

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Bestwood Country Park Collaborative Agreement

Date: 6 April 2017

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Wards Affected

Bestwood St Albans Ward

Purpose

- 1 To obtain approval to enter into a collaborative arrangement with Nottinghamshire County Council for the joint management of general operations and the visitor offer at Bestwood Country Park. ("the collaborative arrangement")
2. To obtain authorisation for the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance in consultation with the Director of Organisational Development and Democratic Services to negotiate and conclude a collaborative agreement to facilitate the collaborative arrangement.

Key Decision

3. This is not a key decision.

Background

4. Local Authorities have the power under s.7 of the Countryside Act 1968 to provide country parks on any site in the countryside appearing to them to be suitable to be adapted to provide a country park. Bestwood Country Park is an area of informal 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. Gedling Borough's and 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).

Country Parks Service Transition

6. Gedling Borough Council was approached in early 2015 by the County Council who were undertaking work to explore ways in which the revenue costs for Bestwood might be reduced against an anticipated medium term reduction in managerial capacity for

the Country Parks Service. They had identified Gedling Borough Council's Parks Service as a suitable stakeholder in the area with the correct level of expertise in the field, who would be able to promote the benefits of the park, its habitats and flora and fauna, whilst encouraging visitors to enjoy the health benefits of the park and its historic buildings. It was hoped the Parks Service might be able to help them achieve their aims of providing a Country Park so they set about an engagement and scoping exercise.

7. Work with Gedling Borough Council to establish the potential savings delivered through the establishment of a collaborative agreement has identified approximately £60,000 of direct annual revenue savings for the County Council whilst at the same securing a valuable green space Country Park for leisure, recreational and outdoor educational activities for the residents of Gedling Borough.
8. At the Nottinghamshire County Council Culture Committee meeting in November 2016 approval was given for County officers to progress negotiations with Gedling Borough Council over the establishment of a collaborative agreement for the future operation of the Park. The other two large country parks operated by the County Council Parks Service – Rufford and Sherwood Forest - are also currently in transition to alternative management arrangements.

The Collaborative Agreement

9. The Local Authority Goods and Services Act 1970 gives the authorities the power to enter into an agreement for the management of Bestwood Country Park and to agree such payment terms as the parties consider appropriate. It is proposed that a collaborative agreement under this statutory power be produced to clarify and formalise the arrangements between the parties. The key responsibilities of the parties under the proposed collaborative arrangement are set out below.
10. 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.
11. In broad terms, Gedling Borough Council will:
 - undertake the day to day management of the Park. In this respect, Gedling Borough Council are in discussions with the County Council in relation to the

potential TUPE transfer of, relevant County Council Country Parks Service staff into its own Parks Division, any formal approvals for this process would be sought separately through SLT and the Chief Executive ;

- 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.

12. An indicative detailed breakdown of the responsibilities under the arrangement are included in Appendix 1.
13. It is proposed that the collaborative arrangement will be for an initial term of five years, and any agreement would allow for further extension, subject to the agreement of both Councils and Member approval. Subject to Member approval and the collaborative agreement being finalised it is anticipated that implementation of the arrangement will be from 1 May 2017. The implementation of the arrangement will deliver the required financial savings required by the County Council whilst providing Gedling Borough Parks Service with the opportunity to achieve their budget in forthcoming years. whilst promoting the benefits of the park, its habitats and flora and fauna, and encouraging visitors to enjoy the health benefits of the park and its historic buildings.
14. The operation of the arrangement, underpinned by a formal collaborative agreement between the parties, will be actively monitored and managed by both Councils through the establishment of regular quarterly joint meetings.

Proposal.

- 15 That Gedling Borough Council enter into a collaborative arrangement with Nottinghamshire County Council for the joint management of general operations and the visitor offer at Bestwood Country Park for an initial period of five years with an option to extend up to 5 years.
16. That the collaborative arrangement is formalised through a collaborative agreement between the Councils, and that authority to negotiate and conclude the agreement be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance in consultation with the Director of Organisational Development and Democratic Services.
17. That annual reports are brought to Cabinet updating members on the performance of the collaborative arrangement.

Alternative Options

- 18 The Council could choose not to enter into the collaborative agreement, and continue to maintain only the land in Gedling's ownership which will prevent the projects

progression. This would result in the County Council requirement to search for another partner to work with. However, this opportunity provides a significant opportunity for good partnership working and will go towards helping Parks and Street Care Services achieve their budget in forthcoming years. It is also seen as a way to ensure that the benefits of the Park are maximised for its users.

Financial Implications

19. The Revenue and Capital budgets for the delivery of the Bestwood Country Park collaborative agreement were approved by Council on 1 March 2017. A capital budget of £46,000 was approved for the purchase of a vehicle and the equipment required to enable the delivery of the agreed services; and the net annual revenue efficiency savings from this partnership are estimated at £35,000.

Appendices

- 20 Appendix 1 Draft Maintenance Schedule

Background Papers

None

Recommendation(s)

- 21 **Cabinet members are recommended to:**
- a) **approve the establishment of a collaborative arrangement between Nottinghamshire County Council and Gedling Borough Council for the joint management of general operations and visitor offer at Bestwood Country Park.**
 - b) **Authorise the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance in consultation with the Director of Organisational Development and Democratic Services to negotiate and conclude a collaborative agreement to facilitate the collaborative arrangement.**

Reasons for Recommendations

22. To support Parks and Street Care Services in achieving their budget in forthcoming years, as agreed by Full Council Whilst promoting the health and wellbeing benefits of the park and its historic buildings, its habitats and flora and fauna, for leisure, recreational and outdoor educational activities for the residents of Gedling Borough..
23. 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. And to enable the Council to maintain the site which falls within its Borough Boundary, and provide a contractual mechanism for quality control.