

## **The Arnold and Marjorie Ziff Tropical World Play – South American House Developments**

**Date:** 15 August 2022

**Report of:** Senior Estates Manager

**Report to:** Chief Officer, Parks & Countryside

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

### **Brief Summary**

- In June 2019 Executive Board gave approval to develop plans for an indoor play facility with an injection of £2.0m into capital scheme no. 33171, to be funded through prudential borrowing. The report also agreed to delegate authority to spend to the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment subject to consultation with the Executive Member for Environment and Active Lifestyles.
- The overall proposals look to transform an existing glasshouse with limited education and conservation value to an indoor play facility to improve visitor experience, increase dwell time and provide a year round attraction that informs and educates people about biodiversity and the importance of conservation particularly following the recent declaration of a climate change emergency.
- This report seeks authority to spend from the capital scheme to initiate enabling works within the current South American House. There have been no recent development works within Tropical World due to the pending proposals involving the construction of play, as a result Tropical World has received some negative feedback from customers visiting and on such as Tripadvisor.
- In response to this it is proposed that we introduce four new enclosures into the 'South America House' to significantly improve the visitor attraction, adding new species and viewing platforms to improve visitor satisfaction as well as allowing Tropical World to become involved with existing European Endangered Species breeding programmes, a key conservation requirement to be compliant with the new zoo standards set to be introduced this year. The new species added are consistent with the plans for the wider improvement scheme referred to in the June 2019 Executive Board report.
- The proposal would contribute to the following Best Council Plan priorities:
  - a) Health and wellbeing by supporting healthy, physically active lifestyles.
  - b) Inclusive Growth through using the civic enterprise model to generate income to fund the new visitor facilities and provide a return on investment.
  - c) Safe, strong communities by providing a new, inclusive community resource for local people and visitors from further afield.
  - d) Growing the cultural sector through restoring, promoting and sharing the heritage of the site, and ensuring that it can be more widely experienced

e) Child Friendly Leeds through improving health and wellbeing, an enhanced learning environment and a place for children to play.

## Recommendations

The Chief Officer Parks & Countryside is requested to approve the following;

- a) The authority to spend up to £250k of the £2 million investment that has been injected into capital scheme number 33171 for enabling works to facilitate the future play development proposals.
- b) To approve the development of 4 new enclosures, enhanced viewing platforms and the introduction of interpretation areas into the South American House.

## Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 Tropical World is one of the top Yorkshire Attractions, seeing circa 300k visitors every year. As a top visitor attraction, development of the site is imperative to remain relevant, exciting, and meet the conservation, research and educational statutory requirements of the Zoo.
- 2 Much like any other attraction, Tropical World faces significant budget challenges and strives to position itself as a key competitor within the attraction industry, Tropical World represents good value for money whilst fulfilling social and environmental responsibilities but must continue to hold this position by investing and improving.
- 3 The proposed improvements will also facilitate better collection planning and enable more flagship and exciting species that hold conservation value playing a much more pivotal role in the zoological industry, research programmes and education. The Tropical World animal collection continues to change and develop according to the mission statement of providing a high standard of welfare and husbandry, delivering a first class service to visitors by representing tropical and arid areas of the world, and promoting the awareness of endangered animal and plant species through education.
- 4 This development, by allowing the design and construction of bespoke, purpose-built enclosures allows the species within them to express their most natural behaviours, comfortably meeting the high standards of the five provisions of animal welfare. Visitors will be introduced to new species displayed in these enclosures with a view to increasing satisfaction, footfall and dwell within the attraction.

## What impact will this proposal have?

### Wards Affected:

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

- 5 The original Executive Board report approved in June 2019 was a key decision and subject to call-in and this decision is a direct consequence and therefore is deemed a significant operational decision.

## What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 6 Market research commissioned in 2020, showed that when asked “the most important reason was for visiting Tropical World” that only 18% of respondents suggested it was

because they were interested in the animals, with 54% designating that spending time with family and children was most important to them. When exploring the proposal of more animals and indoor play being added to the Tropical World experience, visitors and non-visitors suggested that something like this could extend their visit by an extra 30-90 minutes, as well as increasing the amount of repeat visits through the year – extending out of busy school holiday periods.

- 7 The Friends of Roundhay Park and Little Friends of Roundhay Park have been regularly briefed about proposals to the attraction and are supportive of the proposed developments.
- 8 The teams within Tropical World are directly involved with proposals to enhance enclosures and fully supportive of developments. Staff communication and engagement is ongoing.

### **What are the resource implications?**

- 9 The breakdown of works totalling £250k is appended to this report.
- 10 The ongoing care of species in this space, any management and maintenance requirements will be undertaken within existing revenue budgets.

### **What are the legal implications?**

- 11 This decision is as a direct consequence of an Executive Board decision which was key and subject to call in.
- 12 The equality, diversity, cohesion and integration screening undertaken as part of the report to Executive Board in June 2019 is relevant to this development. A link to the screening can be found here: [Tropical World Report Appx 1 EIA 300519.pdf \(leeds.gov.uk\)](#).

### **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

- 13 There is a serious risk associated with 'doing nothing' as a failure to invest in the attraction is likely to see a pattern of continued decline.
- 14 The zoos are subject to annual inspections and latest amendments place greater and stricter emphasis on conservation, education and research requirements. There is a risk of losing the zoo licence without the right collection planning and compliance with statutory requirements. It is essential that site development is in line with the collection, which means projects and initiatives to develop and enhance the visitor attraction in order to achieve the high standards expected by environmental health inspectors, veterinary services and the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Any closure would lead to a significant loss of income as well as reputational damage.
- 15 It is not sustainable to continue the operation of a £2m income generating attraction without investment and development. The site requires development through delivering a commercial approach to the running of the attraction by adopting strategies to maximise opportunities and increase revenue streams.

## Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

### Climate Emergency

Tropical World is a licensed zoo and as part of the conditions of this licence must demonstrate how people are educated about biodiversity as well as promoting conservation. Interpretation signs provide information about the individual species and these are reviewed and updated. In the collection at Tropical World, visitors are provided with an educational experience that will help them learn about the species in the collections, conservation issues affecting them in the wild, and the importance of their habitats. The important role that zoos can play in conservation and education of endangered species and habitats is highlighted as well as to inspire people to take an active role in the conservation of plants and animals in the wild through workshops, onsite tours, digital content and social media.

### Health and Wellbeing

Tropical World provides an enhanced learning environment and as a member of the Child Friendly Leeds initiative is a place for children to play, engage and learn. Tropical World promotes active travel through our marketing and social media campaigns, including the broader benefits of being in the heart of Roundhay Park.

### Inclusive Growth

Tropical World is located within the Green Flag award winning Roundhay Park. Studies show that the improvement of attractions and cultural offering makes a place more desirable to live and work.

### Options, timescales and measuring success

#### a) What other options were considered?

- 1 No further options have been considered at this stage as the proposal is consistent with the wider project aims outlined in previous reports.

### How will success be measured?

- 2 The project will be managed on site by a project officer throughout all stages of the construction. As part of this role, contractor performance will be monitored and managed in line with the contract terms.

### What is the timetable for implementation?

- 3 It is anticipated that construction works will commence July 2022 ready for opening late Autumn 2022.

### Appendices

23 None.

### Background papers

24 None.