

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Recreation and Heritage
Date:	25 February 2019
Title:	Country Park Transformation Update and approval for River Hamble Country Park
Report From:	Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services

Contact name: Jo Heath

Tel: 01962 847717

Email: Jo.heath@hants.gov.uk

1. Recommendation

That the Executive Member for Recreation and Heritage:

- 1.1 Gives authority to procure, spend and enter into the necessary contractual arrangements up to a value of £800,000 to implement the scheme set out in this report at River Hamble Country Park.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report provides an update on progress and achievements of the Country Parks Transformation (CPT) Programme. It outlines the specific proposal for River Hamble country park.
- 2.2. At this point in the programme, both Lepe and Royal Victoria have now completed their phase 1 transformation works. The ANPR (automatic number plate recognition system) is now up and running at Lepe, Royal Victoria and Queen Elizabeth Country Parks and is on track to be installed at all parks by end of March 2019. The building schemes at Queen Elizabeth, River Hamble and Staunton Country Parks are due for completion by December 2019. The café refurbishment at Royal Victoria and improvements at the farm attractions will complete in 2020.
- 2.3. Initial data from the ANPR system has been used to check and challenge original revenue forecasts, inform a new charging structure and provide improved confidence in a revised revenue income forecast. Based on this, 2019/20 should see an increase in income at the parks, reducing the parks collective cash limit to almost a cost neutral position, achieving the overarching benefit of the CPT Programme.
- 2.4. The project at River Hamble country park requires a budget allocation of £800,000 from the corporate allocated capital, to achieve a new visitor

centre with welcome, catering, toilets, seating and hire space, together with new and improved play and trails.

3. Programme Context and Update

- 3.1. The Country Parks Transformation (CPT) Programme aims to develop a suite of modern 21st Century Country Parks that are operationally self financing. The parks will attract more people from Hampshire, and beyond, to visit more often, stay longer, spend more and return. By achieving this, the parks aim to become operationally and financially sustainable in the long term.
- 3.2. The outcomes of the programme can be summarised as:
 - Financially self sustaining parks
 - Improved play, activities, facilities and learning
 - Increased visitor numbers, satisfaction and spend
 - Improved partner/community relationships
- 3.3. The Country Parks currently cost in the region of £3.6m collectively per annum to run. To fund this, £3.2m is generated from income, with the remaining £0.4m coming from the Culture, Communities and Business Services' Cash Limited Revenue Budget. At this point in the programme, both Lepe and Royal Victoria have now completed their phase 1 transformation works. The ANPR (automatic number plate recognition system) is now up and running at Lepe, Royal Victoria and Queen Elizabeth Country Parks and is on track to be installed at all parks by end of March 2019.
- 3.4. Initial data from the ANPR system has been used to check and challenge original revenue forecasts, inform a new charging structure and provide improved confidence in a revised revenue income forecast to achieve T19 savings. Based on this, 2019/20 should see an increase in income at the parks, reducing the parks collective cash limit to £40,000, an almost cost neutral position, thus achieving the overarching benefit of the CPT Programme.
- 3.5. The service is monitoring the increase in costs at parks as a result of completed projects to analyse the affect on the overall net revenue position. This is being fed into forecasted figures for other parks, to ensure a more accurate ongoing forecast.
- 3.6. Lepe Progress/Achievements
 - *The Lookout* opened on 4 May 2018.
 - Catering income increase of £53k May-Nov 2018 compared with the same period in 2017.
 - Parking income increase of £80k May-Dec compared with the same period in 2017, following the introduction of ANPR in mid May.
 - Visitor number increase of 25% since the opening of *The Lookout*.

3.7. Royal Victoria Progress/Achievements

- Chapel opened to the public on 1 Aug 2018.
- Royal opening of the chapel by the Countess of Wessex on 12 Nov 2018.
- A number of successful events held at the chapel.
- Parking income increase of £41k Jun-Dec 2018 compared with the same period in 2017, following the introduction of ANPR in June.
- Visitor number increase of 11% since the chapel opened.
- Additional £900,000 awarded to transform the restaurant.

3.8. Queen Elizabeth Progress/Achievements

- Installation of assault course, dog activity trail, play and community space with pizza oven completed in Juniper area of the park.
- By July 2018 car parking income at Juniper increased by nearly 100% compared with 2017.
- Juniper catering income doubled from £11,000 in 2017 to £22,000 in 2018.
- Visitor number increase of 86% to the Juniper area of the park since Apr 2018.
- Additional £400,000 capital awarded to achieve full transformation plans.
- Main contract tendered and awarded within budget. Works to the visitor centre refurbishment started on 14th January.

3.9. Staunton Progress/Achievements

- Planning permission received, following a delay of approx. 6 months.
- Sawmill works completed in the parkland.
- Additional £450,000 capital awarded to the farm to give a budget of £600,000 for improvements to the farm attraction.
- Works to the parkland will start early in 2019, following appointment of contractors. This was planned to be carried out under one contract, but due to the poor tender response this has been broken down and will be tendered as more than one contract.

3.10. Manor Farm

- £550,000 capital awarded to the farm attraction.
- Focus on enhancing animal welfare and the visitor experience through the development of outdoor play, improved learning and engagement for general visitors and school groups and animal feeding.

3.11. Titchfield Haven Progress/Achievements

- Kitchen upgrade Nov 2017.

- Tea room furniture upgrade to take place in Feb 2019.
- Bid for Bird Aware funding to be submitted in March 2019.

4. River Hamble Country Park (RHCP)

- 4.1. River Hamble Country Park is located directly to the north east of Junction 8 of the M27, between Southampton and Portsmouth. The country park covers approximately 400 acres and incorporates a number of different landscapes from woodland through to grassland, productive agricultural land to recreation space, with the River Hamble running along its eastern boundary.
- 4.2. Areas within the country park have the following designations:
 - SSSI – Site of Special and Scientific Interest
 - SPA – Special Protection Area
 - SAC – Special Area of Conservation
 - SINCC – Site of Interest for Nature Conservation
- 4.3. The park is owned by the County Council, with parts of it leased to a local farmer for agricultural use and not accessible to the public.
- 4.4. The country park includes the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Activity Centre which provides activity opportunities for people with disabilities. The Cricket Campsite and Pauline's Lodge have been developed by the Scouts, which including the grounds, incorporates some 30 acres of land within the park's boundary.
- 4.5. At the beginning of the CPT programme RHCP was marketed as part of Manor Farm. Market research was undertaken by external consultants and their findings highlighted that two different visitor attractions were being marketed under one umbrella with a joint vision and aims. Many of the visitors going to the farm would drive through the country park without realising what it had to offer.
- 4.6. The market research and evaluation highlighted the absence of a visitor hub within the country park. The only facilities being a kiosk, which was opening at weekends (spring and summer only) and during the holidays, but is no longer fit as a catering outlet due to age and condition. There is a small amount of ageing play and toilets. This is not visible from the road and there was a large amount of vegetation blocking visitors from seeing further into the area.
- 4.7. When visitors were asked what improvements they would like to see at the country park, the top five were adventure play (40%), natural/wild play (33%), improved trails (30%), events (28%) and improved catering (27%).
- 4.8. In January 2017 the country park was rebranded River Hamble Country Park. The entrance signage was updated with the new branding and the website developed with its own identity and pages.
- 4.9. The trail network is large and with very limited signage, making it difficult for new visitors to know where to go and existing visitors to navigate further a field or take different paths. The park benefited from some grant funding to

develop the river walk, which was carried out at the end of 2016 and has been popular with walkers and dog walkers. Improvements have also been carried out on other parts of the path network.

- 4.10. There is a large housing development on the doorstep of the park. This provides an opportunity to attract further visitors and also signifies the importance of protecting green spaces within the county as more housing is developed.
- 4.11. The core visitor group is predominantly walkers and dog walkers with a small family market visiting. There is an opportunity to develop the offer based on visitor needs within the country park and to attract a larger family audience.
- 4.12. The building structure to be used for the visitor centre is part of a new timber frame building that was destined to be a classroom, but no longer required. There was an opportunity to make use of an investment already made by the County Council. The programme reviewed where this could be utilised and decided that the need for a building at River Hamble would be a good fit, as this meets the need of the country park
- 4.13. The enhancements and outcomes this project will bring to the park are:
- a hub space for the country park that is visible from the road and provides visitor welcome, catering, seating, toilets and play;
 - the building will provide the visitor welcome, toilets, catering, some under cover seating and a hire space that can be used by the community for learning based activities, school visits and other uses such as children's parties;
 - investment will be made in the play offer to meet the needs of those who wanted to see more adventure and natural play. This will be the start of the investment in play, which will be extended as further funding becomes available;
 - investment will be made in the trail network to consolidate the large number of paths to a core set that improve accessibility and can be used all year round, making River Hamble a destination in all seasons;
 - new signage will be provided within the park to give visitors the confidence to explore;
 - parking is already available at the Barnfields site. Vegetation will be cleared so that the maximum number of spaces can be utilised. Overflow parking is also available nearby. The honesty rating for parking is 54% and is forecast to increase to 95% once ANPR is in operation;
 - ANPR is due to installed and live by March 2019 and car parking income is set to increase by £54,000 by March 2021;
 - following improvements visitor numbers are forecast to increase by 10%.
- 4.14. The capital investment is broken down as follows:

Visitor building	£475,000
Infrastructure and services	£75,000
Play	£150,000
Trails	£45,000
Landscaping	£55,000
Total requiring approval	£800,000

- 4.15. Approval has already been obtained to fund entrance improvements at a cost of £55,000 through s106 funding and for the supply of electricity at a cost of £150,000 through revenue funding under officer delegate decision. These elements are already underway and do not require further approval from EMRH.

Risks

- 4.16. Insufficient budget to achieve transformation to the desired level i.e. play will need to be delivered in stages.
- 4.17. Large infrastructure costs to supply data and power to the site to operate the building and car parking system that need to be met by the project.
- 4.18. Developing a drainage system that can be delivered within budget and be given planning permission.

5. Finance

- 5.1. The Executive Member Policy and Resources approved the CPT Programme in December 2013 and a capital investment from Hampshire County Council of £5.7m; to match a £3m capital target from the sale of countryside assets and a contribution of £4.2m from partner and grant funding.
- 5.2. The sale of assets has exceeded expectations and so far achieved £3,306,000. There is one final property to be marketed with an estimated value of £500,000, which would give an overall total from the property sales of £3,806,000.
- 5.3. The initial programme budget was £12.9m, which rose to £16.1m, an increase of £3.2m or 25%. This was as a result of the success of the programme in exceeding the external funding income target of £4.2m by £2.8m to a total of £7m.
- 5.4. A request for £2.3m additional capital was recommended by Executive Member for Recreation and Heritage in May 2018 and approved by the County Council in September 2018.
- 5.5. The additional funding generated gives a total programme funding of £18.814m.
- 5.6. The programme capital breakdown can be seen in appendix 1.
- 5.7. The overall spend profile for the parks can be found in appendix 2.

Appendix 1 – Overall Capital Breakdown

PROJECT	HCC TOTAL	EXTERNAL SOURCES TOTAL	TOTAL
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Royal Victoria	2,292	2,269	4,561
Lepe	2,070	1,028	3,098
Queen Elizabeth	2,150	208	2,358
Titchfield	50		50
Manor Farm	580		580
River Hamble	950	55	1,005
Staunton	1,558	3,448	5,006
Programme team	535		535
Other programme costs	387		387
Car parking system	950		950
Infrastructure & Signage	240		240
Contingency	44		44
Total	£11.806m	£7.008m	£18.814m

Appendix 2 – River Hamble Spend Profile

River Hamble Country Park Revenue Summary

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Current Gross Running Costs - Baseline	138	138	138
Current Income - Baseline	-123	-123	-123
Total Forecasted Costs	157	210	215
Total Forecasted Income	-93	-133	-179
Net Revenue Position	64	77	36

Appendix 3 – All parks spend profile

All Parks Revenue Summary

	Baseline				
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Current Gross Running Costs - Baseline	2808	2808	2808	2808	2808
Current Income - Baseline	-2370	-2370	-2370	-2370	-2370
Total Forecasted Costs	2808	3590	3235	3639	3606
Total Forecasted Income	-2370	-2969	-2902	-3242	-3566
Net Revenue Position	438	621	333	397	40

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Strategic Plan**

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Date</u>
Transforming our Country Parks – Case for Future Investment	5362	12/12/13
Royal Victoria Country Park Chapel	6424	12/03/15
Project approval for Lepe and Royal Victoria wider park	6939	20/10/15
Country Parks Transformation Project Approvals	7726	09/11/16

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

DocumentLocation

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equality Duty

1.1. The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- a. The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- b. Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- c. Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

1.2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

Equality impact assessments will be completed as part of each project start-up.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. No significant impact has been identified in the development of this report.

3. Climate Change:

3.1. This will be considered as part of each park project.