

## **Report to CABINET (PART A)**

# **Northern Roots – Update and Progress Report**

### **Portfolio Holder(s):**

Cllr Arooj Shah, Council Leader and Portfolio Holder for Building a Better Oldham

Cllr Abdul Jabbar, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Value for Money and Sustainability

**Officer Contact:** Emma Barton – Deputy Chief Executive (Place)

### **Report Author(s):**

Paul Clifford, Director of Economy

Anna Da Silva, CEO Northern Roots Charity

**20<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

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### **Reason for Decision**

Cabinet approval has already been obtained for the Northern Roots project / masterplan (2019) and acceptance of external funding allocations: namely Town Deal Fund (Cabinet 14 November 2022) and Levelling Up Round 2 (20 March 2023) grant awards, where allocations have been ringfenced for a new visitor centre and forestry skills centre.

With planning approvals in place for the proposals, this report seeks approval to draw down the funds and award a construction contract with Wilmott Dixon Construction, WDC so that the works can start on site. A fully compliant procurement process undertaken to award WDC a pre-construction services agreement (PCSA, 18 September 2023) and through this work WDC have confirmed a lump sum for the works, (which has been reviewed and verified by the Council's cost estimator) and this is within the external budget allocation. The legal, commercial, and technical details of the contract award are set out in Part B of this report.

Cabinet members are also asked to note that the delivery of the works set out in this report will act as an enabler and facilitator to further works at the site, to delivered by the Northern Roots Charity and funded from other external funding sources awarded directly to the charity.

Finally, in order to facilitate the requirements of the grant awards, Cabinet members are requested to approve delegations for: i) progressing a review of the governance arrangements for the Northern Roots Charity and project works on the site (owned by the Council); and, ii) by association, a leasing/licensing strategy to permit the delivery of the works on site.

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## Recommendations

Cabinet members are asked to:

- Note the progress to date within the report and the various objectives to be achieved by the progression of the Northern Roots project (Section 2 of this report).
- Approve the draw down of the allocated external grant awards to progress with the visitor centre, skills centre and associated works at the site.
- Approve awarding a Stage 2 design and build contract to Willmott Dixon Construction Limited to undertake the contract works as set out in this report. Noting robust monitoring of the works to ensure delivery on time, within budget and to the required standards to meet the funding criteria / objectives.
- Delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) in consultation with Portfolio holders, the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer to approve the procurement and appointment of sub-contractors and service providers to supply any works, supplies or services needed to deliver the project.
- Delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) in consultation with Portfolio holders, the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer to progress leasing/licensing arrangements to facilitate delivery of the capital build and delivery of the masterplan.
- Delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) in consultation with Borough Solicitor to reset the governance arrangements with the Northern Roots Charity to ensure effective working relationships, effective management of the site, and monitoring of the required objectives.

## Northern Roots

### 1 Background

- 1.1 Cabinet approved a masterplan and charity company for the future management and delivery of the Northern Roots Project in 2019, which set out the ambition for Northern Roots as a pioneering site to harness the potential of 160 acres of urban green space, next to some of Oldham's most deprived communities. Key aspects of the original vision/masterplan included:
- Establishment of visitor infrastructure including a dedicated visitor centre
  - Dedicated educational learning space.
  - Associated supporting infrastructure including car parking
  - Growing space including edible growing zones
  - Sport and recreation
  - Woodland discovery and adventure
- 1.2 The ambition for the Northern Roots site has immense potential and focuses on:
- **People:** by producing healthy food, supporting physical activity, promoting connection with nature and community, and enhancing health and wellbeing
  - **Planet:** by managing and improving the landscape to build biodiversity, capture carbon, enhance water quality and increase ecosystem service value
  - **Place:** by generating training, education, jobs and business opportunities, attracting new visitors and investors to Oldham, and enhancing civic pride
- 1.3 The masterplan has been considered by Planning Committee and approvals are now in place for:
- **FUL/348898/22** (13<sup>th</sup> April 2022) – Hybrid application seeking full/part outline consent comprising (a) Full application for the erection of visitor centre, events building with meeting pods, learning centre, forestry depot, ground mounted solar PV and associated works, relocation of football pitch provision, necessary infrastructure, hard and soft landscaping, site wide vehicular, cycle parking and pedestrian improvements, including car park on Nether Hey Street. (b) Outline application (all matters reserved except for access) for a community growing allotment and swimming pond Land at Snipe Clough Oldham
  - **FUL352515/24** (12<sup>th</sup> March 2024) Full application for the erection of a visitor centre, events building, forestry depot, necessary infrastructure, hard and soft landscaping, vehicular and cycle parking and pedestrian movements.
  - **RES/352568/24** (21<sup>st</sup> March 2024) Application for approval of all Reserved Matters in respect of Phase A (Upper Market Garden) relating to approved application FUL/348898/22 Land at Snipe Clough.
- 1.4 Willmott Dixon Construction Limited (WDC), were appointed 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023 as the winning bidder for the project, under a pre-construction services agreement (PCSA) to progress Phase 1 capital works for the Northern Roots project and progress detailed design for the capital build underpinning planning application FUL/35251/24. In addition to the scheme design, there has also been a requirement to undertake a package of enabling works as part of the PCSA to complete surveys and mine shaft investigations which were completed in July 2024.

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- 1.5 Full details on the Northern Roots masterplan and capital phasing, benefits and the charity's sustainable business model can be found in Appendix 2 of Part B of this report.
- 1.6 Northern Roots progress and deliverables on site (to date) include:
- Developed the Phase 1 farm supporting 2 harvests.
  - Landscape management including the creation of 6 ponds, the improvement of 10 acres of grassland and 20 acres of woodland, and 2,000 trees planted.
  - Established a community garden and wildflower meadow.
- 1.7 This has enabled the following outcomes to be achieved for Oldham's local communities, and the project / site has gained regional and national attention and accreditation by association:
- Created 80 volunteering opportunities.
  - Supported 6 small businesses to setup on site.
  - Supported the local Oldham supply chain through the commissioning of businesses to supply goods and deliver services.
  - Delivered a diverse cultural events programme.
  - Providing educational activities for over 600 children and young people.
  - Delivered activities on site that have engaged an estimated 6,000 local residents over the last 2 years.
  - Provided services to 120 participants in the Natural Health Service.
- 1.8 The next phases of the project and delivery of the masterplan for site comprises:
- \* a new Visitor Centre
  - \* a Forestry Skills Centre
  - \* external works including car parking facilities and access/road infrastructure
  - Playground
  - Phase 2 Farm
  - Solar Array
  - New sports pitches
  - Site wide access
  - Wild play facilities
  - Longhouse
  - Swimming Pond
- 1.9 Items marked \* are proposed to be funded and delivered by approvals from this report, and the draw down on the allocated external grant funds. The other items, listed above, are to be funded by external sources available to the Charity, and these items will be delivered by the Charity. It is envisaged that the parallel delivery of these items will provide a comprehensive offer for the local community and a true visitor experience for local residents and visitors from outside the borough.
- 1.10 The items marked \* are being referenced as Phase 1 in the remainder of this report. Northern Roots charity is raising capital funds directly for future phases of the Northern Roots Masterplan.

## **2 Phase 1: Northern Roots Project / Site Development**

- 2.1 Phase 1 works includes the design and delivery of a Visitor Centre, Forestry Skills Centre and associated car parking, road infrastructure and walking / cycling routes to access the facilities. Specific details have been reviewed, assessed and approved through the public

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consultations undertaken by the Northern Roots Charity and the Council, and through the formally approved planning applications.

- 2.2 The following images provide a visual overview of Phase 1 proposals and site locations for the new facilities; these were provided in more detail through the planning applications (referenced earlier in this report), and the detail is still available to view through the planning portal.



Visitor Centre

Landscape



## Forestry Skills Centre

04.25

### Massing - Scale

The massing of the Forestry Skills Centre rises up steeply in a low steel building behind the building to the north west. The Forestry Skills Centre is a forestry building that slightly cuts into the building to sit with a serviceable yard leading from the access road - part of South Lane. The building has a low pitched roof typical of agricultural buildings and sits below the tree line.



- 2.3 Phase 1 has full planning consent and comprises
- a Visitor Centre – welcome area for visitors to the site, reception facility, public toilets and changing space, kitchen / cafe, community prayer room, office space for site management, two multi-purpose learning / workshop spaces and solar panels / heat pumps for sustainable energy.
  - a Forestry Skills Centre – training suite for vocational courses with technical workshop spaces, storage space for equipment needed on site, small office, kitchen and welfare facilities (toilet, showers and drying room for staff and volunteers)
  - a new car park for visitors, dedicated accessible mobility parking, and electric vehicle charging stations, together with new access paths from the car park to the new facilities.
  - a small outdoor amphitheatre adjacent to the Visitor Centre to host performances, talks and school groups.
- 2.4 Enabling works which have formed part of the Preconstruction Services Agreement (PCSA) and included site surveys, intrusive site investigations including probing work to understand the presence of historic mine workings. These were necessary to be able to complete the Stage 4 design information and tender the work.
- 2.5 During the Stage 2 and Stage 3 design there have been several exercises to look at value engineering. Following completion of the PCSA, Willmott Dixon Construction have tendered the work following completion of the Stage 4 Design. A lump sum price submission which includes the PCSA has now been received from WDC and the technical, financial and legal aspects are set out in Part B of this report.
- 2.6 In parallel with Phase 1 capital delivery, the Northern Roots Charity are planning to deliver complementary recreational and visitor infrastructure and attractions, aligned to its commercial business model and these will be funded from external sources. More information is set out in Part B of this report.

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### 3 Northern Roots Charity / Governance Position

- 3.1 The Council set up the Northern Roots Charity in 2022 to facilitate access to external revenue funding sources. This has been very successful, as the Northern Roots charity continues to be self-funded having attracted external funding from prestigious national and regional funders.
- 3.2 Since 2023 the Charity has invested in 50+ local businesses/freelancers, in addition to local staff. In 2024, the Charity reported to the Shareholder Committee that 31 jobs had been created at the site, with 19 posts being filled by residents of Oldham.
- 3.3 The Charity is established on Social Media with 7,000 followers and a 35,000 monthly reach. A new brand and website has been launched. Approx 6,000 local residents have been engaged in activities on site and in surrounding communities in the last 2 years.
- 3.4 In ensuring support for the delivery of the Northern Roots masterplan, resident outcomes and KPIs to 2030 include:

| PEOPLE   | PLANET   | PLACE  |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• At least 300 social prescriptions per year.</li><li>• 150 long term volunteering and 25 work experience placements per year.</li><li>• 15 trainee/apprentice positions per year.</li><li>• 4,500 school visits per year.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 25% Biodiversity Net Gain: grassland enrichment, woodland management, tree/ hedge planting, wetland creation.</li><li>• 30,000 tonnes of carbon stored in woodland/soils (by 2050).</li><li>• 400 KWP of green energy generated.</li><li>• Water quality improved and run off reduced.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 100,000 visitors per year by 2026, and 300,000 by 2030.</li><li>• Supporting 35-40 new businesses.</li><li>• 60-80 new jobs created.</li><li>• £30million of new funding and investment in Oldham.</li></ul> |

- 3.5 As the accountable body for the external grant awards, the Council is responsible for ensuring the delivery of the required outcomes and objectives for the benefit of Oldham's local communities, therefore this report seeks approval to review and reset the relationship with the Northern Roots Charity. This will enable new monitoring and partnership working to flourish and provide the Council will access to the relevant information to ensure compliance with the funding criteria.
- 3.6 The "reset" of the working relationship, governance and partnership between the Council and the Northern Roots Charity will maintain compliance with the Charity Commission and Companies House, and provide a new opportunity for Oldham's communities to benefit from the strengthened partnership between the Council as landlord and accountable body, and the Charity as the Council's delivery partner for managing and maintaining the site, and delivering activities on site.

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## **4 Consultation**

- 4.1 Northern Roots Charity have been consulted through the various workshops and meetings to help confirm requirements, specifications, business plans and holistic opportunities to maximise the funding awards and deliverables.
- 4.2 Members of the public and wider elected members have been consulted through the various planning application processes – all of which have approval.
- 4.3 Portfolio holders and Ward Councillors have been consulted as this is a Key Decision.

## **5 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The financial implications are contained within the Part B report.

(James Postle, Capital Finance Manager)

## **6. Legal Implications**

- 6.1 The legal implications are contained within the Part B report.

(Alexander Bougatef - Interim Borough Solicitor and Rebecca Butterworth – Solicitor)

## **7. Co-operative Implications**

- 7.1 The proposal to appoint Willmot Dixon under a PCSA agreement is welcomed as the contractor will be expected to comply with the Council's social values and the contractor's supply chain will be expected to utilise local businesses where appropriate and competitive.
- 7.2 Furthermore, the appointment will help the Council meet the Levelling Up project deadline and will help deliver a Visitor and Learning sites at Northern Roots, which will attract residents and create a better and thriving place for residents to live in.

(James Mulvaney, Policy Manager)

## **8. Human Resource Implications**

- 8.1 None Applicable

## **9. Risks**

- 9.1 There is a clearly defined risk register in place for this project, which was recently reviewed and will be consistently monitored through the established project delivery governance structure.

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- 9.2 The recommendation to appoint the contractor will provide the Council with an opportunity to develop this area of land and construct a visitor centre and associated infrastructure. As with all construction projects of this nature, there is financial risk associated with the scheme. It should however be noted that extensive assessments including ground investigation have been undertaken through the PCSA to mitigate risk where possible and this is further mitigated through the identified project contingency budget. that the previous funding required will be outside of the Council's risk appetite and this will be reviewed by a cost consultant prior to this decision being made.

(Victoria Gallacher, Risk and Insurance Manager)

## **10. IT Implications**

- 10.1 It is understood that the only requirement from IT is to provide a point-to-point 'Virtual Private Network' (VPN) over the operators own fibre network that will allow Sir Robert Peacock House via its First Response team, to monitor the security of the building CCTV and alarm solutions. At this point no other IT requirements have been identified. Should this change then please make contact.

(Lindsey Al-Basri, IT Head of Projects)

## **11. Property Implications**

- 11.1 These are set out in detail in Part B of the report. The land upon which the building(s) will be built through the award of the contract will become an additional asset of the Council. The asset will be assigned an appropriate asset number, noted on the register of assets and have a value reported within the Council's financial statements.
- 11.2 In accordance with the Council's land and property protocol, work is underway to adopt a land use strategy which is likely to be a combination of leasing and licensing dependent on the specific requirements of each component of the wider masterplan and existing site constraints.
- 11.3 The Deputy Chief Executive (Place) in conjunction with the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer will progress this land use strategy and associated lease and licensing agreements under the agreed delegations sought from this Cabinet report. Details are set out in Part B of this report.

(Alison Evans, Corporate Estates Manager)

## **12 Procurement Implications**

- 12.1 Willmott Dixon Construction (WDC) were appointed on 18th September 2023 as a result of a compliant procurement process. WDC were appointed on the basis to deliver Pre-Construction Services Agreement; and to be followed by main Works contract subject to the parties successfully agreeing the Contract Sum Analysis and the Contractors Proposals during the second stage of the tender process. Further details relating to contractual arrangements are set out in Part B of the report.

(Sandeep Kapoor - Procurement Business Partner)

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### **13 Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**

- 13.1 As an employer/duty holder, Oldham Council has a statutory duty to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all its employees, and persons not in its employment who may be affected by their work, so they are not exposed to risks to their health or safety. Oldham Council's Health and Safety Team have no objections to the content of this report providing the relevant risk assessments are carried out prior to the works commencing to ensure health and safety compliance during the construction as well as compliance with all building regulations.
- 13.2 Full compliance with the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 must be ensured throughout the project, from design to construction. Suitably competent contractors must be appointed and monitored throughout the project.

(N.Crabtree - Head of Public Protection)

### **14 Community cohesion, including crime and disorder implications in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

- 14.1 The Northern Roots project is focused on enhancing the site to make it attractive for recreational use so that a positive impact on the poor health, deprivation and employment statistics can occur. Northern Roots will work with local health and care providers to connect people in these communities with the well documented physical and mental health benefits of spending time outdoors, working with Oldham's social prescribing network to support access to increased physical activity, healthy food and activities such as gardening and farming. In addition, Northern Roots will work with schools, colleges and universities to deliver courses, qualifications, apprenticeships and jobs, providing economic opportunities in communities where this is much needed.

(Natalie Downs - Stronger Communities Manager)

- 14.2 The Northern Roots project provides intervention and diversion activities which are recognised factors in the reduction of crime and disorder. Any construction site will need to be secured sufficiently to prevent theft of equipment and materials, and the use of equipment, materials and/or site detritus for anti-social behavior or criminal activity

(Lorraine Kenny – Head of Community Safety Services)

### **15 Oldham Equality Impact Assessment, including implications for Children and Young People**

- 15.1 Yes - An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and included with this report and is available under Appendix 1.

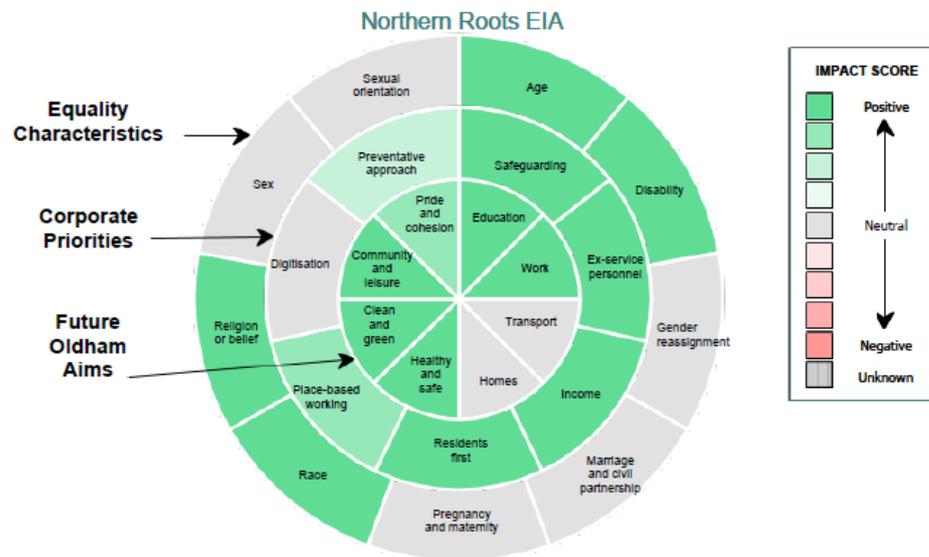
### **16 Key Decision: ESR-29-24**

### **17 Background Papers: Publicly available cabinet reports as referenced in this report**

## 18 Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Northern Roots EIA

#### Appendix 1 – Northern Roots EIA



| Northern Roots EIA              |                   |             |           |  |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|-----------|--|
|                                 | Impact            | Likelihood  | Duration  | Comment  |
| <b>Equality Characteristics</b> |                   |             |           |  |
| Age                             | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots project and its ambition will have a positive benefit for people of all ages  |
| Disability                      | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | new physical infrastructure associated with the Visitor Centre and Learning Centre will be DDA compliant   |
| Gender reassignment             | Neutral           | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots projects vision includes access for all people and backgrounds  |
| Marriage and civil partnership  | Neutral           | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots projects vision includes access for all people and backgrounds  |
| Pregnancy and maternity         | Neutral           | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots projects vision includes access for all people and backgrounds  |
| Race                            | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots projects vision includes access for all people, backgrounds and race. The projects activities does and will continue to reach out to different ethnic groups. |
| Religion or belief              | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | The proposed new infrastructure includes space for private prayer  |
| Sex                             | Neutral           | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots projects vision includes access for all people, sexes and backgrounds.  |
| Sexual orientation              | Neutral           | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots projects vision includes access for all people, sexes and backgrounds.  |
| <b>Corporate Priorities</b>     |                   |             |           |  |
| Safeguarding                    | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots project and its ambition will have a positive benefit for people of all ages  |
| Ex-service personnel            | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots project and its ambition will have a positive benefit for all the residents of Oldham   |
| Income                          | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots project and its ambition will have a positive benefit for all the residents of Oldham irrespective of their income levels                                     |
| Residents first                 | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots project and its ambition will have a positive benefit for all the residents of Oldham   |
| Place-based working             | Moderate Positive | Very Likely | Long Term |  |
| Digitisation                    | Neutral           | Possible    | Long Term |  |
| Preventative approach           | Moderate Positive | Possible    | Long Term | The Northern Roots project and its ambition will have a positive benefit for all the residents of Oldham   |
| <b>Future Oldham Aims</b>       |                   |             |           |  |
| Education                       | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots Project will enable the delivery of education and skills provision In the Learning Centre   |
| Work                            | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots project will provide a range of employment opportunities  |
| Transport                       | Neutral           | Possible    | Long Term |  |
| Homes                           | Neutral           | Possible    | Long Term |  |
| Healthy and safe                | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots project and its ambition will have a positive Health benefit for people   |
| Clean and green                 | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | The Park will be a centre for green innovation and technology  |
| Community and leisure           | Strong Positive   | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots project and its ambition will enable people to get together and access activities to improve their physical or mental health                                  |
| Pride and cohesion              | Moderate Positive | Very Likely | Long Term | The Northern Roots project and its ambition will have a positive benefit for all the residents of Oldham   |