



PROJECT1 Summary

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Introduction

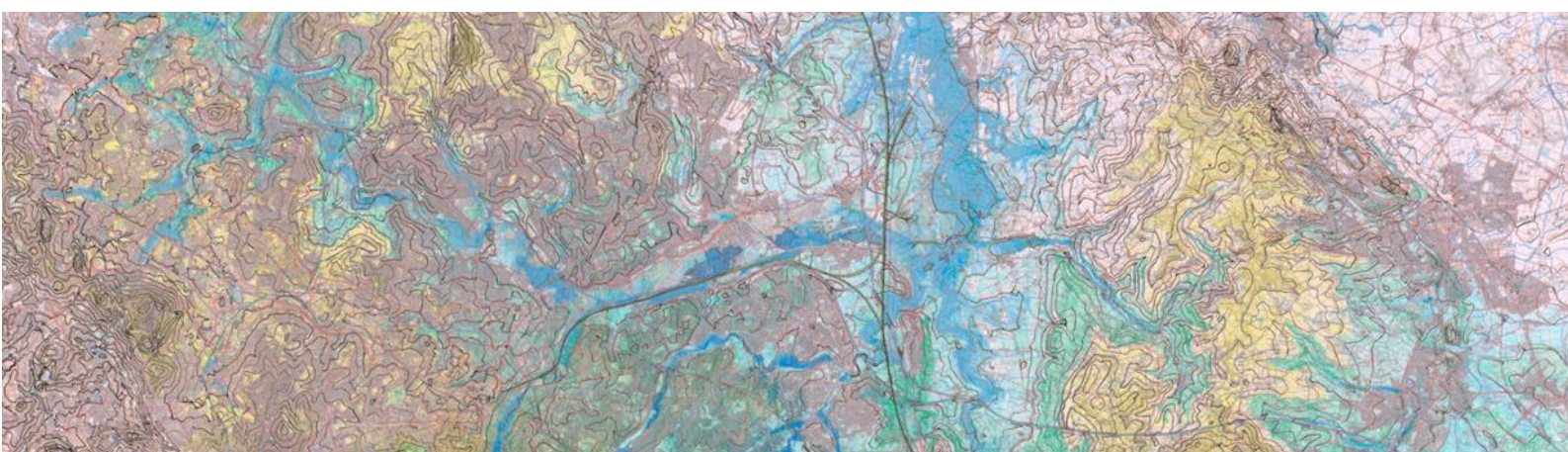
The aim of the WMNP is to transform the West Midlands into the healthiest region in the UK.

Central to this propose is the youngest, fastest growing, most diverse population in the UK, the imminent arrival of HS2, the Coventry City of Culture in 2021, the hosting of the Commonwealth Games and the recent inscription of the Black Country as a UNESCO Geopark. We have a unique opportunity to re-discover a vast, hidden landscape that has been largely ignored for decades.

The WMNP proposal, applauded by the UK Government Review of Landscapes in 2019 for encouraging people to think and to act differently, was endorsed by the WMCA in July 2020.

In August 2020 the WMNP Projects 1-6 were proposed and supported by the WMCA and in September 2020 they were incorporated, in full, as part of the WMCA submission to the UK Government as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

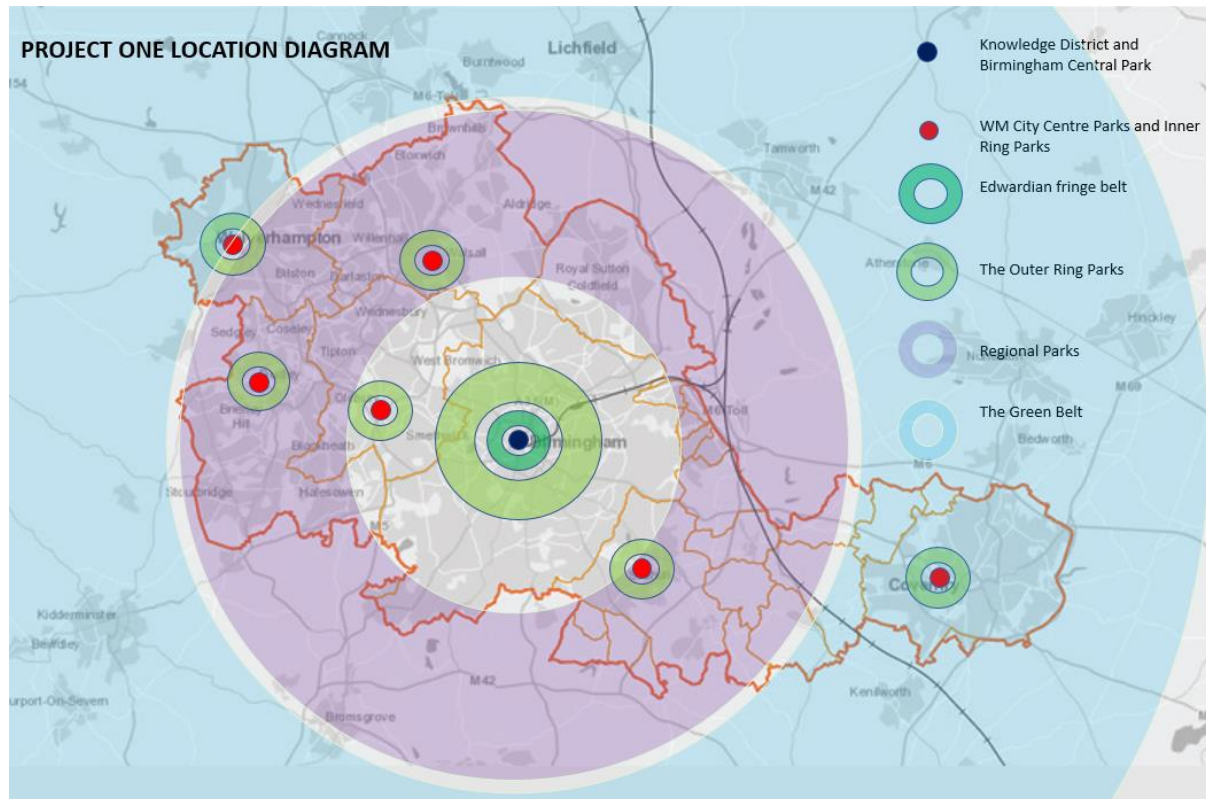
Focusing on Project 1 and in order to move from strategic planning to project development and delivery, the WMNP Lab requires external funding. This will allow the WMNP Lab to continue to build partnerships, maintain momentum, complete the executive development and the delivery of Project 1.



Project 1: four interrelated work streams

Project 1 consists of four work streams that address four interrelated proposals:

- a) **Creating an alternative future for Birmingham City Centre**
- b) **The Knowledge District (including The Birmingham Central Park)**
- c) **The West Midlands National Ring Parks (to replace the ring roads)**
- d) **The WMCA Central Parks (across the region, starting with Coventry)**



1a: Creating alternative futures for Birmingham City Centre

A collaborative study, undertaken with international experts to inform the radical rethink of the purpose, scope and economic viability of dense city centres in a post Covid economy, climate emergency and the urgent need to kick start a green recovery. The study will examine, through holistic spatial visioning exercises, a number of alternative futures for Birmingham city centre, in the context of the WMNP and addressing their function, offering and metabolism (ways of working).

1b: The Knowledge District, including The Birmingham Central Park

The second phase of the central Birmingham project is the reimagining of Digbeth and Eastside with its canal and river network, in the context of a reimagined city.

A statement of confidence and a herald of post-Covid growth, it signals the transformation of Curzon Street and the Knowledge District in the context of the Black Country UNESCO Geopark, the forthcoming Coventry City of Culture, the Commonwealth Games, the arrival of HS2 and the film studio proposal.

The WMNP Lab will work with a range of stakeholders to develop a coherent and compelling vision that is economically and environmentally sound, that engages local communities and addresses the imperatives of green recovery, including skill development, improved mobility, access to open space and nature, the creation of thriving communities and the decarbonisation of the West Midlands.

MAJOR OUTDOOR ATTRACTION

Included in Project 1 is a proposal for The Birmingham Central Park. The closure of John Lewis in Birmingham New Street points to the risk of a hollowing out of the city centre as people prefer to continue to work and shop locally. The Birmingham Central Park vision counters this with the potential to create a major outdoor destination that personifies the opportunity of the region and its people to thrive.

INWARD INVESTMENT IN THE CITY

The creation of the Birmingham Central Park supported by serious national players such as the RSPB and the RHS who have indicated that they will invest/help to generate significant funds to create a city centre park in Birmingham as part of their strategic objectives (for example RHS has over the last few years invested over £30m in Salford). RSPB and RHS have indicated that they will also support the region through a programme of Commonwealth Games activities with local communities and schools. A programme of corporate engagement will attract major companies from a range of sectors to invest and co-locate across the Knowledge Quarter, including companies such as Legal & General, for social and environmental/sustainable investment.

THE CITY'S LUNG

Birmingham is one of the most polluted cities in the UK. The petition of over 10,000 signatures indicates the great public demand for a substantive city centre park that will increase access to nature, provide the opportunity to improve health and well-being and air quality. We need CLEANER AIR. We want a HEALTHIER CITY.

NEW SKILLS FOR A GREEN ECONOMY

The Birmingham Central Park will include a major skills centre, combining technology, film, design and data science with the innovative application of more traditional land-based skills, including in horticulture, ecology, forestry, agriculture, fisheries and water management, to help create a sustainable region, aid the green recovery and address climate change. The WMNP Lab is already working with the International Traditional Skills Institute (ITKI) to create ITKI UK, and with the Prince's Trust to engage with our young people across all of Birmingham's communities to support this initiative.

INCREASED RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Substantial returns on investment from increased rent and rates will be achieved by genuine partnerships created to share costs, risk and benefits for the city/region as a whole rather than continuing to act solely as individual landowners. In addition, for every £1 invested on open space, the local economy gains £27.00 in reduced health care costs, increased rates and uplift in property prices.

OPPORTUNITY FOR LEGACY.

This is the opportunity for investors and landowners to firmly re-establish the civic pride, identity and municipal ambition for which Birmingham was once so renowned. The Birmingham Central Park, bringing together philosophy, arts, science and commerce, centred on the great heritage of East Birmingham, its listed buildings, the canals and river system will be a magnificent outdoor venue (like Millennium Park in Chicago) hosting film, music and the performing arts, punctuated with eating areas, cafés, arts and cultural interventions and spaces for charitable activities, to further enhance the individuality of the experience and help promote social cohesion. With cultural, horticultural and ecological exhibition gardens, laboratories to learn new and traditional skills relating to water catchment and replenishment, climate change, micro brewing, food cultivation, habitat creation and forestry, craft, art and design, it will mark the locus of a national network of foot and cycle paths to the park rings (see below), to the coasts of the UK and to London and other significant destinations. It will house the WMNP Observatory and Lab.

SERIOUSLY ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS OF THE CITY

The Birmingham Central Park provides a real opportunity to buck the trend that the city (and the region) has adopted over decades of filling every available space with buildings and roads, increasing air pollution and thereby eroding our quality of life. It has to be addressed through an inclusive and holistic development and vision.

THE FOOTPRINT

The Curzon Street / East Side / Knowledge Quarter reimagined as the Birmingham Central Park, Birmingham and Coventry City Centres

1c: Birmingham National Ring Parks - our focus for interim funding.

The Birmingham National Ring Park is a green, healthy alternative to the notorious ring roads that encircle our cities, starting with Birmingham. The Ring Parks will help, rather than exacerbate the climate emergency, improve mobility, access to nature and the physical and mental health of local communities.

BACKGROUND: THE INFRASTRUCTURES OF THE WEST MIDLANDS PLATEAU

Cities have since the 1960's measured their success by the number of ring roads. Birmingham is no exception; its ring roads built to celebrate and advertise its significant contribution to car manufacturing. The West Midlands has exceptional system of canals, rarely recognised as a network that facilitated the industrial revolution and thereby changing the world. It has an extensive system of rivers and streams that has been systematically buried, polluted and is now virtually invisible. The West Midlands plateau, a watershed between two of the largest river systems in the UK, is one of the most geologically diverse regions in the world, celebrated in the inscription of The Black Country as UNESCO Global Geopark. Birmingham one of only 23 biophilic cities across the world, has numerous parks and an extensive Edwardian Fringe belt 4-5 miles from the city centre. These immense infrastructures come together to underpin the Ring Park proposal.

The Ring Parks will help to radically reduce car dependency in order to help us reach zero carbon by 2041, dramatically improve air quality of the region, increase health and wellbeing, nature and identity and improve resilience for all of our communities in terms of future pandemics. Its delivery will play a significant role in kick starting the green recovery.

Creating an interconnected network of parks and squares with designated traffic free routes and mobility hubs around, between and across the towns and cities of the plateau, it will meet the demand for alternative green forms of transport, provide access to open space, nature and far greater mobility. Linking communities to through cycling and walking, the aim is to improve nature, soil, identity, air, water and health throughout the region.

The WMNP Lab, arguing that it is time to put the quality of environment, life, health and well-being at the top (not the bottom), of the political agenda, proposes that the infrastructures we have should be repurposed and capitalised on to create the city we need.

- The concrete collar has been broken. As the **Inner Ring Road** continues to be decommissioned, the space released is used to create a traffic free necklace (like the Emerald Necklace in Boston) of interlinked, parks and squares, connecting across and around Birmingham City Centre – **the Inner Ring Park**. Quality space, not more buildings and roads.
- The substantive remnants of the **Edwardian Fringe belt** (approximately 4-5 miles from the city centre) are connected across each other and to each other with designated traffic free cycle ways and footpaths, parks and squares to create a **new Middle Ring Park**
- An **Outer Ring park** connecting existing and creating new parks with designated traffic free cycle and walkways to connect them
- **The Green Belt Ring Park** connects the green belt into ring park system and joins up the cities of the WMCA to the countryside.

Schools, medical centres, shops and other community facilities will be located where these park rings intersect with the canal and river systems (rather than motorway junctions).

Pedestrian and cycle ways along the restored flood plains of the Tame and its tributaries will create another traffic free system to improve local mobility, health, identity and nature.

THE FOOTPRINT

Birmingham, with knowledge transferred to every city in the West Midlands, via 1d.

1d: The WM City Centre Parks

Building on the success of the Black Country Urban Park and the Black Country Garden City, the WM Central Parks project will create the spatial strategy for a series of central parks in each major city of the West Midlands, starting with Coventry. Using the experience and knowledge from 1a, 1d a collaborative study, undertaken with international experts to inform the radical rethink of the purpose, scope and economic viability of Coventry City centre, will set the context for a central park of its own. The network of WM Central Park parks will stretch from Coventry Central Park in the east, to Wolverhampton to the west, creating focal points and major attractions for community events and activities across the region.