

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Committee:	Culture and Communities Select Committee
Date:	18 January 2018
Title:	Country Parks Transformation Programme Update
Report From:	Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services

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1. Recommendation:

That the Culture and Communities Select Committee:

- 1.1 Acknowledges the achievement of the Programme in securing £7m in external funding, £2.8m above the original £4.2m target, to invest in the Country Parks Transformation.
- 1.2 Supports the continued delivery of the transformation projects at each country park and car parking improvements as part of the Country Park Transformation Programme.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The purpose of this paper is to update the Culture and Communities Select Committee on progress with 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 for the sale of selected Countryside assets to raise a target of £3m towards the programme.
- 2.2. 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 enable the country parks to become self financing and bring in a revenue contribution of £490,000 by 2019.
- 2.3. The total budget for the programme has risen from £12.9m to £16.1m, an increase of £3.2m or 25%. This is due to the success of the programme in

exceeding the external funding income target of £4.2m by £2.8m to a total of £7m.

2. Contextual information

- 2.1. The Country Parks Transformation 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, River Hamble, Manor Farm and Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve.
- 2.2. In 2015/16 early programme improvements had a positive impact on the cash limit, and in 2016/17 there was a further reduction of the cash limit to just under £300,000. This is mainly due to an increase in car parking charges and transformation delivery at the parks, increasing the number of visits.
- 2.3. In addition to the revenue from car parking receipts, as a result of transformation additional income is also expected from catering, events, facility hire and third party activities.
- 2.4. 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
 - More effective staff workspaces

3. Programme Update

3.1. Lepe Country Park

Lepe 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.

The transformation at Lepe Country Park is a flagship of the programme. A new glass fronted visitor centre and restaurant will afford a fantastic visitor experience in this coastal location. The new centre is future proofed from the impact of coastal change and will be able to cater for a larger number of visitors that will be undoubtedly attracted to the park. The project is on schedule to complete by May 2018.

Work started on transformation with the renovation of the cold war monitoring post in 2015 to recreate the original 1960s interior with a new

periscope. This was almost entirely funded by a grant from Heritage Lottery Fund of £68,000.

Externally, during 2017 improvements were made to the play area and a new sensory garden built by the Friends group, which have proved to be very popular.

The entire scheme is just under £3m with contribution from the M3 LEP of £880,000.

3.2. Royal Victoria Country Park (RVCP)

RVCP was the first of the country parks to successfully receive grant of just under £2m from the Heritage Lottery Fund 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.

The project will be completed in May 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 the park has seen improvements to the popular children's play area and surfacing works to the Heritage and Bluebell trail making this suitable for visitors with mobility equipment and pushchairs.

3.3. Queen Elizabeth Country Park (QECP)

QECP is a key gateway to the South Downs National Park and, due to the large forest and open grassland areas, a major recreation site serving the A3 corridor and beyond.

The project will deliver a transformed visitor centre including improving the welcome entrance, increasing and refurbishing the catering offer to create a more enjoyable experience, outdoor sheltered spaces and well planned and effective workspaces.

In addition to the visitor centre transformation the park was successful in securing £163,000 in funding from the Armed Forces Covenant to develop an assault course, dog activity trail and improved play. This will be completed in January 2018 and initial feedback indicates that it is going to be very popular attracting many new visitors.

The park has received interest from a number of external activity providers. We are currently tendering for a bike hire operator and have received 5

responses from local business, with a view that the successful company will be in operation in the spring of 2018.

3.4. Staunton Country Park

Staunton has been successful in securing £2.85 m from the Heritage Lottery Fund to restore key elements of the parkland heritage in this priority area of Hampshire. In addition the funding will enable us to create a new visitor centre and catering offer in one of the heritage buildings, improve the interpretation and encourage the community to be involved in running of the park. Planning approval is expected in early 2018 to be able to proceed with delivery.

As a separate project of £300,000 has been invested at the farm attraction to improve the paths and play equipment and a further £150,000 allocated to improve the catering offer in the farm.

3.5. River Hamble Country Park

Manor Farm and Country Park has been renamed to create an identity for the country park offer, as this had been lost with both the park and farm attraction having the same name. Plans are underway to develop the park offer so that it has its own information hub, with key trails that will appeal to a number of audiences; in particular encouraging more families to visit. There is a strong focus on providing improved play features and investigating income generating opportunities to be offered via third parties.

3.6 Manor Farm

Manor Farm is a popular visitor attraction enabling visitors to meet and greet animals in a historic farmyard environment. This, along with the River Hamble Country Park, will also play an important role in housing livestock that is required to graze other sites managed by the Countryside Service.

The transformation here will focus on the visitor experience by extending the area and activities and improving the catering offer.

3.6. Titchfield Haven

The strategic direction for Titchfield is in progress and work is underway with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust to investigate what could be achieved if working together in partnership. A list of options will be evaluated to develop a proposal for how this site is transformed. In the meantime improvements will be made to the café space, through new furniture and decoration of the Wigeon room to make it more appealing to users and third parties through room hire.

3.7. Car Parking

A major element of the Country Park Transformation is to change the way that visitors park and pay at the parks. The new Automatic Number Plate Recognition system will improve the honesty rating from 62% to 95%. It will also provide visitors with better price banding, options to pay (chip and pin, contactless, via an app) and enable payment at the end of a visit rather than the beginning.

It is expected to be in operation at Lepe and Royal Victoria Country Parks in April 2018 and at the remaining parks over the following year.

3.8. Timescales

Park	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Lepe	■						
Royal Victoria	■						
Queen Elizabeth			■				
Staunton		■					
River Hamble				■			
Titchfield Haven					■		
Manor Farm					■		

4. **Finance**

- 4.1. The overall Country Park Transformation programme budget is £16.1m, which is £3m higher than the original target. This consists of £5.7m Policy and Resources capital programme funding, £3.4m capital from the sale of assets and £7m from grants and other sources.
- 4.2. Raising capital from the sale of assets has been positive and expected to exceed the £3m target. £1.8m has been realised to date, with the remaining £1.6m due in 18/19.
- 4.3. The programme had an external funding target of £4.2m which has been exceeded by £2.8m. This has been from a combination of grants and contributions. The large grants include just under £2m from the HLF for RVCP, £2.85m from the HLF for Staunton and £880,000 from the M3 for Lepe.
- 4.4. The strategy still remains that the programme will produce an additional income of £490,000 in order to remove the cash limited budget of £500,000.

Full revenue modelling has been carried out to provide confidence that this can be achieved.

4.5. The breakdown in the total investment into the parks is as follows:

PROJECT	HCC TOTAL	EXTERNAL SOURCES TOTAL	TOTAL
	£'000	£'000	£'000
RVCP - Chapel	1,171	2254	3,425
RVCP - Park	324		324
Lepe	1950	960	2,910
Lepe - observation post		68	68
QECP	1587	45	1,632
QECP - Forts and Fleets	163	163	326
Titchfield	50		50
MFCP	30		30
RHCP	800	55	855
Staunton - parkland	950	3147	4,097
Staunton - farm	150	300	450
Programme team	584		584
Other programme costs	387		387
Car parking system	950		950
Phase 1 Total	£9,096m	£6,992m	£16,088m

5. Communications

5.1. The first Lepe blog received a higher number of page views within 3 days. The average time spent on the page was 4.30 minutes which suggests in depth reading of the content.

Positive landowners and members site visit to Lepe on 21 July. The sensory garden opening received good social media, press coverage and feedback from visitors. On Facebook the post received 214 likes, 45 shares, 26 comments, 15,612 reached. BBC Radio Solent ran an item on the sensory garden – interviewing some of the volunteers, Cllr Gibson and visitors.

At Royal Victoria members of the public from around the world have been in contact with the project manager about their stories of Netley.

The internet blogs have been very popular and in some cases receiving over 1000 views. The launch of the new play equipment achieved 111 likes, 26 comments, 19 shares, 10,956 reached on Facebook.

There has been a lot of local media interest in the work at the chapel. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission was held last year at RVCP with excellent publicity.

There is strong interest from the Lord Lieutenant's office on a royal opening.

- 5.2. Staunton community consultation online surveys received 700+ responses with 100 people stating they would like to be more involved in the project.

The press release following the funding award received excellent interest and generated a high amount of social media interest – 2,290 likes, 202 shares, 215 comments, 78,420 people reached.

- 5.3. At Queen Elizabeth Country Park there has been positive feedback from both staff and visitors on the transformation plans. The first blog post attracted 791 unique page views – the third highest for country park blog posts in 2017 and also higher than the majority of other public-facing blog posts and news articles on Hantsweb. Facebook also generated 601 likes, 126 comments, 128 shares and reached 25,532 people.

- 5.4. Overall, the programme has received excellent feedback from the public on the transformation plans, which are based on the market research undertaken at the beginning of the programme. The last CPT e-newsletter was opened by 46% of respondents which is significantly higher than the industry average of 23%.

6. Phase 2

- 6.1. A capital bid for £2.3m was submitted in the summer 2017 and is awaiting final approval in February 2018. If successful the money will be invested as follows:
- 6.2. An additional £400,000 to fully support transformation objectives at Queen Elizabeth that have been removed out of scope, and which improve the visitor offer or provide an income generating opportunity.
- 6.3. A total of £900,000 allocated to the Empire Room at Royal Victoria to refurbish and preserve the heritage of the room and create a café that will increase the income generating opportunities of catering at the park, which includes events.
- 6.4. To address key condition liability at both Staunton and Manor Farm to improve the visitor offer and reduce the risk that these areas will have on visitor numbers if they deteriorate further

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

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:

This will be considered as part of each park project.

