

COMMUNITY & SOCIAL AFFAIRS**19th JUNE 2013****REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNITY & NEIGHBOURHOODS****MELTON COUNTRY PARK UPDATE**

1.0 To update members on a number of additions and enhancements to the Park, regarding its designation, its facilities, and the activities it offers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Members note the contents of this report and support the Parks' continued growth and development

2.2 Members approve the Tree Management Policy (see 3.10)

3.0 KEY ISSUES

3.1 During the past 24 months a number of changes have occurred in Melton Country Park. Improvements have been made to the existing infrastructure, some additional features have been introduced and the ranges of available activities have increased or are set to increase.

3.2 This report provides members with an update in regards to those changes and seeks their support and endorsement for the Parks' recent and proposed ongoing development.

3.3 Community Orchard

A community orchard has been planted through a sponsorship initiative provided by 'Britvic Pepsico'. Funding was provided for trees, stakes, guards and other related materials to undertake the project. Ground Works Leicester and Friends of Melton Country Park group organised a planting weekend, where both groups together with members of the local community planted the trees. The trees that establish will become a productive community orchard quite literally 'bearing fruits' for all the hard work and labour involved.



3.4 Angling in the park – Removal of Bylaw

The process for changing the park bylaws is almost complete. The bylaw that prohibited fishing has been removed and replaced with one that gives the Council the option to permit it. That process is expected to be completed by the end of June 2013. MBC will be working closely with the Environment Agency during the coming months with a view to introducing some form of permitted and controlled fishing as an additional feature of the park. This will be the subject of a further report for member's consideration that offers a range of options to take this initiative forward.



3.5 QEII Diamond Jubilee 'Fields in Trust' Award 2012

For the Queens Diamond Jubilee in 2012 a project to identify 2,012 outdoor public sites used for leisure, recreation and healthy/sporting pursuits was undertaken. The public were invited to vote for nominated sites and those that were successful would have their sites status (i.e. as a park, as a village sports field etc) bestowed upon it in perpetuity.

Melton Country Park was nominated and has become one of those successful sites. Official confirmation of this is expected imminently.

The benefits of protection are:

- Access to funding streams, only available to successful nominees.
- Making an express and recognizable commitment to local people to safeguard land, facilities and opportunities for sport, play and outdoor recreation both now and forever
- Protecting public access to outdoor space
- Providing reassurance to potential investors regarding viability and sustainability
- Ensuring that in the case of sale proceeds that they are reapplied to replacement facilities, with a priority on new outdoor facilities
- Raising awareness of the importance of such facilities in the context of quality of life, health, the environment and amenity



3.6 'Path For All'

During 2013 the Council will be investigating the possibility of constructing a 'Path for All' and together with the Friends group will be investigating the possibility of submitting applications to known funding streams, to enable the construction of a 'Path for All'.

The 'Path for All' project is expected to see a fully DDA compliant enhanced path from the visitors centre down to the lake and stepping stones - the most popular walking route. The path will be designed to allow access for wheelchairs, pushchairs etc, and provide passing points as well as suitable interpretation for the disabled such as information in Braille and speaking signs in regards to flora and fauna, in the near vicinity of the path. The pathway will include soft divisions such that do not create

physical barriers or trip hazards to encourage people of different abilities i.e. able bodied, disabled to be able to use the path safely. It is proposed that an outline design for the path be produced to allow the concept to be accurately costed and to be fully debated with various stakeholders thereby allowing them to input their expertise, ideas and suggestions that might benefit their own particular client groups. Melton Environmental Action Partnership (MEAP) and the Friends group will be integral to the agreed final design.

3.7 Green Flag - 2013 Re-inspection

In 2012 Melton Country Park applied for and was awarded a 'Green Flag'.



Green Flags are awarded to outdoor community facilities such as parks, that meet the needs of the local community, are managed appropriately, are popular and well frequented, and that have an agreed management plan that ensures those requirements are met. An annual application is required in order that the Green Flag award is retained. During the year recommendations from the inspections are expected to have been carried out, merged into the management plan, or have been added to routine maintenance.

The Green Flag re-application for this year has been submitted. The inspection this year is in the form of a 'mystery judging day', we will not be informed of the date of inspection, although it is expected to be late June, early July. Recommendations from the previous inspection have either been actioned or are scheduled to be completed. All reports and recommendations from Green Flag inspectors will be brought to Melton Environmental Action Partnership (MEAP) for information and discussion.

3.8 Various One Day Park Events

There has been a marked increase in the number of outside groups and organisations requesting the use of the park to hold one day events such as rough terrain cycling, orienteering, and other similar activities suited to a Country Park environment. In general, this further diversification and use of the Park has been well received by the Friends Group who are establishing a practise whereby the organisers of such events are asked to attend one of the groups regular meetings prior to the proposed event to discuss their request and give assurances of adequate provisions in regards to Health and Safety, marshalling and sufficient publicity prior to the event to ensure as far is possible all park users - regular or occasional - are aware of when such events are taking place.



3.9 Dog Activity Trail

Mars Petcare will be working with their parks consultant Steve Jenkinson to install a dog activity trail in Melton Country Park for the benefit of the local community. This will be achieved through a Mars Petcare Team Building event co-ordinated by GroundWorks Nottingham. It is intended that various pieces of dog agility equipment will be installed on 3 different sites on the east side of the Park. The project has the support of the Friends Group and it is hoped that the siting will make the east side of the park more attractive to dog walkers and therefore the park will have less dog activity in the environmentally sensitive areas.



3.10 MBC Tree Management Policy

Officers do receive frequent requests to deal with trees and currently there is a tree protocol that is followed, however, to ensure that there are clear guidelines when dealing with requests members are requested to approve this short tree policy.

Works on trees will only be authorised when:

1. There are clear Health and Safety issues, whereby the tree or part of the tree in its existing condition is causing or contributing to the cause of property or persons to be damaged or endangered in anyway.
2. A clear and obvious loss of amenity to a private property is occurring (such as a significant loss of light due to inappropriate species(growth characteristics) for a particular locality or amenity loss due to the locality of the tree or trees in relation to a private property.
3. Monies for carrying out unplanned work to trees remains available from within

existing annual budgets following that required by the programmed inspections and re-inspections and any works associated with those inspections.



Consideration to not authorise works includes:

1. Loss of green infrastructure function or biodiversity value
2. The reason for carrying out works are aesthetic

Replacement of Removed Trees

Where appropriate and possible removed trees will be replaced either with like for like, with a more appropriate species, or with a tree type or species that is requested from the consensus view from co located neighbours which is suitable and within existing budgets(as point 3 above)

3.11 Traditional Maintenance Methods

During the past couple of years the Councils' Environmental Maintenance Team have been introducing traditional maintenance practises into the Park such as the laying of hedges. Such methods are known to offer the best long term solutions in terms of ensuring the health and fitness for purpose of features and structures managed in such ways. These older forms of maintenance are most sustainable and environmentally friendly, provide an educational resource, and help retain the rural countryside aspects expected of a popular country park.



3.12 Friends of Melton Country Park & Melton Environmental Action Partnership (MEAP)

The way the Park is managed, maintained and developed is key to the Parks' long term security and future. The 'Friends of Melton Country Park ' group meetings provide an excellent place for discussion and debate regarding both day to day Park issues and well as looking at more strategic matters and long term initiatives. Taking these discussions and views forward and into the Councils' domain is now being achieved in part through the addition of a 'Melton Country Park Action Plan', as a standing item on MEAP's agenda. This ensures timescales and expected outcomes are established and important matters in regards to the park are made known to a wide range of regular MEAP attendees which includes, Council Officers(including senior officers), Melton In Bloom, The Civic Society, The Heritage Group, FOMCP, LCC Highways, MOWS & TFEC

3.13 Community Garden – Melton Grow Your Own Project

A group of Melton residents contacted the Council to request the use of some unused land within the Country Park, with the intention of creating a community garden, growing vegetables for people in the community. The groups aim was to transform the land, making it usable; to be able to educate families, community groups and children, on the origin of vegetables, demonstrate ways they can be cooked and used and hopefully save money in the process.

A license was granted to the group, for a piece of unused land, and through the groups determination and fundraising initiatives the garden has developed, and will soon become a thriving community garden.

This project is for the benefit of all members of the community and the group hopes to develop links with local schools and community groups such as The Melton Learning Hub, Homestart and Mencap to assist in educating people on how to grow their own produce and live more healthily.

The community garden links into the Melton Corporate Plan. Some of the clear priorities that relate to this project are:

- Improving the well-being of vulnerable people
- Encouraging people to take an active role in their communities
- Improved quality of life for people living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.



3.14 Visitors Centre & Cafe – The Melton Learning Hub

In September 2011 The Melton Learning Hub (The Hub), an established provider of alternative learning that focuses on improving the lives of disengaged young people, by offering them a variety of accredited, practical learning activities in Melton, took on the lease of the Visitors Centre and Cafe.

Over time, The Hub has developed the Centre into a thriving educational facility, open to the whole community and benefitting all age groups. Recent activities and improvements to the centre include, adapting a room into an 'education suite' that will allow a quiet haven for children to study and have access to IT equipment. A more recent addition, designed by the Hub, is the installation of an augmented reality informational walk around the park, consisting of a range of information boards with 'Q' codes, that are located throughout



the park that give information on particular points of interest. Bikes are now available to rent from the Visitors Centre, managed by the Hub, and regular mountain bike experiences are available on request. Subject to the bylaw changes the Hub are proposing to offer angling lessons and the hiring of angling equipment.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Members are being asked to endorse the proposed tree management policy (see 3.10)

4.2 Other than those identified in the body of the report there are no other policy or corporate implications as a result of this report

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no financial implications as a direct result of this report

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS

6.1 Other than those identified in the body of the report there are no legal or powers implications as a direct result of this report

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

7.1 All projects and initiatives that are realised bear community safety in mind and either develop so as to ensure there are no community safety issues or to ensure that any that might unintentionally arise are mitigated, minimised or eliminated.

8.0 EQUALITIES

8.1 There are no direct issues within this report that have not considered equalities impacts. All park development and enhancements look to be as inclusive as is practically possible and always consider any reasonable proactive measures that can be incorporated into any project or initiative to ensure this. Such measures include offering/increasing as opportunities arise, accessibility and availability to all the Parks' visitors including those with protected characteristics.

It is not considered that the proposed Tree policy requires an EIA.

9.0 RISKS

9.1 This report is primarily an information update that provides members with a current understanding of the parks infrastructure, facilities and activities and as such there are no specific risks associated with this report.

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 There are no climate change issues or implications as a direct result of this report

11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 Melton County Park is managed by the council in close collaboration with the Parks local residents group the Friends of Melton Country Park (FOMCP). The FOMCP meet monthly to discuss park business with Council Officers and elected members attending almost every meeting. All the enhancements and developments detailed within this report were discussed and debated at length at those monthly meetings, members of the public are able to attend as observers and participate if invited to do so. Such attendances varies according to the matters under discussion, however access to where decisions are made and proposals are often first put forward does offer a degree of public involvement and open consultation.

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

The country park is in Newport ward, however this popular facility is known to attract visitors from all parts of the Borough as well as beyond and therefore will potentially affect all wards.

Contact Officer Raman Selvon

Date: 3 June 2013

Appendices : None

Background
Papers: None

Reference : X : Committees/CSA/2013-14/19-06-13/HR- Country Park