

Cabinet – 16 September 2009

Walsall Arboretum Restoration Programme

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| Portfolio: | Councillor Sanders, Leisure and culture |
| Service: | Leisure and Culture – Greenspace Services |
| Wards: | St Matthews and Paddock |
| Key decision: | Yes |
| Forward plan: | No |

1. Summary of report

As reported to Cabinet on 9 February 2009, members will recall that the Council is planning to restore Walsall Arboretum, the borough's premier park, through a three year Restoration Programme. This will be delivered from mid 2010 to spring 2013.

The restoration will include the provision of a new flagship Visitor Centre adjacent to the Centre Green, the restoration of the park's historic building stock, footpaths, fencing, fixtures and significant horticultural improvements. Comprehensive landscape works will be carried out, existing park facilities upgraded and new facilities created within the park.

A Stage 1 "in principle" award of £220,000 was approved by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in March 2008 for the Council to develop the Stage 2 scheme. The Stage 2 application was originally to be submitted by 31 March 2009. However, planning requirements for a full ecological survey to survey both bat activity and crayfish habitats within the site could not take place until June. HLF now expect the Stage 2 application by the end of September.

The HLF expect the Council to act as guarantor to the project and underwrite any shortfall in funding, this currently being £463,700. Every effort will be made to reduce this figure further.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to agree that:-

- 2.1 The final Stage 2 application be submitted to the Heritage Lottery Funded Parks for People Programme on 25 September 2009,

- 2.2 In agreeing the Stage 2 application, this commits the council to £463,700 of additional capital expenditure over that currently assumed in the capital programme should alternative funding sources not be identified, noting that additional funding would not be required until 2012/13,
- 2.3 The £463,700 should be included in the council's medium term financial capital forecast plans as a call on resources for 2012/13, and
- 2.4 Instruct officers to seek to identify additional external funding to mitigate the additional commitment required from the council's own resources.

3. Background Information

The Stage 2 application will request a grant of £4.7m from the Heritage Lottery Fund / Big Lottery Fund to contribute towards the delivery of the Arboretum Restoration Programme. The total cost of the project will be £7.9m (including the Project Development period April 2008 – September 2009) and will be delivered between mid 2010 and Spring 2013.

As previously reported, the scheme will be based around the historic core of the park and will include improvements summarised as follows:-

- Provision of a high quality Visitor Centre on the Centre Green to house a cafeteria, education classroom, meeting rooms, staff accommodation, park toilet facilities and changing rooms,
- Refurbishment of the Grade 2 listed Boathouse and park bandstand,
- Provision of a new youth play facility adjacent to the children's play area,
- Comprehensive footpath resurfacing and creation of new footpath networks,
- New bins, benches and signage,
- Repairs to park boundary walls and fencing,
- Restoration of park entrances,
- Horticultural improvements to rockeries, prestige planting areas, stream corridor and lake margins,
- Comprehensive tree works to include new tree planting, and
- Three new staff positions (Arboretum Parks Manager, Head Ranger and Head Gardener) to ensure the long-term sustainability of the park and its future management, maintenance and development.

4. Resource considerations

4.1 Financial:

Stage 2 Project Development (April 2008 – September 2009)

The funding package for the development period has been agreed as follows:-

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| Development Costs | £ |
| Fees for consultants | 302,000 |
| Project Manager | 42,373 |
| Recruitment/Overheads | 4,000 |
| Contingency | 17,419 |
| Total Development Costs | 365,792 |
| Funding | |
| Walsall Council (39.86%) secured through capital and revenue investment 2008/09 | 145,792 |
| Heritage Lottery Fund (Development Grant) (60.14%) | 220,000 |
| Total funding: | 365,792 |

The HLF Stage 1 development grant of £220,000 was awarded in April 2008 and Walsall Council funding was secured through the mainstream revenue and capital investment programme.

Project Delivery (mid 2010 to Spring 2013)

The cost breakdown and proposed funding package for the delivery of the Restoration Programme is as follows:-

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| Restoration Programme Costs | £ |
| Capital Works | 5,151,874 |
| Revenue / Activity Costs | £682,614 |
| Contingency | £515,187 |
| Inflation | £927,337 |
| Future maintenance costs | £316,000 |
| Total Costs | 7,593,012 |
| Funding | |
| Walsall Council Capital (secured) | 1,523,069 |
| Walsall Council Revenue (already secured within investment programme) | 263,000 |
| Heritage Lottery Fund (subject to Stage 2 award) | 4,572,000 |
| Landfill Tax funding (secured) | 100,000 |
| Other funding achieved (includes £500k Growthpoint) | 671,243 |
| Match funding to be secured | 463,700 |
| Total funding: | 7,593,012 |

4.1.2 Match funding

The February 2009 report stated that there was a shortfall in the project match funding package of just over £1.1m. Extensive work has since been undertaken to reduce this including an “in principle” award of £500,000 from Growthpoint. The gap now stands at £463,700. Further applications have been made to Advantage West Midlands and Walsall Housing Group (VIEW funding), both of which were unsuccessful.

Our appointed HLF Casework Manager and Project Monitor recently met with officers and indicated that they are very happy with the scheme and progress made with the restoration proposals. They have confirmed that in order for the Stage 2 application to be submitted on 25 September 2009, the Council must expressly act as the guarantor for the outstanding match funding, and therefore agree to underwrite any potential shortfall in funding for the project.

4.1.3 Walsall Council Financial Commitment

As previously reported the capital funding identified as secured in the table above is contained within the mainstream capital programme and the revenue funding is earmarked within the revenue investment programme for the next four years. Due to the later submission date this will now need to slip to the 2010/11 – 2013/14 financial years. Additional capital funding of up to £463,700 may need to be committed should officers be unable to secure further external funding, requiring Cabinet approval to include this commitment in the council’s capital plans for 2012/13. Officers will continue to seek external funding to minimise the additional call on the councils own capital resources.

4.2 Procurement

Procurement of the Capital Works Programme

It is intended that the Arboretum project be procured as one single package of works.

The contract package will comprise construction of the new principal building – the Visitor Centre, refurbishment of other buildings and structures, fencing works, enhancement of existing entrances; extensive and varied hard and soft landscaping components; installation of street furniture; drainage works and specialist craft activities.

Prospective contractors will be drawn together for consideration by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) monitors and project team. The procurement process will be managed by the Council’s Procurement Team in line with national and European legal requirements. Selection will take into account the varied nature of the works (new build, restoration, landscaping and specialist craft) and the consequent requirement to manage specialist sub-contractors and suppliers. This is considered as the most economically advantageous method of procuring the works and will also facilitate improved on-site co-ordination.

Within the procurement of the capital works programme it should also be possible to provide employment opportunities for local people.

4.3 Legal:

All applications for planning permission as required for the work within the park have now been submitted including the delayed Visitor Centre application. This was delayed due to the Environment Agency requirement for a park flood risk assessment (FRA) and the ecological survey work required to support the application.

Potential issues with the planning applications have been addressed prior to submission through pre application discussions with the Council's Planning Department and other Statutory Agencies. No further delays in obtaining Planning Permission are anticipated.

4.4 Staffing:

The intention will be to create a dedicated staff structure for the park with three new posts in-line with HLF expectations.

5. Citizen impact

The regeneration of the Arboretum is a priority for the Council and for the people who live, work in and visit the town. The park provides a large area of open space close to the town centre where visitors can play, relax and exercise providing both physical and mental health benefits. The restoration of the park will offer an abundance of opportunities which will have a positive impact on quality of life within the borough and help to create a sense of civic pride.

An outline Audience Development Plan (ADP) was produced for the Stage 1 application which has been developed for the Stage 2 submission. The ADP identifies the range of current audiences / users of the park and their needs and priorities relating to facilities and provision within the park, based on the results of community consultation. The plan then identifies how improvements to the park will benefit current audiences and how new audiences will be attracted to the park.

During the development of the Stage 2 application baseline data on visitor numbers has been collected through an Observational Survey and the installation of Visitor Counters which will be used for comparison purposes in the future as the park is developed and new facilities created within the park. This data and the results of community consultation undertaken (September 2008 – February 2009) have been incorporated within the finalised ADP which forms an action plan to boost park visitor numbers and turn the Arboretum into a regional visitor destination.

The new Head Ranger post will be responsible for audience development activity.

6. Community safety

The Arboretum is Walsall's premier park and will set the standard in future for all other greenspaces throughout the borough. It is recognised that open spaces must be safe and secure places for all members of the community to use and all relevant safety issues must be addressed in management and maintenance plans (MMP's) and subsequently put into practice.

The production of a 10 year MMP which is delivered and regularly reviewed by the new Arboretum Manager will ensure that concerns are addressed promptly with particular attention to equipment and facilities, security, anti-social behaviour, visibility of staff, dog fouling, litter and vandalism, health and safety policies and service standards.

7. Environmental impact

A household survey undertaken during the development of Walsall's Green Space Strategy in 2006 demonstrated that parks and greenspaces are the most valued leisure and cultural facilities in Walsall. They are well used by residents of the borough for informal recreation, sports or as venues for events and activities. The restoration of the Arboretum will benefit local residents and park users and contribute to improving the quality of life in the Borough of Walsall.

Landscape evaluation and building condition surveys were carried out within the Arboretum as the Stage 1 bid was being developed. The results of this work demonstrate the deterioration of the overall fabric of the park and underpin the restoration vision.

The environmental impact of the restoration proposals have been considered carefully during the development of the Stage 2 application and the following specialist surveys were undertaken within the park during late summer 2008 and spring / summer 2009 to inform the detailed design process, these being:-

- Ecological surveys
 - Bat survey
 - Habitat survey
 - Watervole survey
 - Crayfish survey
 - Aquatic invertebrate assessment
 - Geodiversity assessment
- Ground investigations
- Appraisal of renewal energy options for the new Visitor Centre

Recommendations contained within the specialist reports will ensure that the proposed works are completed sensitively and a balance is achieved between the natural and built environment.

The information recorded about the park will also be used when producing park interpretation material in the future to assist park users in their understanding and enjoyment of the park environment.

8. Performance and risk management issues

8.1 Risk:

A project risk log has been produced and this is reviewed on a monthly basis by the Project Team at the Progress Meetings and on a weekly basis by the Project Manager and lead consultant.

The key risks to the project are outlined below:

- 1) Failure to secure the match funding package for the project

This risk is considered to be medium. The outstanding budget shortfall of £463,700, (the purpose of this report), will be addressed through a combination of competitive open tender for the works, value engineering, a guaranteed maximum price contract approach, as well as the ongoing attempt to secure further external funding. Every effort will be made to reduce the funding gap down to zero.

- 2) Project budget (agreed at Stage 1) is exceeded

This risk is considered to be medium. The Council have a commitment to delivering the improvements contained within the Stage 1 masterplan and must do this within the project budget. Stringent budget checks are being carried out by the project Quantity Surveyor and the Project Manager will be responsible for ensuring that the scheme is delivered within budget.

- 3) Planning application for the new Visitor Centre delayed / refused

This risk is considered to be low. Potential issues with the planning application were addressed prior to submission through pre application discussions with the Council's Planning Department and other Statutory Agencies. The Flood Risk Assessment and ecological survey work have now been completed and Visitor Centre planning application submitted.

8.2 Performance management:

The Arboretum Restoration programme links to the following key drivers that direct the work of Greenspace Services:

- NI 199 – Children's and young peoples satisfaction with parks and play areas – 2009/10
- NI 197 – Improved Local Biodiversity – proportion of local sites where positive conservation management has been or is being implemented
- Improving the overall quality of life of Walsall residents
- Active lifestyles – to increase resident participation in activity and physical recreation (from the current 16.1%)
- Raising residents' awareness of the opportunities available to them
- Encourage cultural engagement – equality, opportunity and inclusion
- Contribute to Every Child Matters – Be healthy, Stay safe, Enjoy & achieve, Make a positive contribution and Achieve economic well-being
- To stimulate pride in Walsall

In addition:

- Securing a Green Flag Award for the Arboretum in 2013 is a target within the Greenspace Strategy Action Plan,
- The regeneration of the borough's premier park is a priority project for the Council. Delivering the capital works programme and associated revenue activities will improve the Council's performance in the provision of high quality, well maintained green spaces facilities and services which meet local need, provide a safer environment and contribute greatly to the well being and quality of life of the local community.

9. Equality implications

The Arboretum plays a key role in bringing people together on common ground. The park can unite diverse communities through activities, education, celebrations, cultural events and engagement. The Arboretum is open to all, regardless of ethnic origin, age or gender, and as such represents a democratic forum for the citizens of Walsall.

Access Audit

People with disabilities represent a large potential audience for the Arboretum and access and accessibility into and within the park need to be considered. An Access Plan was produced for the Stage 1 application which contains an action plan identifying priority works to improve access within the park; this ranges from physical entrance improvements and upgrading of pathways to reviewing the way the park is marketed and park information is provided. Representatives from Walsall's Disability Forum held 'site visits to the park and fed back their concerns and issues over access, which influenced the content of the action plan. The new Visitor Centre will be accessible via ramps, be all on one floor, have disabled toilets, hearing loop and a range of other services and facilities.

It is recognised that there is also a need to improve future information, consultation and engagement with minority groups. The production of the Access Plan has identified a need to develop a planned approach to engaging with marginalised groups to identify wider barriers to the use of the Arboretum.

Further targeted consultation with marginalised groups will be carried out as the project is developed and the Access Plan action plan will be addressed in line with the delivery of the Restoration Programme.

A project Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) to identify how the proposed restoration programme will affect people covered by equalities legislation will be carried out in 2009/10 before any work is carried out on the ground. As an Access Audit has already been carried out and plans are in place to improve access to the Arboretum it is anticipated that the EqIA will demonstrate that the Restoration Programme will have a positive benefit in terms of Equality.

10. Consultation

Comprehensive community consultation was carried out to inform the development of the Stage 1 application.

It is important that local people are involved in refining the plans for the Arboretum as the detailed designs are produced and further consultation has been carried out as part of the development of the project.

The Stage 2 consultation activities undertaken are summarised below:

- Observational survey (23 August – 17 October). Visitor Counts within the park over an eight week period
- Team Spirit article (October 2008)
- Young People's Stakeholder Forum (14 October 2008). Consultation workshops around project proposals, preferred choice of youth facility within the park and designing a 'perfect park'
- Walsall Illuminations final weekend. Information panels and project questionnaire
- Adult Stakeholder Forum (13 November 2008). Consultation workshops around project proposals, preferred choice of youth facility within the park and priorities activity
- Exhibition boards on display in Walsall Central Library with project questionnaires (December 2008)
- Project Information on Plasma Screen Displays in Civic Centre First Stop Shop and Walsall Central Library (December 2008)
- Citizen's Panel questionnaire. Arboretum questions included within questionnaire (December 2008)
- Walsall Pride Article. Project Information and Caption Competition. Return date for caption competition 31 January 2009. (December 2008)
- Distribution of project leaflet (December 2008)
- Presentation to Council's Development Team meeting (29 January 2009)
- Project update to Pheasey and Paddock LNP (10 February 2009)
- Detailed project proposals exhibition with accompanying questionnaire and new project leaflet (16 -21 February)
- Youth consultation workshops (17 – 25 February 2009)
- Schools questionnaire (February 2009)

- Staff consultation workshop (19 February 2009)
- Project update to St Matthews, Birchills and Leamore LNP (24 February 2009)
- Project update to Walsall Disability Forum (25 February 2009)
- Project and park promoted through Arboretum User Group Garden entry and distribution of Arboretum Postcard at BBC Gardeners World Live Show (June 2009)

In addition to the above, the project has been marketed and promoted through the local press and project information is available on the Council's website www.walsall.gov.uk/arboretum

Background papers

- Arboretum Masterplan
- Proposed new Arboretum staff structure
- Project Risk Log
- Stage 2 Parks for People Application, including detailed landscape and building proposals

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