

# The Arnold and Marjorie Ziff Tropical World – New Desert House

Date: 05 November 2022

Report of: Senior Estates Manager

Report to: Chief Officer, Parks and 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 design and build a new Desert House to enable the relocation of the current desert house animal collection in anticipation of the new play. There has been little to no development works within Tropical World due to the pending proposals involving the construction of play, as a result Tropical World has received a great deal of negative feedback with particular emphasis on the attraction feeling old, neglected, empty and underutilised.
- The new Desert House will be adjacent to the butterfly house and the current aquarium. Removal of the old lean to building and temporary toilet block. This space will be expanded. The building specification will comply with the necessary building regs and will be a stand-alone building with new roof which removes the issues we currently face. 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 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 £ 595,211.00 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 a purpose-built space to enable the relocation of the current desert house collection

## What is this report about?

- 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 existing desert house has a catalogue of issues, primarily with provision of adequate heating and sustaining ambient temperatures and humidity. The site has a history of roofing issues which further exacerbate these problems, it is imperative that we make significant changes or improvements to ensure the safe and ongoing welfare of the animals housed here. In addition, the hornbills whilst free flight impose a risk in terms of escape, faeces and zoonotic diseases and are difficult to catch up when required for husbandry duties.
- 4 The proposed improvements will also facilitate better collection planning and allow us to look at more flagship and exciting species that hold conservation value and enable us to play 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 our mission statement of providing a high standard of welfare and husbandry, delivering a first class service to our visitors by representing tropical and arid areas of the world, and promoting the awareness of endangered animal and plant species through education.
- 5 This development, by allowing the design and construction of a bespoke, purpose-built space allows the species within them to express their most natural behaviours, comfortably meeting the high standards of the five provisions of animal welfare. Our visitors will be introduced to new species being displayed in these enclosures with a view to increasing visitor satisfaction, footfall and dwell within the attraction.

## What impact will this proposal have?

- 6 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.

## How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

## 7 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 our collection at Tropical World, we aim to provide all visitors with an educational experience that will help them learn about the species in our collections, the conservation issues affecting them in the wild, and the importance of their habitats. We highlight the important role that zoos can play in conservation and education of endangered species and habitats, and 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 we are 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 our attractions and cultural offering makes a place more desirable to live and work. By adopting the civic enterprise model, we can generate more income to fund and develop the site and provide a return on investment.

## What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: Roundhay Park

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

- 8 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.
- 9 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.
- 10 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?**

- 11 The breakdown of works is appended to this report.
- 12 The ongoing care of species in this space, any management and maintenance requirements will be undertaken by existing staff and paid for from the Tropical World budgets.

## **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, we are at risk of losing the zoo licence without the right collection planning and compliance with our statutory requirements, It is essential that we are developing the site 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. This could result in closures and loss of significant income which in the current economic climate would be catastrophic.
- 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.

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

- 16 This decision is as a direct consequence of an Executive Board decision ref D49829 which was key and subject to call in.
- 17 The equality, diversity, cohesion and integration screening undertaken as part of the report to Executive Board in June 2019 is relevant to this development.

## **Options, timescales and measuring success**

### **What other options were considered?**

- 18 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?**

- 19 The project will be managed on site by a project manager 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 and who will be responsible for implementation?**

- 20 It is anticipated that construction works will commence December 2022 ready for opening late Summer 2023.

## **Appendices**

- EDCI

### **Background papers**

- Executive Board report - [Council and democracy \(leeds.gov.uk\)](https://www.leeds.gov.uk/council-and-democracy)