and oversee the management of the project which will continue for the duration of the project.

### **Accommodation**

Not applicable.

### **Risk**

Provisions for risks and liabilities associated with delivery of project aims and objective are addressed and shared jointly between the National Trust and the

council in a Partnership Agreement in preparation by council and NT legal officers.

**Procurement**

Not applicable.