

# HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Decision Report

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	11 March 2019
<b>Title:</b>	Country Park Transformation Update
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services

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### 1. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 1.1 Welcomes the success of the Country Parks Transformation (CPT) Programme to date and its contribution to both service transformation targets, and major customer improvements.
- 1.2 Endorses the positive impacts achieved in terms of visitor numbers and income generated.
- 1.3 Supports the ongoing roll out of the approved programme and planned feasibility work on further developments that may further enhance the Country Park offer.

### 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report provides an update on progress and achievements of the Country Parks Transformation (CPT) Programme.
- 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 the 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 will utilise a budget allocation of £800,000 from the approved corporate allocated capital, to achieve a new visitor centre with welcome facilities, catering, toilets, seating and hire space, together with new and improved play and trails. Once completed this may offer a platform to develop the site into a major visitor destination subject to appropriate feasibility work
- 2.5. The report provides information on the strong financial performance associated with the roll out of the programme including information on visitor and income uplift.

### **3. Programme Context**

- 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.

## 4. Site Updates

### 4.1. Lepe Progress/Achievements:

- *The Lookout* opened on 4 May 2018;
- 80% increase in catering profit of £53k May-Nov 2018 compared with the same period in 2017;
- 57% 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*.

### 4.2. 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;
- 47% 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.

### 4.3. 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 14<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

### 4.4. 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;

#### 4.5. 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.

#### 4.6. 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.

### **5. River Hamble Country Park – Forthcoming work**

- 5.1. River Hamble Country Park (RHCP) 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.
- 5.2. 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.
- 5.3. 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 toilet facilities.
- 5.4. 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%).
- 5.5. 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.
- 5.6. 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.
- 5.7. 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.

- 5.8. In response to this context the proposed enhancements focus upon:
- a hub space for the country park that is visible from the road and provides visitor welcome, catering, seating, toilets and play; and hire space;
  - investment in the play offer to meet the needs of those who wanted to see more adventure and natural play;
  - investment 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;
  - improvements in parking including installation of ANPR at the end of March 2019.
- 5.10 Once these improvements have been secured there will be a strong platform to consider developing the site as a significant visitor destination. A combination of opportunities linked to the strategic location of the site, the family farm attraction, and the extensive and varied nature of the park itself, is worthy of further feasibility work. This will assess such potential linking to experience from the CPT programme and associated business development opportunities.

## **6. Finance**

- 6.1. 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.
- 6.2. The sale of assets has exceeded expectations and so far has 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.
- 6.3. 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.
- 6.4. A request for £2.3m additional capital was recommended by Executive Member Recreation and Heritage in May 2018 and approved by the County Council in September 2018.
- 6.5. The extra funding achieved gives a total programme funding figure of £18.814m.
- 6.6. The programme capital breakdown can be seen in appendix 1.

- 6.7. The increase in revenue costs associated with the new, improved, and expanded facilities is being factored in to ongoing costings to ensure that we maintain the right standards of quality and customer service.
- 6.8. The improvements in financial performance associated with those sites which have received transformation investment, is set out in appendix 2. This represents a positive result and tracks the impact of the investment made with Lepe and RVCP both tracking over 30% in income growth. Whilst a full year's visitor data is not yet available across all parks, our low season improvement is currently tracking strongly, driven by an especially good December uplift

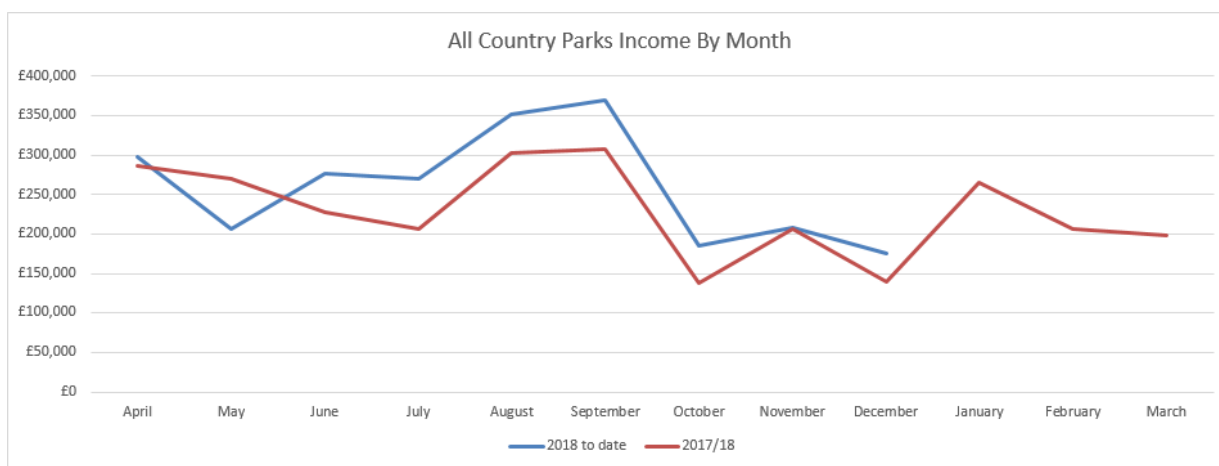
## Appendix 1 – Overall Capital Breakdown

<b>PROJECT</b>	<b>HCC TOTAL</b>	<b>EXTERNAL SOURCES TOTAL</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
	£'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
<b>Total</b>	<b>£11.806m</b>	<b>£7.008m</b>	<b>£18.814m</b>

## Appendix 2 – Country Parks Income and Visitor Figures

### Income for all Parks

Income	2018 to date	2017	% change
Lepe	£299,253	£220,186	35.9%
RVCP	£356,683	£270,518	31.9%
QECP	£435,763	£358,088	21.7%
TH	£102,172	£90,778	12.6%
RH/MF	£406,413	£389,373	4.4%
Staunton	£741,672	£755,576	-1.8%
Totals	£2,341,956	£2,084,519	12.3%



### Visitor Figures for all Parks

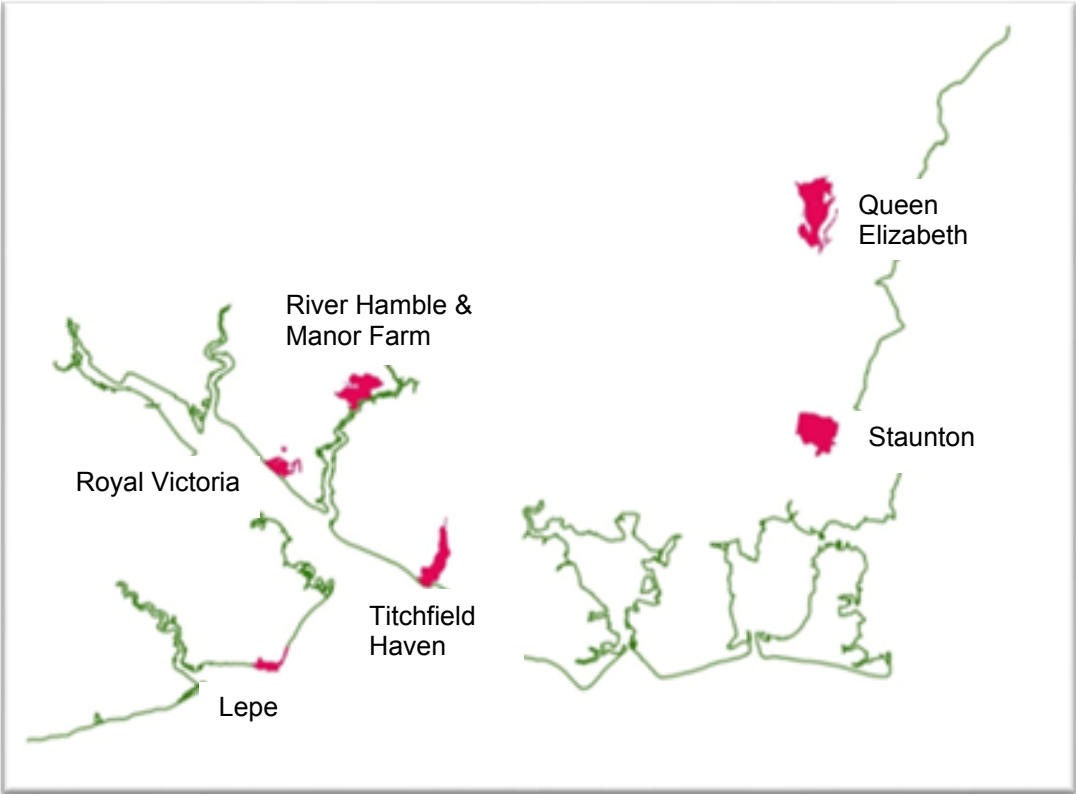
PEAK	April	July	August	October	Totals
2018 to date	327877	329895	282431	283305	1223508
2017-2018	304075	283220	273992	251175	1112462
% variance	7.8%	16.5%	3.1%	12.8%	10.0%
MID	May	June	September	March	Totals
2018 to date	282578	275608	232906		791092
2017-2018	312927	237888	193086		743901
% variance	-9.7%	15.9%	20.6%		6.3%
LOW	November	December	January	February	Totals
2018 to date	192546	197246			389792
2017-2018	173346	142000			315346
% variance	11.1%	38.9%			23.6%



### Appendix 3 – All parks spend profile

	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
<b>Net Revenue Position</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>40</b>

**Appendix 4 – Park Location Map**



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

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

**Other Significant Links**

<b>Links to previous Member decisions:</b>		
<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.