

From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services

Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 15 June 2017

Subject: Public Consultation on the draft Country Parks Strategy

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

**Future Pathway of Paper: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee
30th November 2017**

Electoral Division: County-wide

Summary: Kent County Council owns and manages a portfolio of country parks and countryside sites. These parks offer some of the highest quality habitats and landscapes that Kent has to offer, and in 2016 played host to approximately 1.6 million visits from dog-walkers, families, joggers and many others.

This paper sets the context for the accompanying draft 2017-2021 Country Parks Strategy and asks Members of the Committee for their comments ahead of a planned public consultation in the summer of 2017.

Recommendation(s):

- 1) The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and make recommendations to the Cabinet Member on the contents of the draft 2017-2021 Country Parks Strategy (attached)
- 2) The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse the proposed consultation process contained within section 3 of this report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The KCC Country Parks service owns and manages a portfolio of country parks and countryside sites across the county.
- 1.2 During the period of the last strategy (2014-17) the service has met a series of challenging financial targets.
- 1.3 In 2016/17 the service generated over £1.2 million income through cafes, car parking, venue hire and school visits. This equates to 74% of the Country Parks' direct costs, up from 40% in 2008-09, following a programme of continuous improvement and a focus on sustainability.

- 1.3 Despite these budget pressures, the Country Parks team has maintained exceptional customer satisfaction ratings - an average 9.25 out of 10 for overall satisfaction in 2016 - and have ensured that the parks are managed to a high industry standard. This is evidenced by the Green Flag awards that seven of the parks achieve annually.
- 1.4 It is within this context that the Country Parks Strategy provides the framework for the management of these important assets. The draft 2017-21 strategy builds on the vision and objectives of the previous strategy, but critically develops further the links to health outcomes that the Country Parks offer supports; and it also includes a commitment to further improve our understanding around our customers and potential customers.
- 1.5 The draft strategy has been developed with an Informal Members' Board. The Board was chaired by the previous Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport Cllr Pearman, and also included Cllr Chittenden, Cllr Dean and Cllr Whybrow.

2.0 The draft Country Parks Strategy

- 2.1 The draft 2017-21 Country Parks Strategy is attached to this report. Below is a brief overview of the draft strategy.
- 2.2 The vision is *"to provide an inspirational and sustainable countryside experience for Kent's residents and visitors."* It is supported by three strategic aims:
- i. Provide a network of high quality and biodiverse country parks
 - ii. Increase visitor numbers to the country parks, particularly at off peak times and among under-represented groups
 - iii. Ensure the service is as financially self-sustaining as possible.
- 2.3 These aims will be delivered through ten objectives:
- i. Ensure high quality parks are provided, maintained and improved and that, where possible, the quality of our standards of management are independently tested and verified
 - ii. Ensure that the biodiversity, heritage and landscape values of the sites are maintained or enhanced
 - iii. Support Kent's Environment Strategy
 - iv. Work with nurseries, schools, colleges and adult education providers to provide opportunities to increase awareness, enjoyment and engagement with the environment
 - v. Work with Public Health, Clinical Commissioning Groups, and NHS providers to ensure the parks maximise their potential to improve health, well-being and quality of life
 - vi. Ensure that the parks are enjoyed by all sectors of the community, regardless of age, health, race, religion, disability or gender
 - vii. Increase visitor numbers outside of peak times

- viii. Provide high quality volunteering opportunities
- ix. Increase the percentage of the service's budget generated from income generation activities
- x. Ensure the portfolio of country parks and countryside sites is managed to maximise the delivery of our strategic aims.

2.4 The strategy includes provision for the service to explore opportunities around alternative management arrangements for some of the service's smaller sites. Such opportunities would only be considered with appropriate consultation and safeguards, and would be subject to Cabinet Member decision.

2.5 A precis of the service's annual 2017/18 business plan and an equalities impact assessment of the draft strategy are attached to this report, and will be available to the public as part of the proposed consultation.

3.0 Proposed consultation process

3.1 Following consideration by Members of this Committee, the next stage of the development of the strategy is to consult with stakeholders, partners and the public.

3.2 It is proposed that this consultation will include the following elements

- i. An online survey;
- ii. Discussion at or by the individual parks' Liaison Groups; and
- iii. Printed material at all parks and countryside sites highlighting the draft strategy consultation and ways to respond
- iv. Printed materials at all libraries and Gateways highlighting the draft strategy consultation and ways to respond

3.3 The consultation is planned for a 10 week period across July, August and September 2017, to ensure that visitors to the parks, both in and outside of the school holiday period, have an opportunity to respond.

3.4 The consultation will focus around the following substantive questions;

- i. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the vision? (Scaled response 1-10)
- ii. Would you like to make a comment about the proposed vision (Open response)
- iii. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the three strategic aims? (Scaled response 1-10)
- iv. Would you like to make a comment about the proposed strategic aims (Open response)
- v. To what extent do you agree or disagree with with the ten objectives? (Scaled response 1-10)
- vi. Would you like to make a comment about the proposed objectives (Open response)

- vii. Do you have any other suggestions about how we could improve the parks? (Open response)

3.5 We will also ask for basic demographic data about the respondents, as well as whether or not they are regular park users and if so which is their regular park. This will enable us to analyse the responses by users and non-users, and by park where appropriate.

4. Policy Framework

4.1 As well as being intrinsically important sites for biodiversity and heritage, the parks make a significant contribution to wider outcomes important to Kent County Council. For example, the parks contribute to a wide range of KCC Strategic and Supporting Outcomes, including;

Children and young people in Kent get the best start in life

- Kent's communities are resilient and provide strong and safe environments to successfully raise children and young people
- Children and young people have better physical and mental health

Communities benefit from economic growth by being in-work, healthy and enjoying a good quality of life

- Physical and mental health is improved by supporting people to take more responsibility for their own health and wellbeing
- Kent residents enjoy a good quality of life, and more people benefit from greater social, cultural and sporting opportunities
- Kent's physical and natural environment is protected, enhanced and enjoyed by residents and visitors

Older and vulnerable residents are safe and supported with choices to live independently

- People with mental health issues and dementia are assessed and treated earlier and are supported to live well
- Older and vulnerable residents feel socially included

4.2 In addition, the work contributes to the outcomes identified in the Kent Health and Wellbeing Strategy including;

- Every child has the best start in life
- Effective prevention of ill health by people taking greater responsibility for their health and wellbeing
- The quality of life for people with long term conditions is enhanced and they have access to good quality care and support
- People with mental health issues are supported to live well
- People with dementia are assessed and treated earlier and supported to live well

4.3 Finally, the Strategy also fundamentally contributes to the Kent Environment Strategy;

- Bridge gaps in understanding our risks and opportunities to identify actions
- Build resources, capabilities and changed behaviour
- Conserve and enhance the quality and supply of Kent's natural resources and assets

- Ensure sustainable access and connectivity for businesses and communities

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The service is committed to being as financially self-sustaining as possible, and the service will continue to be managed in accordance with Directorate spending plans.

6. Recommendation(s)

- 1) The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and make recommendations to the Cabinet Member on the contents of the draft Country Parks Strategy (attached)
- 2) The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse the proposed consultation process contained within section 3 of this report

7. Background Documents

- 7.1 The following documents are attached to this paper;

- a. The draft 2017-2021 County Parks Strategy
- b. Highlights from the 2017/18 Country Parks Business Plan - <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD5164&ID=5164&RPID=15249015>
- c. An Equality Impact Assessment of the draft Country Parks Strategy - <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD5163&ID=5163&RPID=15249019>

8. Contact details

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