



Report to Cabinet

Subject: Gedling Colliery Spoil Tip – Options Study

Date: 23rd January 2006

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1. Purpose of the Report

To inform Cabinet of progress in developing the Gedling Colliery site into a Country Park and to seek approval for the use of the Council's budget allocation.

2. Background

Gedling Colliery commenced production in 1902; the area occupied by the spoil heap was formerly farmland. The spoil tip covers nearly 120 hectares over naturally high ground, and is divided into the east and west tips. Records show that the spoil tip is built on the side of a hill, covering three minor valleys, and also the natural drainage lines.

Coal production ceased in 1991 when the pithead and associated buildings were removed. Approximately 33 hectares of the spoil tip were restored to grassland and trees.

In 1994 the site was acquired by R J B Mining (UK Coal) who was granted permission for a tip washing scheme in 1997. This scheme included the restoration of the site to a country park that would be developed and maintained by Gedling Borough Council.

The tip washing scheme ceased after 18 months of the planned four-year programme as there was insufficient coal recovered from the tip. This meant that the approved restoration contours were not achieved, and Gedling Borough Council withdrew from their agreement to take over the site. A revised restoration scheme has been submitted by UK Coal PLC that will return the spoil tip to amenity land as required under the terms of the planning application.

Since 2002 the Greenwood Partnership Team has developed a partnership of stakeholders with an interest in the reclamation and long-term future of the tip. The principal parties in the partnership are as follows: -

Gedling Borough Council
Nottinghamshire County Council
The Forestry Commission
English Partnerships
The Land Restoration Trust
UK Coal Mining

The partnership commissioned an Options Study for the restoration of the site, which was carried out by Nottinghamshire County Council's Landscape & Reclamation team. To complement this work on landscape options, Stevens & Associates were appointed to carry out a strategic overview of the recreational and leisure opportunities for the site, including the financial benefits from any proposals.

The Options Study offered three costed alternatives for restoration:

1. Basic landscape option to cover the minimum acceptable restoration scheme with basic public access.
2. Medium level landscape option including additional landscaping and tree planting with features for public access.
3. High-level landscape option including a range of country park facilities.

The partnership subsequently adopted "Option 2" as the agreed way forward.

Each of the options was produced following extensive research and takes into account the results of ecological surveys, landscape assessment and visual appraisal. These include the testing and analysis of spoil and soil samples to determine the existing ground conditions and to recommend appropriate improvements and species mixes that would be suitable, thereby helping to ensure optimal conditions for the establishment of any new planting.

PC-based decision support software called Roots was used as part of this process to produce custom built specifications for the planting and establishment of trees, shrubs, wild flowers and legumes on the site.

The system identifies the need for soil amendments and plant protection measures, compiling tree and shrub planting mixes and ultimately the specification itself.

UK Coal are required to restore the site but their design plans do not include any form of public access that will create an open space on the urban fringe that will act as a physical and visual link to the wider countryside. Option 2 includes the opportunity for leisure and amenity use and is detailed in Appendix A. This restoration would also result in a greater range of habitat and landscape thus enhancing the local biodiversity. As a minimum, therefore, appropriately managed, the site has the potential under this scheme to become a local nature reserve.

U.K. Coal PLC begins their restoration work on site, as required by planning regulations, in May 2006. May 2007 is the target for Option 2 works to commence.

It is still proposed that the Land Regeneration Trust take ownership of the site from U.K.Coal PLC and that the Forestry Commission manages it on their behalf.

To ensure the community is kept informed of developments on site, Greenwood Community Forest Officers are drafting an article for the next edition of the Contact magazine. The partnership also proposes to organise further engagement of the local community via direct mail and the organisation of public meetings. This activity will be designed to demonstrate local support for the scheme and to start raising interest in a volunteer "Friends" group that may eventually help with the ongoing care of the site.

3. Proposal

The partnership is pursuing funding support for the delivery of Option 2. The Borough has allocated £40,000 for the next ten years as its contribution; it is proposed that this funding should allow payment towards taking the project forward from 2006/07. Essential developmental activities for 2006/07 include local engagement meetings and the production of detailed design plans and work specifications. The partnership will also ask Nottinghamshire County Council to release part of their funding to support these purposes.

Other potential funding partners for the overall project include: -

English Partnerships (National Coalfields Programme)
Nottinghamshire County Council
Greater Nottinghamshire Partnership
U.K. Coal PLC

4. Resource Implications

Resource implications for Option 2 are currently estimated at £4.4m, including an endowment representing 43% of this figure.

These figures are under review, as more information is made available from site surveys and the implications of the Gedling Access Road.

The Borough's contribution of £40,000 for ten years remains fixed.

5. Recommendation

To agree that the Borough's allocation of £40,000 in 2006/07 can be used as a contribution towards taking the project forward.

6. Wards Affected

All Wards

3.3.2 *Landscape Design Objectives:*

- **Objective 1:** Maintain panoramic views – tree planting to be restricted to lower-lying areas.
- **Objective 2:** Planting layout to be site-appropriate in shape and scale – reduce geometric shapes
- **Objective 3:** make access links across the site - and link with public rights of way network beyond the site boundary.
- **Objective 4:** tie in path access with the water bodies
- **Objective 5:** zone the site so that the main activity and recreational focus of the site is in the eastern half of the site, with lower key activity in the western half of the site, and preferably absent from the area around the south western corner that is ecologically sensitive.
- **Objective 6:** where existing access routes for walkers and riders are adjacent or close to the site, then link proposed internal routes to these, providing appropriate access facilities and barriers where needed.
- **Objective 7:** car parking needs to be adjacent to the site boundary and the layout should allow good visibility across the car parking spaces to facilitate natural surveillance for security purposes.
- **Objective 8:** use additional planting to augment the existing, so that it will relate more closely to landform, in line with good forest design guidelines.
- **Objective 9:** incorporate, where desirable, footpath, cycleway and bridleway routes with the drainage features.

3.4 **CONCEPT PLAN**

The concept plan (LT/T108/014) reflects the key issues identified as constraints and opportunities during the site investigations stage of the study, and the objectives of the landscape design statement. These key issues are: -

- The ecologically more sensitive areas to the south west of the site.
- The panoramic views from the site.
- Access and linkages between the urban areas to the south and west, and the countryside areas to the north and east.
- A response to the topography of the site.
- Concentrating different levels of activity in different parts of the site.

3.6 OPTION 2

Option 2 has an improved drainage regime, and 10 hectares of new woodland and shrub planting in addition to the 20 hectares of planting undertaken in earlier restoration works. There is a total of 80 hectares of managed grassland, and a network of public footpaths & cycleway, bridleways and a 1.75km easy access within the site, all of which would provide a range of different experiences for the users, as well as a link to the wider public footpath and bridleway network beyond the site. There would also be parking for around 45 cars.

It is anticipated that this option would also serve the local area but attract a greater number of visitors because of the variety of different routes and trails available – resulting in an estimated 25,000-35,000 visitors per annum.

In order to predict likely management costs for this proposal, it has been assumed that the maintenance of the site would also be let as a tendered contract to a grounds maintenance company, possibly as part of a package of maintenance sites, and overseen by a ranger.