



Subject:	Heritage Lottery Nature Towns and Cities Funding Award
Date:	5 th August 2025
Reporting Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Director Resources, Fleet and Open Spaces & Streetscene
Contact Officer:	Edel Gowdy, Lead Officer, Open Space & Streetscene & Orla Maguire, Biodiversity Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To inform members of the committee that in July 2025, Belfast City Council, in partnership with Ulster Wildlife, has been awarded £850,514 through the Nature Towns and Cities initiative, a UK-wide programme led by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Natural England, and the National Trust.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to note the contents of this report and agree to the signing of the letter of offer and to note that a further report would be submitted for approval outlining the scope of the project.
3.0	Main report
	Background and Context
3.1	In October 2024, invitations were issued for local authorities and other partners to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) for funding to build capacity and partnerships, peer networks to share learning and practical solutions and schemes to attract new investment.

	<p>The total funding pot across the UK is £15 million with a funding limit of £250,000 - £1,000,000 per application.</p>
3.2	<p>Ulster Wildlife in partnership with BCC and other key stakeholders submitted an Expression of Interest. The National Lottery Heritage Fund received 276 EoIs with a total ask of £170 million. Across the UK 37 projects were successful at the EOI stage, 3 in NI including the Belfast bid.</p>
3.3	<p>In July 2025 the project was awarded £850,514 through the initiative. This is 92% of the total approved Project cost of £924,418, with in kind contributions from BCC and Ulster Wildlife totalling £73,904 (£59,531 BCC and £14,373 UW) made up of in kind staff time to manage the project and oversee recruitment.. A project overview is provided below. A more detailed report will be brought back to committee demonstrating how this project will fit into the overall Biodiversity programme over the next three years, along with further detail on resourcing and governance.</p> <p><u>Project overview:</u></p>
3.4	<p>Belfast City Council, in partnership with Ulster Wildlife and other key stakeholders, will develop a shared, co-designed vision and associated set of plans and mechanisms for nature's recovery for the city of Belfast and key surrounding areas, including Lagan Valley Regional Park and the Belfast Hills. The project will build on existing initiatives, such as the Future of Northern Ireland's Urban Green Spaces' report, work undertaken on Nature Recovery Networks (NRNS) and Belfast 2024.</p>
3.5	<p>The Project has four key elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The current evidence base will be strengthened through evaluating existing datasets, identifying gaps and shortfalls. An online GIS/mapping platform will spatially map all existing and proposed nature and climate projects, using the ArcGIS package. Work on Biodiversity Net Gain readiness will also be commissioned. 2. Across existing green and blue spaces, paths towards alternative management practices will be explored to enhance existing parks and open spaces, moving from a horticultural focus to a nature and climate emphasis. 3. Opportunities will be explored to 'green the grey' within the built environment, focussing on areas of need under the Belfast Equal Justice Initiative. This will be achieved by implementing the use of Nature-based Solutions, such as Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems to design proposals to better connect nature and people. A best practice guidance document with recommendations for opportunities across Belfast will be produced. 4. The project will evaluate corporate investment opportunities and bolster volunteer sustainability and capacity building through evaluating need, developing training and related upskilling opportunities to enhance organisational sustainability.

3.6	<p>Finance and Resource implications</p> <p>Provision has been made within the project to cover staffing requirements associated with this project. Resources are available within existing budgets to cover the in kind costs associated with project oversight and recruitment.</p>
3.7	<p>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</p> <p>There are no known equality or good relations implications associated with this report.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices</p> <p>Appendix A - Letter of Offer Appendix B - Supporting Information</p>

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