

Cabinet

14 October 2020

Report of: Councillor Leigh Higgins - Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity (and Deputy Leader)

Melton Country Park Update Report

Corporate Priority:	Protect our climate and enhance our rural, natural environment
Relevant Ward Member(s):	Cllr Margaret Glancy (Melton Newport), Cllr Simon Lumley (Melton Newport), Cllr Pam Posnett MBE (Melton Newport)
Date of consultation with Ward Member(s):	5 October 2020
Exempt Information:	No
Key Decision:	No
Subject to call-in:	No Not key decision

1 Summary

- 1.1 Following approval of the business case from Place committee in October 2018, a project team was set up to look at 6 areas of concern in relation to the country park and a capital budget of £27k was allocated from S106 monies to enable these projects. This was subsequently increased to £37k. Of this amount £33k remains.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the progress made so far and outlines the next steps for the construction of the path. Approval is sought for additional funding required to complete the project. It also provides an update on other activities related to the Country Park.

2 Recommendations

- That Cabinet:**
- 2.1 **Notes the progress made so far and the next steps.**
 - 2.2 **Approves the increase of £8,000 in the capital programme for the construction of the path in the Country Park with the project to be funded from s106 monies and grant funding.**

3 Reason for Recommendations

- 3.1 The construction of the path has been approved by the Council and has been raised as a priority by the ward members for the last two years.
- 3.2 Concluding the construction of the path will enhance connectivity and accessibility to the park for visitors and local residents. It will improve footfall and allow the benefits of the park to be shared more widely.

4 Background

- 4.1 Significant progress has been made in the last two years and following actions have been undertaken:
- A comprehensive management and maintenance plan for the Country Park has been prepared. This has been revised on annual basis. A schedule of works is being prepared to guide the repair and maintenance works required for the next financial year.
 - Environmental maintenance team has worked closely with legal colleagues to successfully resolve encroachment issues.
 - The ecology/access study has been prepared.
 - The dog-wash facility has been removed to reduce the risk of legionella.
 - Melton Learning Hub vacated the café and visitor centre and following approval from Place Committee in March 2019. The Council is currently in the process of awarding a 6 month license to Melton Space to occupy the premises.
 - The visual structural surveys and topographical surveys have been undertaken for the access path as well as the Stepping Stones bridge.
- 4.2 There has been a significant amount of work undertaken to develop appropriate plans and costings for this work. The work on the bridge has included the permission from EA to work over the waterways and issues around weir erosion as well as flooding. Earlier in the year, LCC confirmed that they will be able to help with technical project management and construction on site and were due to provide detailed quotes when COVID-19 struck. Since July, LCC has confirmed that they are unable to undertake this work anymore due to capacity issues. Due to the timescales that have elapsed whilst these issues have been dealt with and the unexpected impact of Covid-19 some of this has ultimately been abortive work

5 Main Considerations

- 5.1 With the view of bringing the project back on track, the project team have sourced contractor Jeakins Wear, through the Scape framework, to undertake feasibility costings on the access path and footstones bridge. These initial cost estimates have totalled £40k for the construction of the path.
- 5.2 There is currently £20,416, which is the remaining S106 funding, currently allocated towards the country park project. This funding has been identified as being capital so can

be used to offset a proportion of the costs for the path. It is proposed to assign this remaining S106 funding specifically towards the completion of the Path.

- 5.3 Additional S106 funding of £10,390 was drawn down on the 22 September 2020. This is expected to be received in the next couple of weeks. The S106 funding is able to be used 'Towards the costs of the Country Park pedestrian access works and the future maintenance thereof'. Due to this it is proposed that this additional funding will be added to the total pot of funding available to contribute towards the Country park path.
- 5.4 The Council received £10k through the Parks Improvement fund from MHCLG. This funding is able to be utilised for the development of the path so will be used towards ensuring its delivery.
- 5.5 **Environmental Maintenance:** In addition to the path, ward councillors have been raising issues around the maintenance and management of the park including car park areas, pot holes, fencing, gates, lighting, seating, wear and tear of the paths and concerns regarding the safety of the stepping stone bridge. Environmental maintenance team is due to prepare a revised management and maintenance plan for Country Park with identified schedule of works, cost and timescales to be met by the service budgets. If there are any additional items and related costs to be considered, that would be part of the budget setting process for the next financial year.
- 5.6 **Café and Visitor Centre:** A licence to occupy is being agreed with Melton Space for a six month period from the date of signature. It is expected that this will be until the end of April 2021. The Corporate Assets team is due to consider options for repair and redevelopment of the café and visitor centre following the new post-holder for the Senior Estate Surveyor starting from the 1st December. There is interest from another community group to occupy the space and run the visitor centre. Options for going forward will be presented to the Cabinet early next year.
- 5.7 **Footstone Bridge:** The estimated cost for the refurbishment of the footstones bridge is approximately £40k. This is subject to further inspection and survey once access to the water is arranged. The visual structural survey has not identified any imminent threat to the structure. A full structural survey will need access to the underside of the bridge from the water which requires approval from Environmental Agency. It would be prudent to undertake any works required including weir erosion at the same time to achieve efficiency of cost and time. Due to the cost of the works required to completely refurbish the bridge we are unable to fund this project through existing Country park budget allocations. It is expected that a bid will be submitted by the Regeneration Manager during the budgeting process for 2021/22 to be considered alongside other growth and capital proposals.
- 5.8 **Country Park Masterplan:** The Council has received £100,000 of grant funding from the Leicestershire and Leicestershire Economic Partnership (LLEP) through the Business Rate Pool (BRP) funding for preparing a detailed business case for the provision of a health and leisure offer in Melton. In April 2020, the Cabinet approved the use of £50,000 of Council's investment to match the LLEP funding alongside £50k of staff time. The tasks agreed as part of the work programme for this project includes exploration of other sites such as the Country Park for alternative modes of leisure offer such as outdoor activities. A sum of £30k has been identified for preparing a feasibility study/ initial masterplan to provide more opportunity for outdoor leisure pursuits such as walking, running and cycling routes, fishing, outdoor gym, play areas, sports pitches etc to enhance physical and mental health and wellbeing of Melton's residents. The detailed scope of activities will be defined in consultation with stakeholders and ward councillors. This will provide an

opportunity to consider the comprehensive enhancement of the country park and make it a destination for the people who want to enjoy natural environment and outdoor pursuits.

6 Options Considered

- 6.1 Not approving the additional budget is not considered as an appropriate option as this project has already been approved and is deliverable within this financial year. There is a good level of support and expectation from the stakeholders, ward councillors and residents for this project to materialise.
- 6.2 Undertaking the works for Stepping Stone bridge at the same time is not considered to be appropriate as this will require an additional sum of approximately £40,000 which cannot be met from the current budget. It is considered prudent to consider the request from growth in budget as part of the budget setting process for the next financial year so the funding allocation can be considered alongside other bids for funding. The contractor procured for the works of the path will be able to undertake the works for the bridge.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 Ward Councillor Consultation: There has been ongoing dialogue with ward Councillors in regards to several projects or improvement works that need to be undertaken within the Country Park. The access path from the Persimmon estate has regularly been highlighted as being a key project that the ward members would like resolving.
- 7.2 Over the last 2 years the Regeneration team has liaised with 2 stakeholder groups (Friends of the Country Park and the Persimmon Estate residents group) in regards to this project. Both groups have been kept informed on progress made with the projects on the Country Park. The Access path has been highlighted a priority for completion by both groups and both groups will be informed of any progress in regards to this project

8 Next Steps – Implementation and Communication

- 8.1 Next steps are:
 - i) Secure permission from persimmon to undertake works on their land
 - ii) Conclude and sign the contract with the contractor
 - iii) Mobilisation and works on site
- 8.2 In parallel:
 - i) Consider additional budget request for the Stepping stone bridge works
 - ii) Procure and appoint consultants for the masterplan works
 - iii) Explore options for the future of the visitor centre, café and toilets
 - iv) Prepare a schedule of works for ongoing repair and maintenance works

9 Financial Implications

9.1 Financial implications have been outlined in the content of this report. In short the financial implications are as follows:

- i) Of the £37k originally allocated in the capital programme, £33k remains unspent which is not sufficient to meet the cost of the path.
- ii) A sum of £8,000 from S106 contribution to be committed to enabling the construction of the path to increase the current allocation in the capital programme.
- iii) Approximately £40,000 will be requested through a growth / capital bid for the footstones bridge as part of the 2021/22 budget setting process.
- iv) The cost of the Masterplan will be financed through the funding received from the Business Rates Pool for the development of a Health and Leisure Offer.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Director for Corporate Services

10 Legal and Governance Implications

- 10.1 Legal support will be required to secure permission from Persimmon to access their land to enable to Country path to link up to the path on the Persimmon Development.
- 10.2 A decision notice will be developed once the Council have agreed to enter into a delivery agreement with the contractor for the works.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Louise Arnold, Snr Solicitor (05.10.2020)

11 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

- 11.1 The path will be designed to meet accessibility criteria.

12 Community Safety Implications

- 12.1 Health and safety guidance will be adhered to during the development of the path and any future works to the footstones bridge (Subject to growth bid being successful)

13 Environmental and Climate Change Implications

- 13.1 The path will improve access to natural environment for the visitors and residents with positive impact on physical and mental health and well-being.

14 Other Implications (where significant)

- 14.1 n/a

15 Risk & Mitigation

Risk No	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk
1	Increase in Cost and timescales: Adverse weather events may mean there are some delays but this is unlikely to have any significant impact.	Low	Marginal	Low Risk
2	Refusal of access by landowners	Low	Critical	Medium Risk

		Impact / Consequences			
		Negligible	Marginal	Critical	Catastrophic
Likelihood	Score/ definition	1	2	3	4
	6 Very High				
	5 High				
	4 Significant				
	3 Low		1	2	
	2 Very Low				
	1 Almost impossible				

Risk No	Mitigation
1	This has been procured via a framework. Extensive assessment of the site has been undertaken by the contractor to develop the costs for the path. The Contractor has ensured work will take 4 weeks to undertaken
2	Persimmon have historically agreed to access and it is very much in their interest to enable the development to proceed. Regen and Legal are liaising to obtain this license for access and it is expected this will take around one month to secure.

16 Background Papers

16.1 N/A

17 Appendices

17.1 Appendix 1 - Access Path Route Map

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