

Cabinet
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BROADLAND COUNTRY PARK: VISITOR FACILITY CONCEPT AND DESIGN

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Portfolio: Economic Growth

Wards Affected: All

Purpose of the Report:

This report seeks approval to develop existing concept designs for a visitor kiosk and supporting facilities at Broadland Country Park. Furthering plans to a technical design phase will provide a detailed costed proposal, procurement strategy and supplementary planning application to enable delivery at the Country Park.

Recommendations:

Cabinet to:

- Endorse the existing concept design for a visitor kiosk at Broadland Country Park
- Agree to progress the existing plans at Broadland Country Park to technical design stage, including funding options, detailed costed designs, a procurement strategy and supplementary planning application.

1. Background

- 1.1 In January 2020, Broadland District Council, purchased a 57 hectare area of woodland, heathland, and fenland in the parish of Felthorpe. Alongside an additional 19 hectares area of land leased by Broadland District Council, the overall site forms Broadland Country Park, referred to from heron in as BCP.
- 1.2 BCP was officially named and opened to the public in April 2021.
- 1.3 The site was acquired as part of the Council's requirement to deliver 'Sustainable Alternative Natural Greenspaces', or SANGS, to mitigate against the impacts of recreational disturbance on internationally designated Natura 2000 sites. BCP, as a large-scale country park offer, was considered as being able to provide an alternative visitor destination.
- 1.4 The Council, however, viewed BCP as going beyond simply fulfilling statutory requirements, and recognised the unique opportunity to develop the natural resources on site to create a space that could foster local communities, grow a sense of place, support wellbeing and outdoor education as well as enhancing and promoting biodiversity.
- 1.5 Management objectives were endorsed by Cabinet alongside the decision to purchase the site. These reflect the additional on-site opportunities as outlined within 1.4 of this report and have set a precedence for all subsequent activities occurring on site. These objectives are:
 - Objective 1: Provide facilities that meet the needs of a range of different user groups.
 - Objective 2: Encourage wider public awareness and use of BCP.
 - Objective 3: Improve access to and from BCP.
 - Objective 4: Enhance biodiversity.
 - Objective 5: Develop long-term financial sustainability across BCP.
- 1.6 Alongside the Cabinet decision to purchase BCP, Section 106 monies, allocated from nearby developments in Horsford, were ringfenced to support the delivery of key visitor infrastructure on the site. This included a surfaced circular walk, improved parking provision, play facilities, new walking routes, way-marking, interpretation, promotion, and marketing of the site. In addition to ringfenced S106 monies, funding via the Business Rates Pool was secured to compliment the onsite works.
- 1.7 To date, the following activities have occurred at BCP:
 - A new network of informal trails
 - Visitor surveys and formal interviews with over 40 key stakeholders
 - Establishment of onsite conservation grazing
 - Provision of picnic benches
 - Way-marking and high-quality orientation and trail map
 - A series of children's activities and public events
 - Bike racks installed in the main car park.
 - 50,363 recorded visits to the park in 2022

- Regular and active on-site volunteers - in 2021, volunteers contributed 2,288 hours to the management of BCP.
- Commissioned Royal Institute British Architects (RIBA) stage 2 'concept designs' for onsite visitor kiosk, Appendix 1.

1.8 The range of activities as described above has grown the visitor appeal of BCP and has embedded the onsite management principles, as well as forming a strong basis to deliver alternative recreational provision as a SANG.

1.9 Since the BCP project began, additional facilities, primarily a visitor kiosk with toilets, and catering facilities, have been considered. These sit outside the extent of the ringfenced funds referred to in 1.6 of this report and, although considered within visitor surveys and stakeholder discussions, no formal decision has yet been made to progress plans for this type of facility beyond the concept design stage which is appended to this report.

2. Current position

2.1. Activities, as outlined within 1.6 of this report, have already delivered a significant range of facilities on site. In addition to this, a package of works is planned over the coming months that will further BCP's management objectives. These are outlined below:

Item	Management objective	Timeline	Funding source	Approx. cost
Car park resurfacing and extension	Objective 3: Improve access to and from the site	February 2024	S106 land west of Holt Road, Horsford (20170409)	£10,000
Portaloos toilet trial Provide 1 x accessible with baby change and 2 x standard portaloos for a 6-month trial.	Objective 1: Provide facilities that meet the needs of a range of different user groups	October 2023	S106 land west of Holt Road, Horsford (20170409)	£2,100
Play and den building area	Objective 1: Provide facilities that meet the needs of a range of different user groups	January 2024	S106 land west of Holt Road, Horsford (20170409)	£3,000
Improved on site waymarking and boundary signage	Objective 1: Provide facilities that meet the needs of a range of different user groups. Objective 2: Encourage wider public awareness and use of the site.	Dec 2023.	S106 land west of Holt Road, Horsford (20170409)	£900
Secure storage facilities for staff and volunteers.	Objective 1: Provide facilities that meet	Nov 2023	S106 land west of Holt Road,	Container

Purchase solar power generator to charge electric power tools and provide lighting.	the needs of a range of different user groups. Objective 5: Develop long-term financial sustainability across the site		Horsford (20170409)	£4,702 Solar generator: £958
			Total cost (est):	£19,640

- 2.2. In addition to these on site works, consultants have been engaged with to carry out visitor surveys and to develop concept design work for a visitor kiosk at BCP through to RIBA stage 2. The plans are attached to the report in Appendix one.
- 2.3. The recent surveys indicated a desire to see additional visitor facilities at BCP. When users of other country park sites in Norfolk were asked, 92% of participants supported the need for the introduction of toilets at BCP. In addition to this, 82% felt that a low-key refreshment offer was essential or desirable on site.
- 2.4. For those surveyed who already visit BCP, including volunteers, the priorities were improved interpretation regarding on site conservation work, additional waymarking and clearer information at entrance points.
- 2.5. BCP provides an excellent opportunity to deliver a key visitor destination which will benefit residents of, and visitors to, Broadland and the Greater Norwich area. BCP has an opportunity to become an exemplar site for volunteer and community lead conservation as well as being ideally located to promote active lifestyles, wellbeing, and community engagement events. All of this can be achieved whilst enabling a mitigation strategy that alleviates the impact of growth on, and therefore safeguards for generations to come, internationally important designated sites.
- 2.6. Whilst substantial work has begun to achieve these objectives, the absence of additional visitor facilities, primarily toilets and a low-key catering option, limits the existing on-site offer and appeal of BCP. As outlined in 2.3, this is particularly apparent when it comes attracting those who live beyond the immediate local area, a catchment which is significant - the population 30 mins drive of BCP is 244,028 and a 60 min drive is 654,423.
- 2.7. In addition to this, should BCP wish to achieve the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities 'Green Flag' standard for an official Country Park permanent toilet facilities will need to be provided on site.
- 2.8. The concept designs for an onsite visitor kiosk have therefore embedded catering space and toilets within the design work. The plans are sensitive to the nature and setting of BCP and cognisant throughout of environmental impact, design, materials, and the Council's own net-zero 2030 ambitions.
- 2.9. To deliver a visitor kiosk to the scale and standard as proposed in Appendix 1 additional funds, beyond those currently ring-fenced (as described in 1.6 of this report), would be required.

- 2.10. Indicative costings suggest this additional sum is approximately £300,000. This funding could be achieved through a range of options including one or more of the following:
- Existing S106 monies - allocated within Broadland for the provision of Green Infrastructure and SANGS.
 - The Greater Norwich Infrastructure Fund - subject to a successful bid
 - The Council's Environmental Project Reserve - delegated spends of up to £100,000 to the Assistant Director for Economic Growth, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Excellence.
- 2.11. It is anticipated that the visitor kiosk facility would be leased to a third-party supplier and would therefore generate a rental income for BCP. Indicative costings suggest this figure to be in the region of £6,500 – £9,000 per annum.

3. Proposed action

- 3.1. This report proposes that Cabinet approve progressing the existing RIBA stage 2 'concept design' plans for a visitor kiosk at BCP to RIBA stage 5, 'technical design phase.
- 3.2. This will require developing detailed funding options, costed designs, a procurement strategy, and a supplementary planning application. The necessary steps for RIBA stage 5 are advised upon within the appended report.

4. Other options

- 4.1. Members could choose not to progress the existing plans for a visitor kiosk at BCP to technical design stage and resolve to only carry out the planned works within existing funds, as outlined within 1.6 of the report. This however misses the opportunity to maximise BCP as an officially designated Green Flag country park, key visitor destination and alternative to the designated Natura 2000 sites.
- 4.2. A lack of visitor facilities both limits the future scalability of BCP and restricts the council's ability to fully deliver against its own management objectives, which commit to 'providing facilities on site which meet the needs of a wide range of user groups' and 'encourage wider public awareness and use of the site'.

5. Issues and risks

- 5.1. **Resource implications** - There will be costs associated with the technical design works, professional fees and documentation necessary to submit a planning application for a visitor kiosk. The existing Business Rates Pool fund allocates approximately £65,000 to 'prepare and submit a planning application' and therefore this could be drawn down to support the activities described within this report.
- 5.2. **Legal Implications** – As described within 1.6 of this report, there is a legal obligation under the Habitat Regulations to mitigate against the impacts of recreational disturbance on internationally designated Natura 2000 sites.
- 5.3. **Equality Implications** – N/A

- 5.4. **Environmental Impact** – The initial concept designs (as outlined within Appendix 1) embed strong and clear sustainability principles throughout – these have been guided by the council’s own net-zero 2030 target. Therefore, the visitor kiosk would seek to minimise embedded carbon, and emissions, both within the design and throughout the operational lifetime of the build and would therefore have a negligible impact on the Council’s carbon footprint.
- 5.5. **Crime and Disorder** – There is a park ranger at the BCP three days a week. Since the introduction of this post anti-social behaviour has considerably reduced. The presence of the ranger naturally deters anti-social behaviour and will ensure that any additional facilities will be regularly inspected.
- 5.6. **Reputational Risk** – As outlined within 4.2 of this report, a lack of visitor facilities both limits the future scalability of BCP and restricts the Council’s ability to fully deliver against its own management objectives, which commit to ‘providing facilities on site which meet the needs of a wide range of user groups’ and ‘encourage wider public awareness and use of the site’.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. Existing work has grown the visitor appeal of BCP and has begun to embed the Council's onsite management principles, as well as forming a strong basis to deliver alternative recreational provision as a SANG. However, the absence of additional visitor facilities, primarily toilets and a low-key catering option, limits the current on-site offer and limits the future scalability of BCP.
- 6.2. Progressing the existing RIBA stage 2 ‘concept design’ plans for a visitor kiosk to RIBA stage 5, ‘technical design phase’ will provide detailed funding options, costed designs, a procurement strategy, and a supplementary planning application. This in turn will support the delivery of the Council’s own management objectives and will grow the opportunity for BCP to become an exemplar visitor destination, showcasing both excellent standards in conservation management, whilst promoting a community-focused, family-friendly facility which will benefit residents of, and visitors to, Broadland and the Greater Norwich area.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1. Cabinet to:
 - 7.1.1. Endorse the existing concept design for a visitor kiosk at Broadland Country Park
 - 7.1.2. Agree to progress the existing plans at Broadland Country Park to technical design stage, including funding options, detailed costed designs, a procurement strategy and supplementary planning application.