

Report to OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Alexandra Park Eco-Centre and Northern Roots

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jabar, Deputy Leader

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Purpose of the Report

To brief the Overview and Scrutiny Board on the scope and programme of the Eco Centre and Northern Roots projects, following Cabinet's decision to approve them in January 2019.

Recommendations

To note the objectives, and progress to date, of the Eco Centre and Northern Roots projects.

Northern Roots and the Alexandra Park Eco Centre

1 Background

1.1 Over the past six years, and as a tangible part of the co-operative borough ambition, community growing, horticulture skills and training, renewable energy and the local food economy have been developing. This is through a series of linked initiatives including Get Oldham Working, Get Oldham Growing, Growing Oldham, Feeding Ambition, Oldham Community Power and more recently the work on Thriving Communities.

1.2 Oldham's Eco-Centre

Alexandra Park is one of Oldham's greatest assets for residents and also provides a Depot facility which is in urgent need of replacement. Already operating from the site and park are at scale growing, community growing, training, and bio-mass. The new Eco-Centre replacement facility will build on these activities. This will be a facility in its own right but also has the opportunity to provide a place for a wide range of activities, education, enterprises and community engagement.

1.3 Northern Roots

Northern Roots is a proposal to develop the UK's largest urban farm and eco-park, on 160 acres of land at Snipe Clough, immediately adjacent to the Alexandra Park depot. When combined with proposals for the Eco-centre, Northern Roots presents a significant opportunity to further develop and establish Oldham as a green and growing city for the benefit of residents, Greater Manchester and beyond.

This can be a positive new vehicle for change in Oldham and has the potential to be a powerful brand, pulling together existing and developing new initiatives around food, growing, sustainability and wellbeing in the borough, as well enabling community engagement on opportunities and sites across the Borough. There is the ambition for Oldham to become known as a green and growing town and for that to deliver real benefits for the communities and businesses of Oldham but also for GM and beyond.

More work is needed to further develop ideas and interest in the project, as well as identifying sites and opportunities for events, investment and activities. Getting communities involved is key to the success of this project as well as seeking engagement and interest from other organisations, investors and experts.

To enable development work to be taken forward, the Council has identified revenue funding for two years. On January 28 2019 the Cabinet gave the following approvals:

- (i) Approved capital funding re the Eco-Centre

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- (ii) Agreed that a Northern Roots project should be developed to support and complement the Eco-Centre on the Depot site at Alexandra Park which will be Phase 1.
 - (iii) Approved further work on developing and communicating the Northern Roots project, including early phase projects, community engagement, stakeholder/investor engagement and developing options for opportunities/potential sites identified and within the scope of the project.
 - (iv) Delegated approvals for initial development of the Northern Roots project to the Leader and Strategic Director of Reform, with reports for decisions coming forward for approval as required.

2 **Current Position**

- 2.1 The Eco Centre project is at the stage where a multi-disciplinary team of designers is about to be appointed to develop the current concept plan into a detailed plan, in advance of a contractor being selected to construct the new facility. It is expected that the team will be in place before the end of July 2019, with its primary focus being to secure planning approval in early 2020. Assuming approval is given, and subject to final approval from the Council, it is expected that work will commence on site in the summer of 2020.
- 2.2 Importantly, the Eco Centre client team will continue to work closely with colleagues leading on the wider Northern Roots project, thus ensuring continued synergy and co-ordination between the two initiatives. Within the Northern Roots project, work is ongoing to clarify the position with regards to land title and permissions, and implications for developing facilities and activities on Snipe Clough. Conversations have been initiated with potential funders and supporters, and planning is underway for community and stakeholder engagement, and for the delivery of early stage pilot projects.

A presentation will be shared at the Overview and Scrutiny Board, to provide more information on the scope, ambition and current status of the Eco-Centre and Northern Roots projects.

3 **Key Questions for Overview and Scrutiny to Consider**

- 3.1 With regards to Northern Roots:
 - Are there any particular communities, partners or stakeholders we should include in the consultation?
 - Are there any pilot projects members would like to see prioritised?
 - How should elected members be involved and engaged in the project going forward?

4. **Links to Corporate Outcomes**

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- 4.1 The plans for an Eco-Centre and Northern Roots project are aligned with the ambitions set out in the Oldham Plan and fully support delivery of the Oldham Model.

There are strong interdependencies with plans for the town centre regeneration and the opportunity to build and scale activities already underway around the food economy, growing, low carbon and renewable energy, sustainable transport etc.

The project is rooted in social value and making tangible the co-operative values. This is reflected throughout the project with a strong emphasis on community engagement, tangible opportunities benefits to residents and seeking to establish and support local businesses

5 **Consultation**

- 5.1 Legal, Finance, Policy, Regeneration, Health, Economy and Planning are all helping to deliver these projects and sit as part of the Project Groups.