

17 October 2016

Agenda Item: 6a

REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT & PROPERTY

COMMERCIAL OPERATION AT RUFFORD COUNTRY PARK

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval to the granting of a lease on the terms outlined within the report to the successful selected bidder.
2. To confirm a further report will be submitted to Culture Committee giving a recommendation for selecting an appropriate partner to manage Rufford Country Park's commercial operation.
3. To authorise the Corporate Director of CFCS (or his nominee) in consultation with the Chairman (or vice Chairman in his absence) of the F&P Committee to proceed to agree lease terms subject to their being in broad alignment with the terms outlined in the report.

Information and Advice

4. Some information relating to this report is not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. Having regard to the circumstances, on balance the public interest in disclosing the information does not outweigh the reason for exemption because divulging the information would significantly damage the Council's commercial position. The exempt information is set out in exempt appendices.
5. To preserve the buildings from demolition, in 1952 Nottinghamshire County Council purchased the Abbey and surrounding land, which was around a Tudor house that dated back to 1537.
6. The property suffered from dry rot, rising damp, a damaged roof, mining subsidence and bulging walls and as a result in 1956, a necessary controlled demolition of the Abbey's upper floors, the 17th century north wing and the 18th century east wing took place. The Government and the County Council decided to an agreed approach that the 12th century parts of the abbey, including the crypt, must be preserved at all costs and the responsibility for the care of the ancient building then came under the Ministry of Works and later English Heritage.
7. Today Rufford Country Park has a diverse historic environment which focuses on the scheduled monument of Rufford Abbey, the Grade 1 listed Jacobean house, the

foundation of the cloistral complex, several ancillary buildings, and water management earthworks. It lies within a Grade II registered park and within the site there are in total 14 listed buildings including the grade II former orangery.

8. The central part of the scheduled area is in the Guardianship of the Secretary of State, which means that whilst Nottinghamshire County Council retain the freehold of this the Secretary of State has taken on all management control.
9. The responsibility for management on behalf of the Secretary of State has been passed to the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England and is delivered under a licence agreement with Nottinghamshire County Council for the day to day use and management of the guardianship area.
10. Only the Secretary of State can authorise works to the scheduled monument. In the event that a private sector body is in occupation of the scheduled monument (and guardianship area), any works which the private sector provider might wish to carry out would require application for Scheduled Monument Consent, this process is operated by Historic England.
11. The Abbey and its grounds were designated a Country Park by Nottinghamshire County Council in 1969.
12. The Historic England Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in England has been compiled since 1983 and includes the Grade II registered Rufford Parks and Gardens.

Background

13. In light of financial challenges faced by the Council it has been identified that the operating costs at Rufford need to be reduced significantly. At the same time the County Council is committed to preserving Rufford Country Park historical heritage amenity and outstanding open space.
14. A report which outlined the full business case to reduce the revenue costs of maintaining Rufford Country Park by approximately £300,000 per annum with effect from 2017/18 was approved by Members in February 2015.
15. In order to deliver the requirements of the business case whilst preserving Rufford's unique combination of history and peaceful countryside, officers have undertaken work to consider how best to reduce costs and generate additional income by reshaping the Park's overall commercial offer.
16. A further report which outlined how potential third party partners would be engaged to gauge the potential viability of establishing alternative commissioned arrangements for future delivery of the catering and commercial offer at Rufford was presented and approved by Culture Committee on 3 November 2015.
17. In December 2015 a soft market testing exercise was undertaken at Rufford. Nine organisations attended. A number of these currently manage some or all country parks facilities on behalf of other Local Authorities along with well-known national charitable/heritage organisations.

18. Whilst a strong level of market interest was received, feedback indicated that in order to achieve the financial targets that would be required by the Council, significant reshaping of the commercial offer would be necessary and supplementary Council capital investment would be required.

19. Approval was given on 8 March 2016 by Culture Committee for the commencement of the procurement exercise to select an appropriate partner to manage Rufford Country Park's commercial operation with effect from 2017. This was progressed on the basis that contractual arrangements envisaged by the Council will result in the Council retaining overall responsibility and control of Rufford Country Park. The Council will continue to directly control management and conservation of the Park's green space.

Other Options Considered

20. Maintain the current in house approach to the commercial offer at Rufford, supported by additional capital investment.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

21. The granting of a lease to the successful bidder to ensure the new organisation has a legal right to occupy the commercial properties at Rufford.

Statutory and Policy Implications

22. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) To seek approval to the granting of a lease on the terms outlined within the report to the successful selected bidder.
- 2) To confirm a further report will be submitted to Culture Committee giving a recommendation for selecting an appropriate partner to manage Rufford Country Park's commercial operation.
- 3) To authorise the Corporate Director of CFCS (or his nominee) in consultation with the Chairman (or Vice Chairman in his absence) of the F&P Committee to proceed to agree lease terms subject to their being in broad alignment with the terms outlined in the report.

Jas Hundal

Service Director – Environment, Transport & Property

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Gael Gamble 0115 977 2083

Constitutional Comments (SOM 27.09.16)

23. The recommendation falls within the remit of the Finance and Property Committee under its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (GB 28.09.16)

24. The financial implications are set out in the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Report to Culture Committee dated 8 March 2016 - Commercial Operations at Rufford Country Park

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

Ward(s): Rufford

Member(s): Councillor John Peck

File ref.: /GG/SB/03083

SP: 3097

Properties affected: 03083 - Rufford Country Park