

**HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL****Report**

<b>Committee:</b>	Culture and Communities Select Committee
<b>Date:</b>	14 September 2015
<b>Title:</b>	Country Parks Transformation Programme Update
<b>Reference:</b>	6895
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services

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## **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to update the Culture and Communities Select Committee and the Executive Member on the Country Parks Transformation (CPT) programme. The programme was approved by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources (EMPR) in December 2013 and allocated £5.7m capital funding. Approval was also given at this meeting for the sale of selected Countryside assets to raise a target of £3m towards the programme. To achieve an overall budget of £12.9m the programme needs to raise £4.2m from other external sources.
- 1.2. The Transformation programme is a once in a generation opportunity to transform the County Council's country parks in order for them to remain relevant to current and future visitors; deliver significant improvements; maximise investment and partnership funding; and become operationally cost neutral. On completion, the programme will provide ongoing revenue savings of around £0.5 million per annum.
- 1.3. This report will:
  - provide an update on the Country Parks Transformation programme progress and delivery;
  - provide detail on the Lepe and Royal Victoria Country Parks projects that are now entering delivery phase.
- 1.4. The project to transform Lepe Country Park has been allocated £2.3m from the programme's capital budget. This will deliver a new, sustainable visitor centre with café, staff accommodation and investment throughout the wider park. Approval to spend on this project will be requested from EMPR in October 2015.
- 1.5. Royal Victoria Country Park (RVCP) has been successful in achieving £1.7m Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) to transform the historically

important Chapel building ensuring that it is easier to access for all and conserved for future generations to enjoy and understand its significance. The EMPR approved £1.1million in match funding for this project from the CPT capital budget in March 2015.

## **2. Contextual information**

- 2.1. The Country Parks Transformation (CPT) programme aims to develop a suite of modern 21st Century Country Parks and includes all of the parks owned and managed by Hampshire County Council – Lepe, Royal Victoria, Queen Elizabeth, Staunton, Manor Farm and Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve. Through capital investment and external funding 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 financially sustainable.
- 2.2. The parks are well liked and attract over 1million visits a year and receive consistently good feedback and reviews. All of the parks have been awarded the national Green Flag Award which recognises the quality of the park, its management, and the involvement of the local community. Many people are prepared to invest their own time to help, with over 23,000 volunteer days recorded at the parks during 2014/15. The health and wellbeing benefits of enjoying the countryside are well known and for many people this is the main motivation for their visit.
- 2.3. Over the past 3 years, through strong cost reduction plans and solid income generation, the net operating costs of the parks have reduced by over £350,000. This has been largely achieved through realising the income potential of the existing assets. During 14/15 the income derived from parks was £2m. In order to continue the trend of increasing income, and meet the operational costs of the parks, an improved offer to the public is required. Establishing and maintaining these sites as popular year-round destinations will require facilities and activities which meet people's needs and which compare favourably with alternative ways for them to spend their leisure time.

## **3. Programme Update**

- 3.1. Since receiving approval for the Country Parks Transformation programme the programme team have been developing the plans for each of the country parks in conjunction with Countryside Service and Property colleagues. Over 2,000 members of the public and stakeholders have responded to the surveys undertaken to assist in understanding the needs of communities, visitors and those who currently do not use the parks. The information received is helping to shape these transformation plans.
- 3.2. In 2014 RVCP installed a very popular new play feature that is fully inclusive allowing able bodied and disabled visitors to play together. This resulted in increased visits to the park and demonstrated the popularity of play within the parks. Play is a key theme for delivery with particular focus upon natural and adventure play.

- 3.3. The programme will also deliver enhanced trails and paths, better signage and interpretation, improved catering and infrastructure for third party activities. This, coupled with more events, will contribute to an increase in revenue. A cost benefit analysis is currently underway to project the potential profit to be realised from these activities.
- 3.4. It is anticipated that the programme will result in a 20% growth in income once completed and also deliver the following benefits:
- Through improved facilities an increase in visit numbers to 1.7m following implementation of the programme, which includes a rise in visits during off-peak and out of season times.
  - Improving access to and from the parks by car and via more sustainable means.
  - Improved signage and interpretation within the parks to enable greater exploration and increase dwell time.
  - Increased number of core volunteers. The work completed by volunteers is of benefit to the park and that volunteers develop a strong community, recognised for their skills and achievements.
  - Increased environmental benefits by reducing the amount of waste going to landfill, reducing energy use, meeting and exceeding standards set by monitoring authorities.
  - Office and operational spaces effectively meet the needs of those who work and volunteer as well as those renting workspace at the parks.
  - An increase in overall customer satisfaction, which will positively reflect the County Council in delivering quality services.
- 3.5. Capital improvements that have already been delivered as part of the programme are: enlargement of the car park at Manor Farm and changing the layout to achieve the maximum number of cars at peak times. Renovation of the cold war monitoring post at Lepe to recreate the original 1960s interior with a new periscope. This was almost entirely funded by a grant from Heritage Lottery Fund of £68k.
- 3.6. The key milestones for the programme are as follows:

22 Oct	EMPR Lepe and Royal Victoria project approval
By end 2015	Scope and budget confirmed for remaining park projects
By Mar 2016	EMPR approval for remaining projects
July 2015 to Sept 2016	Project design and development
Oct 2015 to April 2016	Stakeholder Consultation on proposed changes to the parks

#### **4. Lepe Country Park**

- 4.1. Lepe Country Park is an important countryside recreational and educational resource and popular country park which attracts over 250,000 visits a year. Located within the New Forest National Park, Lepe is one of the few places where people can access the coast and enjoy stunning views across the Solent. The Park is enormously well supported by the local community with a very active Friends group who play a vital role in the running of the Park.
- 4.2. The building which houses the visitor facilities and offices is reaching the end of its design life resulting in increased maintenance costs. The cost of maintenance will increase until economically non viable. The building is situated below the level of the cliff and is susceptible to flooding. The visitor centre has been flooded on a number of occasions with the last event in February 2014. This resulted in the facilities being closed to the public for a period of time whilst work was undertaken and a repair cost of £90k. Consequently there was a significant loss of income to the County Council. The beach car park is frequently affected by flooding resulting in a loss of income and reduced access to the park.
- 4.3. The Shoreline Management Policy for this area of the coast is 'no active intervention' which restricts the ability to defend the coast. This, along with the predicted coastal change, will result in a greater number of flooding incidents of the cafe and offices and eventually loss of the foreshore car park.
- 4.4. If no improvement is made to the offer, the quality of visit will deteriorate with loss of custom and income. Due to the significant risk of damage caused by further flooding it was decided to advance the transformation plans for this park ahead of the others.
- 4.5. Ambitious plans for Lepe are underway to develop a new visitor centre with café and staff accommodation on the land owned by the County Council. The new building will make the best of the coastal location whilst being positioned to withstand high tides and storm surges and provide an exemplar of building in constrained and challenging environments.

#### **5. Royal Victoria Country Park**

- 5.1. RVCP is the first of the country parks to successfully receive grant funding from the HLF as part of its transformation, demonstrating the importance of conserving the heritage of the country parks. The RVCP Chapel project aims to encourage more people to visit, explore and learn about the park's history as the site of what was once the largest military hospital in the world.
- 5.2. A key element of the CPT is to secure external contributions of £4.2million towards the overall programme budget of £12.9million. This grant accounts for 38% of this external funding target.
- 5.3. The project will be completed by June 2018 and will see improved access to the Tower with breath taking views of Southampton Water, a new

multifunctional learning and performance space along with a kiosk and other facilities to entice people to visit and learn about the Chapel. Supporting this transformation will be improvements to the infrastructure to facilitate larger visitor numbers and encourage exploration of the wider park. Plans also include an enhanced catering offer and provision of indoor play to meet the demands of the pre-school market.

- 5.4. Once the overall project has been completed, it is forecast in the business plan that a revenue surplus will be generated, increasing at around 5% per annum. In addition to this further income will be realised from additional car parking and catering income.
- 5.5. There is an active Friends group who have been fully involved in the Heritage Lottery Fund application and who will play a major role in the delivery of the project and future running of the Chapel. This year, in addition to the Green Flag award, held by all the parks, RVCP has also been awarded Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge and Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme award.

## **6. Finance**

- 6.1. The overall Country Park Transformation programme budget is £12.9m. This consists of £5.7m Policy and Resources capital programme funding, £3m capital from the sale of assets and a minimum target of £4.2m from external funding.
- 6.2. Raising capital from the sale of assets is positive. Of the £3m target, £744k has been realised to date, £1.4m is anticipated in 15/16, with the remaining due in 16/17.
- 6.3. Including the £1.7m in Heritage Lottery Funding towards the transformation of the Chapel at Royal Victoria, the programme has now achieved around 40% of its funding target. The team is continually investigating grants and developing robust funding plans to achieve the remaining grant funding target.
- 6.4. Assuming the programme is successful with raising external funding Appendix 1 demonstrates how the funding will be split across the Country Parks.
- 6.5. The strategy still remains that the programme will support the removal of the cash limited budget by 2017/18. The business plans prepared for each park will demonstrate how this will be achieved.

## **7. Consultation**

- 7.1. Partners, staff and the community will continue to be involved in the development of each of the projects. Programme newsletters are currently distributed every two months to all identified stakeholders and around 1000 members of the public, who have elected to receive further information on the programme.

7.2. A consultation plan is being developed as part of each park project and includes the following key stakeholders:-

- Landowners
- Strategic partners
- Local councillors
- Staff and volunteers
- Park visitors

## **8. Key Risks**

8.1. There remains uncertainty around the timing and level of funding from external sources to fund certain aspects of the programme. To mitigate against this, external funding plans have been produced for each park and the team continue to investigate alternative sources of funding for each project. Project managers are currently working on further Heritage Lottery Funding bids and investment for specific projects within the parks. Once the scope for each project has been finalised, further applications will be made according to priorities.

8.2. As part of the benefits work a condition liability survey was commissioned in early 2015. The result of this highlighted a higher than expected level of investment to address repairs and maintenance. Over the next 1-3years an estimated £1.8m investment is required. Whilst the programme will significantly reduce the maintenance liabilities it is unlikely that it will meet them all. Working with property colleagues we will aim to identify and deliver against the maintenance priorities.

## **9. Recommendation**

That the Culture and Communities Select Committee recommends to the Executive Member for Culture, Recreation and Countryside that he:

9.1 Recognises the progress made with the Country Park Transformation programme and endorses the programme to continue with the start up of each park project.

9.2 Recommends more detailed consideration by the Executive Member Policy and Resources as each park project reaches start up.

**CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**

**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

<b>Hampshire safer and more secure for all:</b>	no
<b>Maximising well-being:</b>	yes
<b>Enhancing our quality of place:</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

**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.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
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.

## Appendix 1

Programme Spend Profile	Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total £'000
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	
<b>Expenditure</b>							
RVCP	0	142	50	2,780	598	0	3,570
Lepe	0	0	268	2,007	25	0	2,300
QECP	0	0	50	950	0	0	1,000
Titchfield	0	0	10	290	0	0	300
MFCP	0	30	250	920	0	0	1,200
Staunton	0	0	225	250	500	2,109	3,084
Programme team	0	44	233	279	195	139	890
Start-up fees, expenses and contingency	0	136	250	120	50		556
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>1,336</b>	<b>7,596</b>	<b>1,368</b>	<b>2,248</b>	<b>12,900</b>
<b>Funding</b>							
External Funding	0	182	2,430	50	100	1,359	4,121
Capital Receipts	395	349	1,435	900	0	0	3,079
HCC Capital	0	0	0	3,543	1,268	889	5,700
<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>3,865</b>	<b>4,493</b>	<b>1,368</b>	<b>2,248</b>	<b>12,900</b>
In year (surplus)/deficit resources	(395)	(179)	(2,529)	3,103	0	0	0
Cumulative (surplus)/deficit resources	(395)	(574)	(3,103)	0	0	0	0