

TO: THE EXECUTIVE
8TH MAY 2018

TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME – PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE REVIEW
CHIEF OFFICER: PLANNING, TRANSPORT & COUNTRYSIDE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To approve the implementation of the new strategy for the Parks and Countryside service following the transformation review.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the Executive agree to the implementation of, the recommendations emanating from the Transformation Review of the Parks and Countryside service as detailed in annexe 1;
- 2.2. That the Executive agree to the development of a country park subject to further feasibility work.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1. 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 review demonstrated that a saving in the region of £476k delivered over 3 years could be achieved.
- 3.2. The Plan Phase Gateway review held on 21st March 2018 saw members support the direction of travel to enhance and maintain the service and to move ahead with the five recommendations presented to them.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. The option of 'No change' was considered. This would mean continuing with the Parks and Countryside service in its current form with no major changes. This option was not selected as no savings could be achieved.
- 4.2. All sourcing options were explored, including make, buy, share and divest. Recommendations include make, divest and buy options but sharing options have not been recommended at this time.
- 4.3. Contracting out parts of or the rangers service as a whole was explored but is not recommended at this time as the ranger service holds the key to many of the income generating projects, particularly the practical enhancement and management of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGS) and has the existing skill set to deliver a single Natural Estate approach to land management.
- 4.4. The opportunity to share the Parks and Countryside service or elements of it with other local authorities was explored. Due to the different structures, systems and responsibilities and the way in which land is held and managed by other councils, it

appears that there would be no particular benefits/savings that could be secured through the sharing of services with these councils at this time. Although this should be kept under review.

5. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

5.1. The review is led by the Chief Officer: Planning, Transport & Countryside 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.

5.2. The main focus of the Parks and Countryside review was to meet or exceed the savings targets set whilst endeavouring to ensure that maximum benefit is being secured from the borough's natural environment. Specifically this focussed on the management of land and trees currently within the Council's Park 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.

5.3. Our direction for the future

We will seek:

To involve residents, businesses and other partners in developing and maintaining the borough's green spaces - introducing attractive new services to help reduce our reliance on Council funding.

The Council recognises:

The central importance of our green spaces and wildlife, and that they are key to the health and success of the borough.

This will be enhanced by:

- Encouraging people to join in volunteer and help us raise money.
- Protecting our natural spaces and creating new ones - to match housing and economic growth.
- Generating external funding through the planning process for enhancements and ongoing maintenance.
- Sensitively developing natural spaces and assets to include new facilities and services to generate long term income.

We will do this by:

- Improving access for everyone living and working in the borough.
- Caring for our natural spaces for the benefit of both people and wildlife.
- Generating income to help reduce our costs.
- Encouraging healthy outdoor activity for all ages and abilities.

5.4. To achieve these developments and savings the following strategic options have been 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.

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- 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

5.5. The new strategic plan to enhance and maintain the service has been reviewed and supported by councillors at the Gateway Review held on 21st March 2018 and has been endorsed by the councils internal Transformation Board. A set of 5 recommendations shown in annexe 1 were presented in order that these changes may be implemented in the next phase.

5.6. A Business Development Plan will be produced to support the commercial mind-set. It will consider market and competitor analysis, resource and practise management, and skills development.

5.7. The savings are closely in line with the efficiency targets set of £400k. Whilst it won't be possible to implement all of the recommendations and realise savings within 2018/19, indicative figures show we can achieve in the region of £333k savings in 18-19, rising up to estimates of £454k in 2019/20 and finally up to £476k in 2020/21.

5.8. Table 1: Savings/Income projections

Initiative	Saving/Income
Country Park	£85k
Income Generation Initiatives – including SPA mitigation facilitation funds, Bio Mass scheme, Sponsorship, Highway Tree Pruning Scheme, Licensing and Filming	£323k
Service Re-design – Unified Natural Estate	£40K
Budget Efficiencies / cost reduction – Enforcement, bookings and events	£28K
TOTAL	£476k

5.9. There are three major capital cost elements to the project. These elements will finance the proposals for a new Country Park and a Bio Mass Burner sited upon it. The total investment required is around £2.2m.

- The first element comes as part of the recommendation to sell two properties (currently used as staff housing) the gateway review supported the proposal to the ring fence the capital receipt from these sales, estimated at £650k for investment into the Country Park project.
- The second element was identified as part of research and identified some funds available from built sports and open space S106 contributions. This channel of funding is being explored further to ensure it can be used for this purpose and has not been earmarked for other projects.

- And finally, the third element is an 'invest to save' application for the remainder of the investment required. Financial detail provided as part of the application will need to evidence a viable capital investment opportunity.

6. ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1. Legal advice has been provided at various points in the plan phase and this will continue as the proposals set out in the report proceed towards implementation.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2. Savings from the Transformation Programme underpin the Council's medium term financial position.

Equalities Impact Screening

- 6.3. Attached at Annexe 2.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4. 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. The future of the service will not be sustainable.

7. CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1. The approach to the review has been extremely positive with a 'people first' focus including large amount of staff and stakeholder engagement. The project team and board have continued to involve staff in the preparation of business cases presented to the board for decision.
- 7.2. Three sets of workshops were held with staff and stakeholders. They focussed on Land Management, Public Tree Pruning, and Customer Journeys. Results and recommendations from these workshops have fed into the final recommendations.
- 7.3. During the plan phase of the review, from the 12th December 2017 to the 23rd January 2018, we consulted with residents with a parks and open spaces survey receiving over 250 responses. The purpose of the survey was to understand resident's views and support for proposals being investigated as part of the Parks and Countryside review. This has enabled us to make an informed decision on the potential success and impact of the proposals being put forward.
- 7.4. The feedback received was strongly in agreement with the councils preferred options and has informed the formulation of Plan Phase report and recommendations.
- 7.5. The Gateway reviews gave Councillors the opportunity to understand and comment on the various streams set out in this project.

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Background Papers

Parks and Countryside Review Plan Phase Report – March 2018

Contact for further information

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Annexe 1

Recommendations

That the Executive supports:

1. Planning the development of Horseshoe Lake as a Country Park using a modular approach.
2. The investigation and development of a Biomass burner and green waste storage/drying area (dependant on recommendation above).
3. Implementation of income generation schemes including: enhanced filming scheme and sponsorship for the service.
4. Implementation of cost reduction schemes including: new approach to enforcement; licensing; service re-design; reduced maintenance budget and staff re-structuring where required.
5. Service re-design and remodelling to unify responsibility for land management and income generation into a new Natural Estate Service.

Annexe 2 – Equalities screening document