

From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services
Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director of Growth Environment and Transport

To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 31 January 2018

Decision No: 18/00002

Subject: Country Parks Strategy 2017-21 consultation report

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: For Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: Countywide

Summary:

This report provides an update on the recent consultation that was undertaken on the proposed Strategy for Kent Country Parks 2017 – 2021. It provides an overview of the findings, as well as the proposed changes to implementation of the Strategy.

Recommendation(s): The Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to receive a short presentation on the consultation’s findings, and to consider and endorse, or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services on the proposed decision to adopt and deliver against The Country Parks Strategy 2017 – 2021 as shown at Appendix A.

1. Introduction

1.1 Kent Country Parks Service manages nine country parks across the county. A further five countryside sites are managed by Infrastructure.

1.2 In summary the Service:

- holds seven Green Flags
- achieves a customer rating of 9.25/10
- is 77% cost neutral
- benefits from 9, 800 volunteer hours per year
- receives 1.6 million annual visitors
- delivers Forest Schools and nature-themed Birthday Parties to 5, 800 children per annum
- hosts 300 Park Runners every weekend
- costs 30p per resident per annum
- and incorporates over 30km of accessible routes

1.3 The current strategy ran from 2014 – 2017 and as such a new strategy was drafted during 2016/17, supported by an Informal Members' Group.

1.4 The 2017 – 2021 Strategy was consulted upon from 10th July 2017 to 18th September 2017, following Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee's comments in June 2017.

2. The Consultation Results

2.1 There were 247 respondents, of whom 199 were Kent residents who visit KCC's country parks, and 11 were Kent residents who do not currently visit KCC's country parks. The rest were largely stakeholders with an interest in our sites.

2.2 57% of the respondents 'strongly agreed' with the proposed strategy's vision, with a further 33% of all respondents 'agreeing' resulting in 90% of all respondents indicating they agreed or strongly agreed that the Service should "provide an inspirational and sustainable countryside experience for Kent's residents and visitors."

2.3 The proposed strategy put forward three Strategic Aims

1. Provide a network of high quality and biodiverse country parks
2. Increase visitors to the country parks particularly at off peak times and among under represented groups
3. Ensure the service is as self-sustaining as possible

2.4 There was strong agreement for Aim 1, and agreement for Aims 2 and 3.

2.5 It is proposed that the Strategy remains unchanged from the version consulted upon, but a number of delivery mechanisms for delivery of the Strategy will be strengthened or adapted in light of consultation feedback, including

- Greater emphasis on the biodiversity management of the sites will feature in on-site and the Service Communications Plan from 2018/19 onwards. Four of the nine county parks' management plans are already published in full on the KCC website, but we will additionally alert local stakeholders including the local parish council(s) when all nine are annually updated
- Equality Impact Assessments of each of the country parks' overall products and offer will be completed and made publically available by 31st March 2018. These will then trigger an associated action plan (Stage 3 of an EqIA) to better attract under represented groups, and to identify funding mechanisms and targeted communication channels.
- A link to the Kent Environment Strategy shall be added to the online version of the Country Parks Strategy 2017 – 2021. Additionally, the feedback from respondents asking what the Kent Environment Strategy is, has been passed on to be fed into the developing 'KES' communications plan.

2.6 The full report of the consultation is included at Appendix 2

3. Legal Implications

3.1 None

4. Equalities Implications

4.1 The EqIA on the proposed Strategy determined that there is no indication that the Strategy will have an adverse equality impact on any of the protected characteristics. The subsequent consultation responses do not change that determination, but do suggest a course of action for the Service in better targeting communications to under-represented or other target groups. The Service has previously identified a lack of quality data on the protected characteristics of its users, and the action from the original EqIA of the Consultation Strategy which is already featured in the 16/17 Service Business Plan, means that more accurate research into the demographic profile of park users is scheduled; followed by appropriate action to encourage increased usage from under-represented groups.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 This Strategy will be delivered through the County Council's core funding of the KCC Country Parks Service, and through the income that the service generates year on year. The Service in 16/17 was 77% cost neutral to the authority.

6. Policy Framework

6.1 The proposed Strategy supports all three of KCC's Strategic Outcomes through a number of the KCC Supporting Outcomes, including:

- 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
- 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
- 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

6.2 The proposed Strategy additionally supports the Kent Environment Strategy, the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan, and the Kent Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Subject to comments from Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee, the three Aims and ten Objectives will inform and underpin the Service's 18/19 Business Plan, as well as subsequent annual business plans.

7.2 The three actions outlined in 2.5 above will be adopted within that same approach

8. Recommendation(s)

8.1 The Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee is asked to receive a short presentation on the consultation's findings, and to consider and endorse, or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services on the proposed decision to adopt and deliver against The Country Parks Strategy 2017 – 2021 as shown at Appendix A.

9. Appendices and Background Documents

Appendix A – Proposed Record of Decision
Country Parks 2017-21 Consultation Draft:

<https://consultations.kent.gov.uk/consult.ti/countryparksstrategy/consultationHome>

Appendix 1 – Consultation Report

Appendix 2 – Consultation Questionnaire

10. Contact details

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