

Report to Council

Subject: Development of Gedling Country Park Visitor Centre

Date: 13 July 2016

Author: Director of Health and Community Well-Being

1. Purpose of the Report

To seek approval for additional capital budget to enable the provision of a visitor centre at Gedling Country Park.

2. Background

In 2013, Gedling Borough Council obtained a 25 year lease from Harworth Estates for a 240 acre site to create what has become Gedling Country Park. The freehold was subsequently secured for £1 in June 2015 and after an 18 month project to install pathways to make the site accessible and safe for public use, the park was officially opened on Saturday 28 March 2015.

A Friends of Gedling Country Park group was formed in late 2014 to help develop and maintain the new Country Park, the group's aim being to enhance the various habitats, flora and fauna on site and to serve as an active means of communication and co-operation between all users and the Council.

The group was initially formed as an unincorporated association (effectively a small community group) and successfully applied to become a registered charity in May 2016. The group has made, and continues to make, a significant contribution to the development and maintenance of the park, for example, recently obtaining £50,000 of WREN funding towards provision of a children's play area that is scheduled to be constructed later this summer.

Even allowing for the fact that there are currently limited visitor facilities on the site, the Country Park has proved extremely popular with people from across the Borough and the wider Nottinghamshire area. As a result, additional temporary car parking was installed at the Spring Lane entrance in October 2015 to deal with continued high demand for car parking spaces.

As well as offering a beautiful and informal setting for people to simply take a stroll or have a run, the park now hosts weekly Park Run events. The Senior Park Run that started in June 2015 recently held its first anniversary which was attended by 187 runners and the Junior Park Run that commenced in April 2016 has an average of 76 weekly runners.

The development of the Country Park is therefore central to the Gedling Plan objectives concerning improving the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors. The park provides a unique opportunity for local people to access a destination venue and so benefit from the positive health advantages that doing so brings.

The Country Park and the proposed visitor centre facilities will also contribute to many other Gedling Plan objectives, these include:

- promoting and encouraging pride and local citizenship
- increasing participation in the local area
- creating employment opportunities and jobs locally
- providing an attractive and sustainable environment that local people can enjoy

The park's topography, design and ecological importance (open grassland habitats) add significant value to the green space infrastructure within the Borough and it is widely viewed as a prized local community asset.

Visitors have been requesting a café and permanent toilet facility from the outset and over the past 12 months the potential for the development of a café facility, along with a heritage and cultural centre to highlight the site and the surrounding areas rich heritage and culture have been explored and developed.

We can therefore be not only satisfied with the positive impact that the park has made to date but also confident that there is public demand and interest in its ongoing development. This was recently confirmed in an online survey that took place between March and May 2016. The survey sought to identify what local residents and others who had visited the park considered to be priorities for the park's future developments and over 600 responses were received (the highest participation the Council has ever received for a survey of this kind). The top priorities identified through this exercise were:

- a café facility with outdoor seating and shaded areas
- display areas to explain the local mining heritage
- educational classroom areas

At budget Council in March 2016, a capital budget of £900,000 was approved to establish a café and toilet facilities, subject to detailed

consideration of designs and costs.

As part of the implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy the Borough Council prepared a document, known as the Regulation 123 List, which set out the projects that will be funded by CIL. The Gedling Colliery Country Park Visitor Centre was included in the Council's Regulation 123 list in recognition of the fact that it is infrastructure required to support the development of the borough, in particular Gedling Colliery/Chase Farm. The Regulation 123 list was approved by the Council in July 2015 as part of the CIL Charging Scheme and included an estimate of £1 million for the visitor centre.

It was always envisaged that the park would be developed in stages, in response to public demand and as and when funding was able to be secured. Reference has already been made to the children's play areas which will be created later this summer, partly funded by the Council and supported by external funding. This report deals with the first phase of the visitor centre facilities, namely provision of a café and toilet facilities. Discussions have taken place with the Heritage Lottery Fund about phase 2 and an initial submission made for funding to provide educational and heritage resources. While there is no certainty that HLF funding will be forthcoming, the designs for phase one have regard to the potential phase 2 developments.

3. Proposals

Immediately after Budget Council, Nottingham City Council's Major Projects Team was commissioned to provide project management support and procure design and costings options for a café and toilet facilities. They were also engaged to develop design options for the provision of educational, cultural and heritage visitor facilities should Heritage Lottery funding become available in the future. Nottingham City had a strong track record of securing HLF funding as well as recent and relevant experience of developing visitor facilities on parks which made them a suitable partner.

The Director of Health and Community Well-Being has led a Project Management Team including the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Environment and supported by a wide range of officers from various technical disciplines.

A number of different design and cost options have been explored and the preferred option – copies of which are attached to this report and are on display in the Members' Room - comprises the following:-

- a 282 m², future proof new build construction, to allow the facility to

- be extended over time
- 60 cover café with servery and food preparation area
- male & female WCs
- fully accessible WC with a changing places provision
- circulation and ancillary space
- fixed furniture and equipment, with the option to include kitchen fittings if required following the appointment of a catering concessionaire
- CCTV and electric shutters

Key to the consideration has been creating facilities that are not only fit for purpose now but also have regard to (a) the significant housing growth that will take place close to the Country Park and (b) commercial opportunities, for example, links with the new Gedling Crematorium.

In order to secure Best Value, a preferred contractor has been procured via a Framework Agreement that Gedling is party to and this contractor has, in turn, tendered out all the various aspects of the work to obtain competitive prices.

The table below sets out the proposed costings based on the specification above and in accordance with the designs attached to this report.

Cost Element	Cost
Visitor Centre (includes landscaping scheme)	£996,000
Changing Places (fully accessible changing facility)	£25,000
Project Management, Quantity Surveyor and CDM Client	£52,500
Contingency	£100,000
Additional car park works	£85,000
Total Cost Estimate	£1,258,500

As detailed above the preferred option for the visitor centre is estimated to cost £1,258,500 and therefore requires approval of an additional capital budget of £358,500. It is proposed that the additional budget requirement be financed by a contribution from the earmarked leisure strategy revenue reserve.

4. Resource Implications

At its meeting in March Council approved a capital budget for the visitor centre of £900,000 to be financed by a £500,000 revenue contribution and £400,000 by borrowing.

As detailed above the preferred option for the visitor centre requires approval of an additional capital budget of **£358,500**. This additional

budget requirement can be financed by a contribution from the earmarked leisure strategy revenue reserve.

As detailed at paragraph 2, the Gedling Country Park Visitor Centre project is included on the CIL Regulation 123 List with an estimated project contribution of £1m, although CIL receipts for this project are not forecast to be available until 2024/25. Regulation 60 of the CIL Regulations 2010 do however allow for a charging authority to apply CIL to reimburse expenditure already incurred on infrastructure so when the CIL receipts are secured the Council can reimburse the revenue contributions invested in the visitor centre back to the general fund balance/reserves. At the current time, the Council is unable to apply CIL receipts to repay money borrowed for the purposes of funding infrastructure. The CIL Regulations include provision to enable the Secretary of State to allow authorities to 'prudentially' borrow against future income from the levy; however these provisions have yet to be brought into force.

Budget Council also approved an indicative ongoing revenue budget of £50,000 for the future operation of the visitor centre. Three operating models are being considered for the café facility within the visitors centre. These are:

- an in-house provision
- a shared service option with another local authority
- a lease concession arrangement through a framework tendering exercise.

The outline business case assessment of the options suggests that the ongoing costs can be contained within the current approved budget. The option of an in-house provision is less favourable for the Council than the other two options, both of which carry the potential to offer an income stream. The final business case for the operating model will be confirmed by tender or negotiation processes as appropriate and will be the subject of an Executive Decision.

5. Recommendation

That Full Council approves an additional capital budget of **£358,500** to be financed by a contribution from the Earmarked Leisure Strategy Reserve, to enable the construction of the visitor centre café, toilet facilities and additional car parking required at Gedling Country Park.

6. Appendices - Preferred Design Option