

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND SPORT

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	23 SEPTEMBER 2013	AGENDA ITEM:	11
TITLE:	THAMES PARKS CONSULTATION - REVIEW		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLORS LOVELOCK, PAGE & GITTINGS	PORTFOLIO	CORPORATE SERVICES, STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT CULTURE, SPORT & CONSUMER SERVICES
SERVICE:	PARKS AND OPEN SPACES	WARDS:	CAVERSHAM
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report identifies the outcome of the recent consultation undertaken to establish the views of the general public and associated interest groups in respect of leisure development proposals relating to the Thames Parks.
- 1.2 To seek approval to further progress proposals as officer recommendations set out within section 5 of the report.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Committee consider the content of the report.
- 2.2 That the proposals set out in section 5 of the report be approved.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council is required to improve its financial position by circa £44m over the next three financial years. Increasing income through the implementation of new income initiatives has been identified as one of a number of key factors to achieving this objective.
- 3.2 Earlier this year Councillors requested a consultation in respect of the leisure service new income proposals be undertaken. The proposals identified the development of residential moorings and premium leisure facilities within the Thames Parks at Hills Meadow & Christchurch Meadows (as below).

- 3.2.1 **Hills Meadow:** Proposal to provide 10 residential moorings on a 150 metre stretch of the river bank. The mooring will be within an existing waterway between Hills Meadow and View Island (The Mill Stream), which is viewed favourably by the Environment Agency who have a preference for 'off-channel moorings'. Each mooring to have a purpose built jetty, equipped with access to water & electricity, providing access to the river bank in all river conditions. There will be a requirement to dredge the channel to provide adequate draught for mooring boats. The moorings will be managed by the Parks Service with formal lease arrangements in place with boat owners.
- 3.2.2 **Christchurch Meadows:** To seek external partner investment to develop premium additional 'pay to participate' leisure activities at Christchurch Meadows, providing greater variety and creating a regional visitor attraction at the heart of the Thames Parks. Proposals include: High Ropes adventure course, Adventure Golf, Boat Hire/Waterside activity & a café. Existing Council managed public leisure facilities will remain free of charge to general public access.

4. CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

- 4.1 **METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** The consultation period ran from the 3rd June 2013 to 30th June 2013 and was delivered through a number of initiatives aimed at ensuring maximum publicity, affording significant opportunity for the general public and local interest groups to respond. Methods used were as follows;
- 4.1.1 **Press release** - A press release was organised ahead of the consultation period to raise public awareness.
- 4.1.2 **Posters placed prominently on site** - Posters were placed at each site advising of the consultation and methods of contact; including details of public drop in sessions.
- 4.1.3 **Online** - Full details of proposals and feedback form were made available for completion on the Council's Website.
- 4.1.4 **Mail Out** - The consultation leaflet (appendix A) was mailed to a total of two thousand one hundred (2100) residential and business properties neighbouring the two sites. In addition identified resident and local interest groups; CADRA, Globe, Sports Groups, Event hirers & Swan Life Line were directly written to.
- 4.1.5 **Email to additional interested parties** - Those that had expressed an interest in leisure provision through response to previous RBC consultation and resident surveys, were sent an email drawing their attention to proposals and inviting their participation in the consultation exercise.
- 4.1.6 **Presentation to Caversham Globe** - A presentation was delivered to members of Caversham Globe on the evening of the 25th June, following their AGM. The meeting had been extended to include additional members of the public and provided opportunity after the presentation for Q&A.
- 4.1.7 **Presentation to Youth Cabinet** - A presentation was delivered to members of Youth Cabinet on the evening of the 18th June, with subsequent Q&A session.

4.1.8 **Drop in discussion sessions** - Were delivered by parks officers over the weekend of 15th & 16th June at Christchurch Meadows. Each session ran from 12:00 noon to 16:00 pm. During this time presentations were delivered to small groups of the general public, affording opportunity for discussion and Q&A.

4.2 **RESULTS OF CONSULTATION** - During the consultation period a total of 443 responses were received. Feedback was sought in the following format:

Christchurch Meadows Leisure Development:

- I support the proposal to use the pavilion to provide a cafe: Y/N
- I support the proposal to provide a greater variety of high quality leisure facilities: Y/N
- I support the proposal to provide improved boat hire facilities: Y/N
- With separate provision for additional comment.

Hills Meadow Residential Mooring:

- I support the proposal to provide residential moorings: Y/N
- With separate provision for additional comment.

4.3 **Percentage approval ratings by category:** The below table illustrates the number of responses received by category and their approval rating reflected as a percentage.

Approval rating		443		Percentage	
Category:	No. of responses	Y	N	In Favour	Against
Café	429	364	65	85%	15%
Leisure Development	430	303	127	70%	30%
Boat Hire	429	340	89	79%	21%
Residential Moorings	424	266	158	63%	37%

4.4 **Additional Comment:** All additional comments received in relation to the proposals consulted upon can be found within appendix B.

4.5 In general those that approved of proposals were found to be less likely to have made additional comment, than those that disapproved on the basis of a concern. This should be kept in mind when reviewing the comments found within appendix B, which may otherwise be perceived as extensively negative.

4.6 **Concerns Raised:** The majority of concerns expressed fell into broad categories as follows:

- Impact on Wildlife.
- Impact to Natural Environment (including flood issues).
- Loss of Open Space.
- Additional visitor numbers & resulting traffic.

4.7 The above perceived issues were anticipated by officers and those that attended either the presentations or drop in sessions were provided with information on how these issues would be appropriately addressed. It is essential that should the projects progress (section 5), that they do so with a clear strategy in respect of the above points.

- 4.8 It should be noted that Caversham Globe are not in favour of the proposals (their formal response is attached as appendix B1).
- 4.9 **Consultation Audience:** The consultation exercise aimed specifically to engage with those individuals most likely to be affected by the implementation of proposals or likely to have strong views in respect of their personal interests. It would normally be expected to receive a higher proportion of responses expressing concern than if engaging with a wider audience, including likely new service users.

A conscious decision was made to avoid overselling the proposals and to present them in an impartial manner, highlighting perceived benefits as well as being clear in relation to the impact proposals would have in respect of; natural environment, increased visitor numbers, car parking etc. The aim was to allow individuals to develop an informed opinion from their personal perspective.

Within the consultation it would have been possible to include likely user groups and individuals to establish demand. It was in the first instance felt appropriate to ensure that local residents, Globe and other interest groups were engaged to establish their views.

5. PROPOSAL:

- 5.1 **Publish Consultation results:** It is intended as a first action to publish the outcome of the public consultation exercise on the Council's Website. It is proposed that this is in summary format and not featuring individual comments/views. It is also proposed to include with the results, information relating to the further development of the projects which will be updated as progress is made.
- 5.2 The feedback received from members of the public through the consultation exercise is felt to be sufficiently positive to permit further work to be undertaken to develop proposals for future implementation/delivery.
- 5.3 It is intended to ensure that groups such as Caversham Globe are able to see that their views have been taken in to account and that these have assisted in shaping the finer detail of proposals, moving forward. Caversham Globe have requested that should proposals be taken forward, that they are involved in detailed consultation and pre-planning actions. It is intended to ensure that as far as practicable this request is accommodated through the preplanning consultation process.
- 5.4 **Further Action:** In response to the feedback received and the Council's priorities, it is proposed that officers should now progress proposals as follows:
- 5.5 **Christchurch Meadows Leisure Development:** This will require the following steps:
1. Undertake further consultation with specialist leisure providers / operators (Highropes, Waterside Activity, Adventure Golf and similar) to ensure specifications for any facilities provide the best leisure opportunities for park users whilst complementing the landscape and current use of the site.

2. To subsequently produce an outline landscape plan and specification for consideration and approval.
 3. It is recommended that the Director and Lead Member for Culture and Sport (jointly) be granted authority to approve the finalised plans prior to commencement of the marketing exercise.
 4. Following completion of the marketing exercise a report will be presented to Policy Committee for decision regarding how best to proceed.
 5. Further public consultation will be undertaken as part of the required formal planning application/s process.
- 5.6 **Hills Meadow Mooring:** The consultation identified clear support for the introduction of residential mooring in Reading.

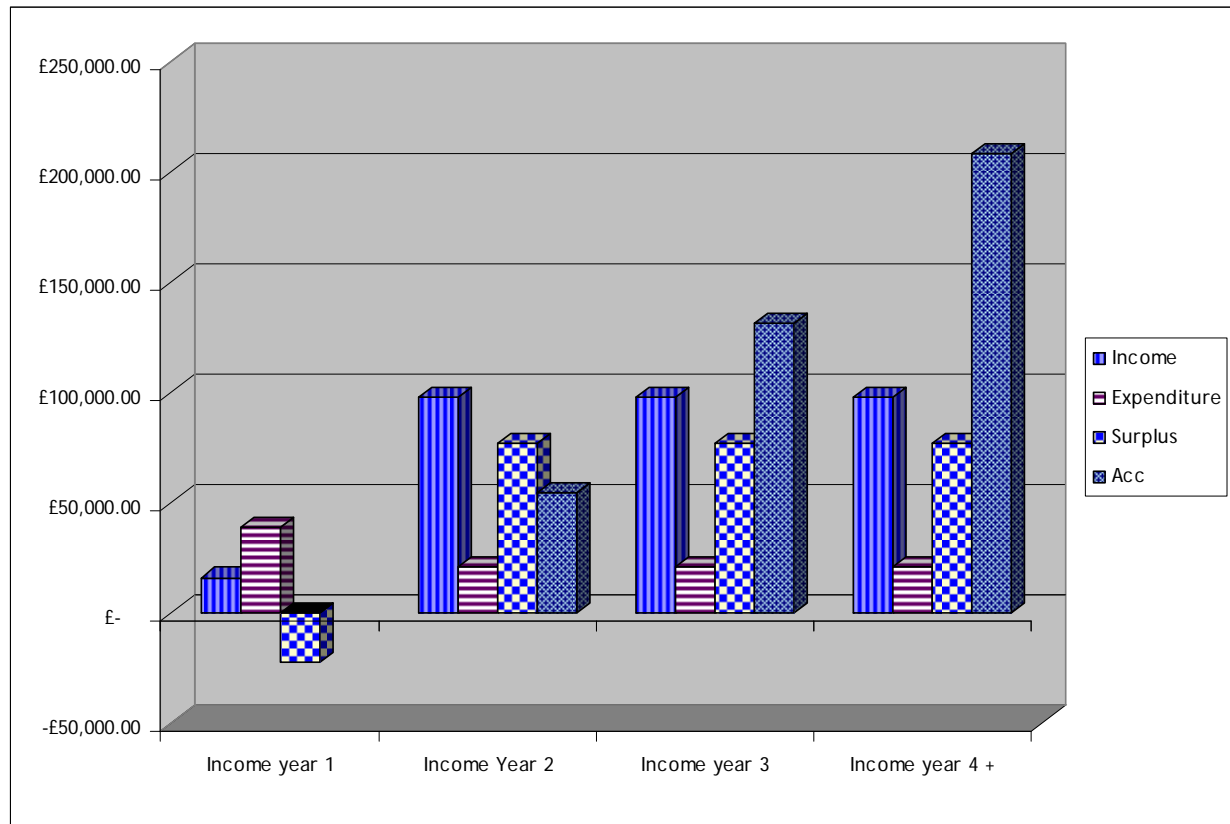
Some concern was however identified regarding how the natural environment including wildlife would be affected by development in the proposed location and steps the Council would take to ensure this issue is adequately planned for and addressed.

It is therefore proposed to:

1. Undertake further work to identify suitable sites for residential mooring across Reading along with an assessment of the relative merits and drawbacks of these locations.
2. Present to members the findings of this work for further consideration and recommendation regarding next steps.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1 The graph below illustrates the expenditure and income that it is anticipated could be generated by the implementation of the two schemes over the next four financial years. This will be clarified during the progression of the projects as recommended in section 5:



- 6.2 Implementation of the two above projects will generate approximately £208k of new income over the four subsequent financial years, as illustrated by the below table. This will be clarified during the progression of the project as recommended in section 5.

	Income year 1	Income Year 2	Income year 3	Income year 4 +
Income	£ 16,000.00	£ 98,000.00	£ 98,000.00	£ 98,000.00
Expenditure	£ 38,568.44	£ 21,006.88	£ 21,006.88	£ 21,006.88
Surplus	-£ 22,568.44	£ 76,993.13	£ 76,993.13	£ 76,993.13
Acc		£ 54,424.69	£ 131,417.81	£ 208,410.94

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Planning consent will be required to deliver the above projects.
- 7.2 Procurement guidelines as required by Central & local government policy will need to be followed.
- 7.3 There is a legal requirement to advertise the development of open space in the local press.

8. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

8.1 As body of report.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

9.1 The implementation of new income initiatives forms part of the annual budget setting process within the context of maintaining the financial health of the Council.

9.2 The projects identified deliver key aims and objectives of the Thames Parks Plan.