

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND CULTURE

BESTWOOD COUNTRY PARK – COLLABORATIVE AGREEMENT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval to complete negotiations with Gedling Borough Council over the establishment of a collaboration agreement for Bestwood Country Park for the Borough Council to manage the general operations and visitor offer at Bestwood Country Park on behalf of the County Council.
2. To seek delegated authority for the Corporate Director, Children, Families and Cultural Services, in consultation with the Group Manager, Legal and Democratic Services, to approve any additions or amendments to any agreements which in their judgement are necessary to give effect to the project and which are within the financial parameters set out in this report.
3. To seek approval to bring annual reports to the Committee on the performance of the agreement.

Information and Advice

Background

4. Bestwood Country Park is an area of recreation and nature conservation, comprising 690 acres, in an urban fringe location on the northern border of Nottingham. It is well used by Nottinghamshire people, and enjoys the support of two active Friends groups. The County Council's ambition for Bestwood Country Park is to ensure its long term sustainability, and to maximise opportunities at the Park for visitors to participate in, appreciate and value their local landscape and heritage.
5. Roughly two thirds of the Park's land is owned by Nottinghamshire County Council and one third by Gedling Borough Council. Both Councils currently manage their land independently of the other (i.e. each Council independently carries out grounds maintenance, management of park buildings such as toilet blocks, and supports the activities of community groups operating on the site).

Current Budget Position

6. The annual revenue cost of Bestwood Country Park to the County Council is approximately £250,000. Full Council has previously agreed an Outline Business Case (OBC) for Bestwood that requires an annual revenue saving of £50,000 to be delivered through the exploration and establishment of alternative delivery models for the Park. The

saving is required from 2017/2018. There is little commercial activity at Bestwood, and little realistic prospect of significant commercial activity in the medium term future.

Country Parks Service Transition

7. Members will be aware that at the Culture Committee meeting in November 2016 approval was given for officers to progress negotiations with Gedling Borough Council over the establishment of a collaborative agreement for the future operation of the Park. Members will be aware also that the other two large country parks operated by the Country Parks Service – Rufford and Sherwood Forest - are currently in transition to alternative management arrangements.
8. Work to explore ways in which the revenue costs for Bestwood can also be reduced has therefore taken place within this context, and against an anticipated medium term reduction in managerial capacity for the Country Parks Service.
9. Work with Gedling Borough Council to establish the potential savings delivered through the establishment of a collaborative agreement has identified approximately £55,000 of direct annual revenue savings.

The Collaborative Agreement

10. The key terms of the proposed collaborative agreement with Gedling Borough Council are set out below.
11. In broad terms, the County Council will:
 - remain the freehold owner of the land it currently owns;
 - retain sole responsibility for the management and maintenance of the Alexandra Lodge buildings and associated infrastructure;
 - retain responsibility for the structural maintenance of the other buildings and structures on the Park site (including the Winding Engine House), as set out in the repairs and maintenance schedule that will form part of the collaborative agreement;
 - retain direct oversight of the agricultural tenancy areas within the Park;
 - retain capacity to offer support to the Park's Friends and volunteer groups.
12. In broad terms, Gedling Borough Council will:
 - undertake the day to day management of the Park. In this respect, Gedling Borough Council will absorb, through TUPE transfer, relevant County Council Country Parks Service staff into its own Parks Division;
 - undertake the day to day stewardship and grounds maintenance of the Park, in accordance with current landscape and conservation plans, and in accordance with standards agreed with the County Council;
 - manage on a day to day basis the Park's buildings and structures (except for Alexandra Lodge);
 - assume responsibility for the day to day co-ordination and support of the Park's Friends and volunteer groups;
 - deliver appropriate community and education events and activities.

13. The collaborative agreement will be for an initial term of five years, and will allow for further extension, subject to the agreement of both Councils. Implementation will be from 1 April 2017, or as soon as final agreement between both Councils is reached. Either Council may serve notice and withdraw from the Collaborative Service by giving not less than 12 months' notice to the other Council of its intention to do so.
14. The implementation of the agreement will deliver the required financial savings previously agreed by Full Council.
15. The operation of the agreement will be actively monitored and managed by both Councils through the establishment of regular quarterly joint meetings.

Other Options Considered

16. Other options have been previously considered and discarded in prior reports to the Culture Committee.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

17. To support the delivery of the required revenue budget savings for Bestwood Country Park, as agreed by Full Council.
18. To ensure that the future arrangements for the management of the Park support its effective, safe and sustainable operation, and that its overall visitor offer is properly supported.
19. To enable the Council to maintain ownership and control of its land holding, and provide a contractual mechanism for quality control.
20. To minimise the impact of financial constraints on local residents and Park users.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. 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 services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, 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.

Financial Implications

22. These are set out in the body of the report.

Human Resources Implications

23. These are set out in the body of the report.

Implications for Service Users

24. The establishment of the collaborative agreement will see the Park managed and maintained at a comparable level to that currently attained under the direct management of the County Council.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

25. Gedling Borough Council has experience in managing ecologically sensitive sites, and care of Bestwood's natural habitats will form a key component of the services delivered by the Borough Council through the agreement.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Committee:

- 1) approves the completion of negotiations with Gedling Borough Council over the establishment of a collaboration agreement for Bestwood Country Park for the Borough Council to manage the general operations and visitor offer at Bestwood Country Park on behalf of the County Council.
- 2) gives delegated authority for the Corporate Director, Children, Families and Cultural Services, in consultation with the Group Manager, Legal and Democratic Services, to approve any additions or amendments to any agreements which in their judgement are necessary to give effect to the project and which are within the financial parameters set out in this report.
- 3) approves that annual reports be brought to the Committee on the performance of the agreement.

Derek Higton
Service Director, Youth, Families and Culture.

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Derek Higton
Service Director, Youth, Families and Culture
T: 0115 9773498
E: derek.higton@nottsgov.uk

Constitutional Comments (SMG 17/02/17)

26. The Committee has responsibility for country parks and the proposals in this report fall within the remit of this Committee.
27. The Employment Procedure Rules provide that the report to Committee include the required advice and HR comments and that the recognised trade unions be consulted on all proposed changes to staffing structures (and any views given should be fully considered prior to a decision being made).

Financial Comments (CDS 20/02/17)

28. The financial implications of the report are set out in paragraph 14 above.

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.

Bestwood Country Park – future maintenance arrangements – report to Culture Committee on 19 April 2016

Bestwood Country Park – future maintenance arrangements – report to Culture Committee on 1 November 2016

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C0944