HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Culture, Recreation and Countryside
Date:	4 October 2016
Title:	Country Parks Transformation Project Approvals
Reference:	7727
Report From:	Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services

Contact name: Jo Heath

Tel: 01962 847717 **Email:** Jo.heath@hants.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

1.1. This report presents the next stage of the Country Parks Transformation Programme (CPT). It outlines specific proposals for Staunton and Queen Elizabeth.

1.2. The Country Parks 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 collectively become operationally cost neutral. The programme will build upon the County Council's strong tradition and track record of strategic asset management, ensuring that the benefits the parks bring to Hampshire residents are protected and enhanced for future generations.

1.3. The Executive Member Policy and Resources approved the 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. The £4.2m target for external funding has been exceeded to £7.6m. The spend profile can be seen in appendix 1.

1.4. The Staunton parkland project received a first round development grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to develop a proposal for the Country Park. The development phase is now underway and an application for £2.85m to deliver the project will be ready to be submitted in early 2017. This project requires match funding of £910,000 from the approved Policy and Resources capital. Every £1 of match funding from HCC generates £3.75 of grant funding from HLF/BIG Lottery.

1.5. The project to transform Queen Elizabeth Country Park now requires an allocation of £1.75m from the approved Policy and Resources capital

(£850,000 released from the approved £2.7m allocated to Lepe). This will deliver a transformed visitor centre, developing space for tourism based businesses; that will all contribute to the park's income generation and further investment within the park. Every £1 of HCC capital generates an additional 70p in grant funding.

1.6. This report will:

- provide an update on the Country Parks Transformation programme progress and delivery;
- provide detail on the projects at Staunton and Queen Elizabeth Country Parks.

2. Programme Context and Update

2.1. The Country Parks Transformation (CPT) programme is a once in a generation opportunity to create a suite of modern 21st Century 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.

2.2. In order to continue the trend of increasing income, and meet more of the operational costs of the parks, an improved offer to the public is required. Since their inception around 30 years ago visitor expectations have changed, competition has increased and the parks capital investment has fallen below the preferred level. This transformation programme provides an opportunity to invest in the facilities and activities which meet people's needs and which compare favourably with alternative ways for them to spend their leisure time.

2.3. The Country Parks collectively cost £2.8m per annum to run, £2.3m is generated from income, with the remaining £0.5m from the Cash Limited Revenue Budget. In 2015/16 early programme improvements had a positive impact on the cash limit, a trend which is set to continue in 2016/17 with a further reduction of £145,000. This is mainly due to an increase in car parking charges in line with policy. At the end of five years we are predicting an overall net surplus of around £350,000.

2.4. The initial programme budget was £12.9m, which included a £4.2m target from external grant funding. The programme team have worked exceptionally hard to achieve and even succeed this. Currently the target from grant funding is £7.6m upon completion of secondary applications for HLF/BIG lottery funding for Staunton and Enterprise M3 funding for Queen Elizabeth.

2.5. A joint M3 Local Growth Fund application has been submitted for the South Downs and New Forest National Parks, which covers the projects at Lepe and QE. This has been successful, but at present we are only guaranteed 50% of the funding, which equates to £850,000. The rest of the funding has been secured in principle however this will not be confirmed until after the Autumn Statement. To receive the additional amount the project at Queen

Elizabeth needs to be underway and able to spend £850,000 within the 2017-2018 financial year. Therefore, the design work must start imminently to be able meet the delivery timescale. To mitigate against a low risk of not receiving the additional funding, the team continues to investigate alternative sources of funding.

2.6. £830,000 remains within the budget to fund the project at Manor Farm. Smaller grants under £500,000 have been submitted and been unsuccessful for this park. The programme team have currently put forward a bid for funding via the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership and preparing for future Coastal Community Funding; together with continually researching other opportunities. The programme is holding back on committing the £830,000 to spend at Manor Farm until all grant funding opportunities have been explored. Appendix 1 gives a breakdown of the current investment at each park.

2.7. Analysis undertaken by external consultants in 2015 highlighted a poor honesty rating from car parking payments. Further work identified that on average the collective honesty rating is 52%. A technical analysis of fifteen options was undertaken, ranging from manual enforcement via an attendant through to automated systems. The assessment determined an automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) system was the most effective. The capital cost of installing an ANPR system at the 5 sites is in the region of £750,000 with an estimate net income of £900,000 in the year following installation based on 15/16 visitor numbers and with price tariff increases.

2.8. The programme successfully secured £38k of funding received from the Playbuilder fund via Sports to develop the natural play offer at the parks, which was one of the top requirements from the visitor survey. The money has funded a part-time project officer for 18 months, who is in post and making good progress. Audits are underway at Staunton and Manor Farm for suitable development space and finding out who is currently playing in the parks. Consultation with external organisations such as Forestry Commission, National Trust and New Forest National Park Authority is also in progress.

3. Wider Programme Benefits

- The programme will result in a significant growth in income once completed.
- The parks will offer visitors more play features and activities to enjoy and participate in the outdoors and gain the physical and mental benefits this brings.
- A more attractive offer all year round, increasing visits in off-peak and out of season periods.
- Improved signage, interpretation and trails within the parks to enable greater self exploration and increase dwell time.
- Better cafes with more indoor activities for children, improving the parks resilience to inclement weather.

- Improved infrastructure and facilities to build on a popular events programme collectively across all the parks.
- The parks will remain at the heart of the local community, increasing core volunteers who are recognised for their skills and achievements.
- Improved learning facilities to provide a safe environment in which to learn about the countryside.
- Protecting the heritage and improving the assets to reduce the maintenance liability, improve function and enhance the visitor experience.
- 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.
- The parks will be in a stronger position in the long term when faced with further reductions to local authority budgets.
- Contribute to the local economy as visitor attractions that encourage tourists from outside the County to visit, stay and spend.

4. Staunton Country Park

4.1. Staunton country park is located on the edge of Leigh Park housing estate, home to 27,000 residents. Three of the local wards are in the 10% most deprived in the country, with the remaining wards in the 20%. The park is a wonderful resource for residents and for many a quiet oasis on their doorstep. The added bonus for this community, and perhaps quite unique, is the ability for so many to access the park on foot.

4.2. The park is divided in two by Middle Park Way, the area to the south is the paid farm attraction, which is currently the main focus of a visit. The area to the north of the road is the free to access parkland, where much of the Regency heritage is found including the pleasure grounds, lake, follies and 100 hectare park.

4.3. A consultant's report completed in March 2015 commented that 'the free to enter zone almost feels hidden', and 'the rich history of the site and its founder is not readily accessible to the visitor'. Visitors surveyed in July 2015 also showed that most were unaware of the parkland's heritage, although some knew about the follies. The survey highlighted there was an appetite to learn more about the heritage as well as become more involved in the park.

4.4. The 2015 Condition Report states that many of the buildings and built features, particularly the follies, are in need of restoration. Landscape restoration works are urgently needed and conservation of the park's key historic features. This work will prevent further deterioration as well as allow them to be understood and enjoyed. The hidden and underappreciated heritage of the park will be revealed during the project.

4.5. Car parking often reaches capacity quickly on peak days resulting in parking on the verge of Middle Park Way, which is not the safest option and reduces the flow of traffic, resulting in congestion. Visitors paying to enter the farm currently receive a refund for parking and the overall honesty rating for those paying is 40%, demonstrating the need for an improved payment system.

4.6. Highbury College use some of the existing buildings to run courses out of the park. The site is also a valued location by the Beacon Community Partnership, who have a temporary building within part of the parkland.

4.7. The parkland project at Staunton is to be developed in two phases. The development phase is underway to determine requirements. The delivery phase will implement the project. The costs and funding are broken down as follows:

Development Phase (underway)	HLF	£122,700
	HCC	£40,000
	Phase Sub Total	**£162,700**
Delivery Phase	HLF	£2,850,000
	Highbury College	£350,000
	HCC	£910,000
	Phase Sub Total	**£4,110,000**
Total Project Cost		**£4,272,700**

Every £1 of match funding from HCC generates £3.75 of grant funding from HLF/BIG Lottery.

4.8. The capital costs of the delivery phase are broken down as follows:

Restoration of follies & terrace	£332,000
Conversion of Victorian Coach House	£145,000
Conversion of stable block to toilets	£212,000
Demolition of old toilets	£10,000
Landscape restoration	£645,000
Sawmill yard & Storey Gardens	£15,000
New teaching building	£550,000
Cafe and services	£142,000
New car park	£710,000
Contingency	£287,300
Inflation	£390,000
TOTAL	**£3,438,300**

Note that these costs include property fees

4.9. The revenue costs of the delivery phase associated with the project are:

Interpretation	£180,000
Equipment and materials	£37,000
Professional fees	£179,200
New staff	£198,000
Staff & volunteer training and travel	£26,500
Activities and events programme	£51,000
TOTAL	**£671,700**

4.10. It is anticipated that there will be an increase in revenue costs associated with running the new visitor hub, which will be covered by the increased income expected from car parking.

4.11. As a separate project £300,000 has been invested at the farm attraction to improve the paths and play equipment. £150,000 has also been allocated to improve the café. This will contribute to the overall improvement of the park giving a total investment of £4.723m.

4.12. The benefits the project will bring are as follows:

- A new visitor centre with facilities, information and interpretation to significantly increase the number of people experiencing the parkland' both as visitors and volunteers encouraging them to explore, enjoy, understand and become involved with the park.
- Connect local residents from the surrounding housing estate with their shared heritage of the Estate, placing the park at the centre of their community and providing a range of new activities and opportunities for them to become engaged and involved; creating a park that will be as vibrant in the future as it was in the past.
- Greater free to access opportunities for play.
- Relocating and enlarging the car park to increase dwell time and create a full day visit by broadening the offer to include the farm and the parkland.
- Installation of an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system to manage car parking payments, giving visitors the opportunity to more accurately pay for the time they have spent on site.
- Increased revenue from car parking with a compliance rate of around 99%.
- Expansion of catering outlets within the parkland and farm. The café will be improved within the farm to make it more attractive and meet the needs of those visiting.
- Meet at estimated £275,000 of the existing condition liability, which if left unaddressed could result in further deterioration and increase in cost to repair.
- The project will also work in partnership with Highbury College to provide a more suitable venue for on-site vocational training with practical tuition and work on the landscape of the parkland.

<u>Consultation</u>

4.13. We are working closely with our user groups, the Access Group (including cyclists, dog walkers and local residents), Anglers, Education Members, Young Ambassadors and a Chinese heritage interest group. Representatives of each of these groups have been invited to join the newly formed Friends of Staunton and will play a significant role in the development and delivery of the project.

4.14. Throughout the planning of this project we have worked closely with many of our partners/ stakeholders including the Beacon Community Partnership, Highbury College, Portsmouth Water and engaged with the Staunton Panel.

Risk

4.15. That the planning consent for car park relocation at Staunton is not granted and possible additional costs for on-road improvements. The architect is in communication with highways and appointment of a Transport Engineer will allow costs to be accurately estimated.

5. Queen Elizabeth Country Park

5.1. Queen Elizabeth Country Park is a key gateway to the South Downs National Park and a major recreation site serving the A3 corridor and beyond. With three hills over 600ft and 766 hectares of open access land the park dominates the surrounding landscape. The eastern part of site has a strong mountain biking focus and the park sits directly on the South Downs Way National Trail. Butser Hill National Nature Reserve sits in the western half and is an iconic local landmark. As the highest point on the South Downs (270m) it also provides exceptional panoramic views of the surrounding area.

5.2. There is mixed ownership across the site with a working partnership between HCC and the Forestry Commission. The county council owns approximately 300 hectares of land (west of the A3), with the main visitor facilities and car park (east of the A3) leased from the FC on a 50 year lease. The remainder of this land is managed jointly with the FC managing the woodland, while HCC provides visitor facilities within it. Head Down is used for mountain biking and other events including off-road motorcycles, and is an important part of the recreation offer. Butser Hill has minimal visitor infrastructure with only a car park and catering kiosk (toilets are currently closed).

5.3. There are a range of different users on site including families with children, cyclists (mountain bikers in particular) and those wanting to keep fit (park run group and triathletes). The park is also popular with the armed forces that often use the site for training. The site is well connected to the public rights of way network, providing a welcome stop off on long distance trails, and will soon have a dedicated cycle route from Petersfield.

5.4. The visitor centre is poorly laid out and uninspiring, with a distinct lack of welcome and information about the park and what's on offer. A new more structured and coherent approach to interpretation is required that helps visitors to understand the importance of QECP in terms of its heritage and nature conservation value and as a gateway to the South Downs National Park. This is also important to highlight the different trails and opportunities across the park, which visitors are not always aware.

5.5. The education programme and pre-school activities are successful, however the existing education room is inadequate and is beyond the end of its design life. As it is a temporary building it is not a priority for maintenance and a result may become unusable in the future.

5.6. Play equipment is well used however it is now tired and in need of replacement. There is high demand for adventure and natural play and the potential for play to become the primary reason why people visit.

5.7. For the Forestry Commission investment in the park is a key part of the lease renewal and the County Council has committed to invest at least £1m into the park within the first 5 years of the lease period. The South Downs National Park Authority are eager to work with HCC to transform QECP as a hub and a gateway into the National Park, as well as provide them with an important base to work from. If this cannot be delivered it is possible that the team would relocate to the central office in Midhurst reducing park's rental income.

5.8. Car parking adjacent to the visitor centre often reaches capacity quickly on peak days. There is space for overflow parking, but this is not marked with no visible information on how to pay. The overall honesty rating for those paying is 46%, demonstrating the need for an improved payment system.

5.9. The funding envelope for the park is made up of confirmed funding of £1.7m from HCC and £163,000 Army Covenant Grant, together with anticipated contribution of, £250,000 from SDNPA and £850,000 from M3 Local Growth Fund. This gives a total project budget of just over £3m. Every £1 of HCC capital generates an additional 70p in grant funding.

5.10. The capital investment is broken down as follows:

Visitor Centre refurbishment – welcome space, café, area for commercial let and toilets	£1,230,000
New office space	£900,000
New play area, fitness/ assault course and dog agility trail	£330,000
Car park improvements	£190,000
Interpretation and signage	£113,000
Drainage upgrade (septic tank)	£110,000
Education space (including removal of old one)	£140,000
TOTAL	**£3,013,000**

Note that these costs are exclusive of VAT and include fees

5.11. The benefits the project will bring are as follows:

- A transformed visitor centre including improving the welcome entrance, relocating and increasing the size of the café to create a more enjoyable experience and higher usage (including an outdoor sheltered area) and developing space for tourism based businesses; that will all contribute to the park's income generation.
- Encourage new visitors as well as help the park to cope with the existing number of visitors it can presently manage.
- Encourage greater self exploration and increase dwell time to create an all day visit from both the local community and those that travel from further afield.
- The play features of this project will be delivered via the Forts and Fleets project currently underway. This will create a new fitness/ assault

course, a dog agility trail and community space. This particular project will be completed working alongside partners from the armed forces and is part funded by a £163,000 Army Covenant fund grant.

- Installation of an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system to manage car parking payments, giving visitors the opportunity to more accurately pay for the time they have spent on site.
- Increased revenue from car parking with a compliance rate of around 99%.
- Meet an estimated £420,000 of the existing condition liability, which if left unaddressed could result in further deterioration and increase in cost to repair.
- The project will enable the park to become a major flagship visitor attraction for the south east and local area, helping to ensure it thrives as a self-financing tourist business.
- Multi-use learning space for formal and informal groups as well as private hire and functions in order to maximize use of the space and generate income.
- The project will also improve working relationships with important partners.

Consultation

5.12. Over 650 visitors and stakeholders responded to surveys undertaken to assist in understanding the needs of visitors, stakeholders and the local community. The consultation process was completed through web based surveys and face to face discussions at the park.

5.13. There has been more detailed consultation with key strategic partners including the Forestry Commission (landowner, with a team based at the park) and South Downs National Park Authority (funding partner, with a team based at the park). The latter was closely involved in the development of the funding application to the EM3 as well as a key funder in the overall development of the park.

5.14. Throughout the development of the Forts and Fleets project there was significant consultation with representatives from the armed forces. This will continue as the project progresses working closely with experts from these groups, e.g. physical training instructors. Armed forces families as well as park visitors will be involved in developing the play aspect of the project. Groups that use the park for fitness and training will also be consulted as well as dog groups that will also benefit from the new facilities.

Risk

5.15. At Queen Elizabeth the land within the Park leased from the freeholders (Forestry Commission) is presently out of lease. Negotiations to renew this agreement are ongoing and should be completed by the end of 2016.

6. Recommendations

That the Executive Member for Culture, Recreation and Countryside:

6.1 Recognises the progress made with the Country Park Transformation programme and endorses the programme to continue with the development of each park project.

6.2 Recommends to the Executive Member Policy and Resources that approval is given to procure, spend and enter into the necessary contractual arrangement to implement the two schemes set out in this report:

a) Queen Elizabeth Country Park at a value of £3m; and
b) Staunton Country Park Parkland project at a value of £4.1m for the delivery phase.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Corporate Strategy

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

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:

The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;

Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;

Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionally 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.

CPT Programme Spend Profile

Programme Spend Profile	Year 0 2013/14 £'000	Year 1 2014/15 £'000	Year 2 2015/16 £'000	Year 3 2016/17 £'000	Year 4 2017/18 £'000	Year 5 2018/19 £'000	Total £'000
Expenditure							
RVCP	0	142	0	3,135	0	0	3,277
Lepe	0	0	918	1,850	0	0	2,768
QECP	0	0	0	0	3,013	0	3,013
Titchfield	0	0	0	5	0	45	50
MFCP	0	30	0	0	800	0	830
Staunton	0	0	93	370	150	4,110	4,723
Programme team	0	44	202	270	245	173	934
Other programme costs	0	136	151	65	35		387
Car parking							500
Total Costs	0	352	1,364	5,695	4,243	4,328	16,482
Funding							
External Funding	0	182	2,143	2,000	0	3,323	7,648
Capital Receipts	395	349	1,105	1,285	0	0	3,134
HCC Capital	0	0	0	3,543	1,268	889	5,700
Total Funding	395	531	3,248	6,828	1,268	4,212	16,482