

**TO: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
DECEMBER 2018**

**Parks and Countryside Review - Progress Report
Director: Place, Planning and Regeneration**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1. To update the Overview and Scrutiny Panel on the progress with regard to the Parks and Countryside review.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Parks and Countryside review forms part of the Council's Transformation Programme and over the last nine months it has been exploring ways in which the savings target of £400k could be achieved whilst transforming the way in which the service is delivered. The outcome of the Gateway review demonstrated that a saving in the region of £476k could be delivered over 3 years. £200k of this savings target was achieved for the financial year 18/19.

3. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Overview and Scrutiny Panel notes the progress in implementing the outcomes from the Transformation Review of Parks and Countryside.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel has a role in reviewing the progress being made in relevant transformation reviews.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Not applicable. The Chairman of ECC Overview and Scrutiny requested the update.

6. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

6.1. The review is led by the Director of Place, Planning and Regeneration, supported by a project manager and supported by a Project Board involving the senior management of the services in scope, Activist consultants, and managers outside the service to offer challenge.

6.2. The main focus of the Parks and Countryside review was to meet or exceed the savings target set whilst endeavouring to ensure that maximum benefit is being secured from the borough's natural environment. Specifically this focused on the management of land and trees currently within the Council's Parks and Countryside team's remit which currently are highly regarded by residents (As evidenced in satisfaction surveys). The natural and accessible character of Bracknell Forest will

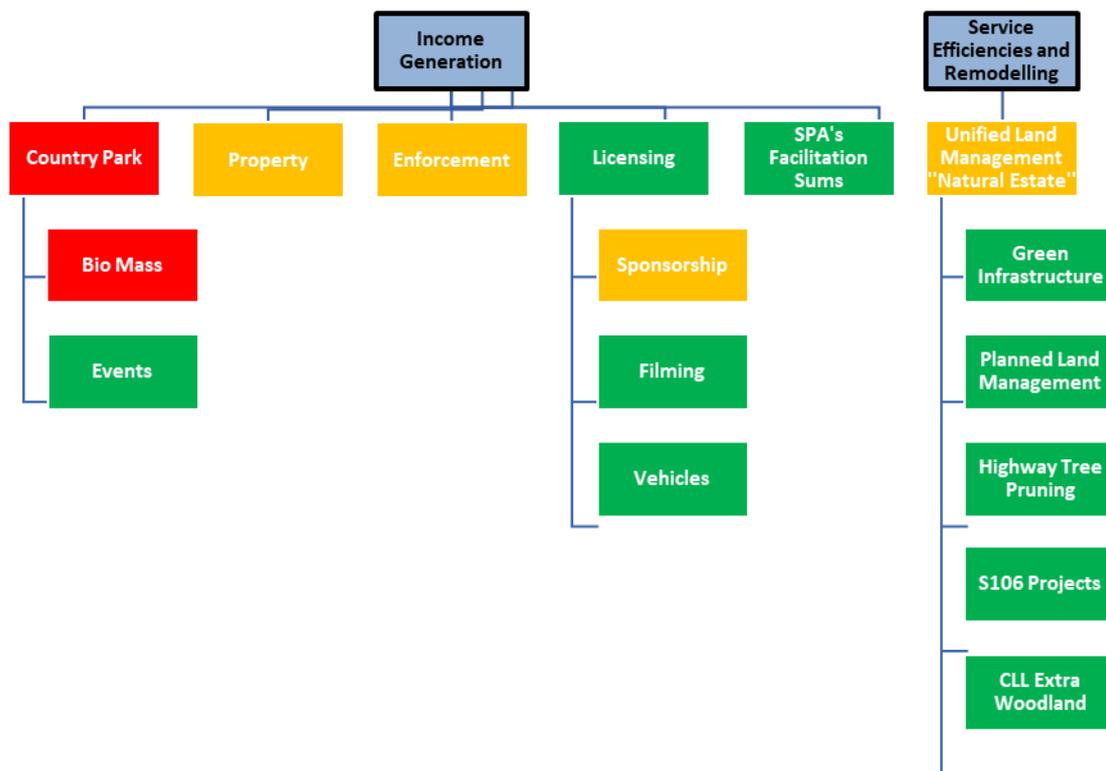
be maintained or enhanced to ensure that communities benefit from active use of local natural spaces.

6.3. To achieve these developments and savings the following strategic options were selected:

- Income generating potential will be established through commercially viable business assets newly created or existing.
- Land management costs will be minimised by effective management planning and procurement.
- Volunteering and sponsorship will be fully enabled to encourage and reward local residents and business to support the in perpetuity costs of open space provision.
- Maintenance costs arising from the misuse of public spaces will be met by those responsible, not by the council.
- Grant funding opportunities and developer contributions will be maximised for all open spaces.
- Discretionary work is identified, reviewed and minimised.

6.4. The Plan Phase Gateway review held on 21st March 2018 saw councillors support the direction of travel to enhance and maintain the service and to move ahead with the recommendations presented to them.

6.5. Recommendations focussed on income generation, service efficiencies and remodelling.



7. Income Generation

7.1. Country Park

In accordance with the Parks and Countryside gateway reviews, the development of Horseshoe Lake as a country park has been tested to determine whether a financial saving can be delivered for the council, by generating additional income using this beautiful lakeside location.

The vision is to create a major new visitor attraction for the Borough, one that takes advantage of its green setting. As well as welcoming people to make more use of their natural environment, the new building and playground will encourage people to stay and enjoy food at a new café. The profit on the café, catering and room hire and the income from the car park will help pay for the construction of the new building and generate an overall return for the Council. Creating an income generating asset to support service provision.

Final business case and financial modelling is programmed to go to the Executive for decision on the 12th February 2019.

7.2. Bio Mass

A biomass boiler and potentially a water source heat pump would be sited at the new country park as an efficiency saving that would generate Renewable Heat Initiative payments from the government and reduce utility costs during operation. Access to a biomass boiler will reduce the cost of disposing of green waste from some elements of the borough's natural estate, for instance meadow grass and waste wood.

Apart from the primary financial return there are many other environmental benefits that will be realised; for instance the educational opportunities to inform the public about the wildlife habitats of the borough and their management as well as understanding of sustainability and responsible use of open space.

This proposal is dependent upon approval for the creation of a new country park.

7.3. Property

Following staff consultation and working closely with human resources, service occupancies have been brought to an end and two residential properties housing Parks and Countryside staff were vacated in October 2018.

Once vacated, the properties (Snaprails Lodge and Greenfinch Close) were handed over to Property Services for disposal. The capital receipt from these properties will be ring fenced for capital investment into the proposed country park at Horseshoe Lake.

Lily Hill Lodge has been retained by the service while the alternatives are explored for how this historic building can better serve the borough's flagship site.

7.4. Licensing

This work stream has been approached in two parts.

The first part, which has now been implemented, is to issue licences for private businesses, such as, mobile catering units in car parks, to use land owned by the council and managed by the service for a charge. This has already had positive progress and there are now a number of new catering vans trading at Parks and Countryside sites creating new income but also showing early signs of discouraging antisocial behaviour and littering at the sites.

The second part of this work stream is to implement licensing for commercial dog walkers using parks and open spaces to exercise their client's dogs. The businesses would pay a fee to have a licence so that the Council could ensure that public spaces are not misused.

From early conversations with the Crown Estate it has been determined they are supportive of co-ordinating our approaches in this area, but they are not keen to work with Bracknell Forest on a combined scheme as they envisage implementing their own scheme.

Parks and Countryside will collaborate with neighbouring local authorities. Further market research is being carried out and investigation is underway as to whether the project could be a part of the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) scheme which would enable to possibly promote to all the Councils around the SPA.

7.5. Filming

Parks and Countryside have created a profile to enable Bracknell Forest to become a 'film-friendly' borough. Bracknell Forest Council has joined in founding the Berkshire Film Office, along with 5 other neighbouring boroughs.

The key drivers are to promote a positive view of the area, in particular, Bracknell Forest's green spaces and successfully attain filming business to generate new income for the council and bring wider custom to the local economy.

This will be delivered as a single point of contact that is an easily accessible, one-stop shop encouraging film companies, television and smaller film or photography enterprises, to do business with the council or in the local area.

Key promotion and publicity includes the imminent launch of the Berkshire film office website which and in February 2019 there will be an official film office launch event with Bracknell being the host.

7.6. SPA mitigation facilitation

The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Avoidance and Mitigation Supplementary Planning Document costs are now up to date and following a review these have been increased to reflect the true costs of providing SANGs.

The Council has revised the document to provide a formulaic and more commercial approach to charging for SANGs.

The SANG facilitation work stream had a target of £406k for year 1, split between £140,000(Planning) and £266,000(P&C). It has already generated £412k in income this year and is likely to increase before the end of the financial year.

7.7. Business Development Plans

The Parks and Countryside service is moving in a more commercial direction.

To prepare and plan for this our Business Change Manager and external consultants Activist, developed a business development methodology and toolkit. Training has been delivered through a set of workshops to all those involved with income generating initiatives as part of the review. Where business development plans were required to launch the ideas and maximise the income opportunities the toolkit is now in use.

Business development plans have been written for the key income generating initiatives within the review.

8. Services Efficiencies and Remodelling

8.1. Unified Natural Estate – Green Infrastructure

The purpose of this work stream is to create a single 'Natural Estate' which incorporates a 'One Council' approach to all the land management functions required in the future.

Transforming the Parks and Countryside Service into a Natural Estate Service focuses upon changes to the land management processes, in order to re-prioritise and re-distribute essential tasks and to ensure that where appropriate the specialist skills available in the council are applied consistently to all the council's land, not just specific sites.

To enable this we are defining the borough's Green Infrastructure assets and assigning them geographically to existing staff, along with the Parks and Countryside sites.

For more efficient processes and tasks carried out by officers we will implement mobile working and the use of the Confirm database for planning and recording inspections by site based staff more efficiently.

We will integrate and simplify land management processes, using single contact points, multi-disciplinary inspections, forward work plans and clear mechanisms for feeding specialist tasks into larger council work contracts and specialist services in other departments.

Working closely with Transformations Business Change Manager the project team have created a service catalogue closely linked to a process suite that has been designed with the component processes being mapped in a series of sessions involving many of the subject matter experts in the team.

The next step will be to identify the capabilities required for the successful delivery of the Services and this will inform role profiling and training needs analysis amongst other things.

8.2. Events and facilities bookings

The Parks and Countryside service have an attractive programme of activities and events that have historically been managed with a manual and time consuming process.

These processes have been mapped, reviewed and re-designed and are now been replaced with online bookings and payments through Eventbrite. This change is much more efficient and is in line with the councils digital by default and self-serve strategies.

These changes have incorporated a small price increase which does not create a profit but does now covers the costs to run the events.

New events such as open air cinema have progressed this year and will be developed in the coming years to become an income generating activity in our park areas.

8.3. Reduced maintenance budget

Work is largely complete or in progress for this work stream and reductions to existing budgets have been made where possible.

A new cleaning contract has been procured at reduced level.

There is an ongoing process with Parish and Town Councils underway to agree land transfers where appropriate.

The vehicle fleet size has been reduced by one vehicle, enabled by greater casual car use by staff.

8.4. Enforcement – Misuse of land

This work stream will implement a process by which the Council works with an external company who issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for criminal offences such as dropping litter or failing to pick up dogs mess.

The Council would contract this out to a company who would employ staff to patrol areas such as Parks and Countryside sites and issue FPNs to those who are witnessed to be dropping litter. The contract would be at no cost to the Council and should FPNs prove numerous then a profit-sharing model would generate a small surplus for the Council which could be re-directed to an appropriate community benefit.

Initial meetings were held with 3 major suppliers of this enforcement service to discuss the options available to us and the costs attached to them. To be able to benefit from the “cost neutral” options the sites within the area coverage had to include The Lexicon. Unfortunately The Lexicon did not want to partner with us at this time which meant the proposal had to be reassessed.

The reviews project team are now in the process of creating a revised area coverage map showing all sites that would be available for patrol primarily focussed on; Parks and Countryside sites, neighbourhood shopping precincts and known litter hotspots such as public highway near fast food outlets. This will be discussed with the suppliers and if viable as a zero cost model the with options agreeable to the council then action will progress.

If there is a clear direction forwards for this project we will need to carry out consultation with local businesses to ensure that any enforcement action included upon precincts does not affect their businesses detrimentally.

We will also need to create a new Public Space Protection Order to be able to issue fixed penalty notices upon the land in scope.

9. ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

9.1. Not requested

Borough Treasurer

9.2. Not requested

Strategic Risk Management Issues

Failure to implement proposals will result in significant alternative savings needing to be found in the Council's budget. There may be resource capacity issues in parts of the organisation as a result of these measures which will need to be managed.

9.3. CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

None relating to this report

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

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