
Minutes of the meeting of the Great Notley Country Park Joint Venture Partnership Board, held in Conference Room, Cressing Temple, CM77 8PD on Wednesday, 01 March 2017

Present:

Councillors:

S Walsh (Chairman)	Essex County Council
W Schmitt (Vice-Chairman)	Braintree District Council
K Twitchen	Essex County Council

The following Officers were present in support of the meeting:

Tim Dixon	Head of Country Parks, Essex County Council
Nick Day	Street Scene and Parks Manager, Braintree District Council
Jennie Duffy	Area Manager, Country Parks, Essex County Council
Paul Partridge	Head of Operations, Braintree District Council
Steffanie Robertson	Interim Site Manager, Great Notley Country Park
Sophie Campion	Committee Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

The Committee Officer reported apologies for absence from Councillor Graham Butland, Braintree District Council.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Great Notley Country Park Joint Venture Partnership Board held on Wednesday 20 July 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

There were two matters arising from the minutes:

- Minute 6 - Members asked after the member of staff who had been on sick leave and were advised that she was feeling much better but had now left the service. The best wishes of the Board had been passed onto her.
- Minute 8 - the proposed Member engagement relating to the Strategic Review of the Country Park had not taken place in the autumn due to some delays with the project. This meeting replaced any previously planned engagement. It was acknowledged that it would be beneficial to involve local Members and this would be included in the next steps.

4 **Site Report**

The Board considered the Site Report (GTP/01/17) presented by Tim Dixon, Head of Country Parks, Essex County Council. The following issues were highlighted from the report:

Staffing

The Board was advised that Steffanie was the Interim Site Manager covering Claire's maternity leave. It was expected that Claire would be returning to the role following her maternity leave. The Board acknowledged the excellent work undertaken by Steffanie and the skills that she had brought to the role during her time as interim site manager.

Visitor Numbers

The visitor numbers had increased with August being the busiest month. The overall visitor numbers for the period April to September were higher than the 3 year average for the same period.

Play Trail

Following the latest inspections some remedial works had taken place on some of the play equipment. This had been funded through the revenue budget. The on-going maintenance procedures had been reviewed and updated. There were three new items of play equipment planned.

Car Parking

PARC had now been given access to the system to manage their own visitors. However overall over-sight remained with the Country Parks team. With the release of new £1 coins due imminently, the pay machines would be upgraded to accommodate these which would cost £8,000. The season tickets continue to be promoted.

Catering

The new catering contractor who worked over the summer had handed in their notice and ended their contract at the start of October 2016 and 'Lily's Cafe' had opened in their place with a contract until March. The team were currently procuring for a permanent contract and it was hoped that the transition to the permanent contract would be seamless. The current temporary contractor was willing to continue through the summer if necessary to ensure continuity.

Re-surfacing

Through the Capital Infrastructure Improvement Funds for all parks, the Great Notley Country Park re-surfacing was being continued over the next two months, around the lake to where it had stopped last year and through to the play area.

Proposal for zip-wire

The proposal for a zip wire at the Park was going to full business case to understand the viability. This would be the longest zip wire in the East of England. The expectation was to invest £250k which included the set up, training, contingency and improvements to the current reception facilities. The aim was to have this in place for the October half-term. The half year return net surplus was expected to be £17k and full year £55k. The offer would be £8 per go along a 0.5km zip wire. This would be subject to planning permission. The business case would be going to the Portfolio Holder at Essex County Council and the Executive Director to progress.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- Members were supportive of the zip wire proposal. It was acknowledged that with the bird statue at the top of the mound where the zip wire would start from there would need to be careful planning. There would also need to be continued discussion with Braintree District Council and it was requested that the business case be shared with the planning team at Braintree District Council to discuss potential planning permission. In response it was explained that planning permission could not be gained until the equipment had been procured so outline planning permission would be sought and conditions would be placed within the contract.
- In response to further questions about the zip wire it was confirmed that all potential costs were being covered including new uniforms and training for staff. There would not be a minimum age for using the zip wire, it would be based on size and the fit of the harness. It was suggested that following guidelines on the use of drones, it may be possible to use a drone to help with the planning of the zip wire route.
- It was suggested that consideration be given to extending the footpaths up the slope and to procuring another park buggy to ensure access for all.
- It was confirmed that the changes to the car parking pay machines would ensure that both £1 coins could be accepted in the interim period. It was noted that all old £1 coins would need to be deposited at a bank by October 2017.
- The positioning of the bird statue had been affected by the strong winds and it was confirmed that it had been checked for safety but an engineer would also be checking it. It was noted that with further strong winds due, it would need to be made safe.

The Board passed on their thanks to the team at the Country Park for their continued work.

5 Artificial Grass Pitches and Multi-Use Games Area

The Board considered report GTP/02/17 and update from Nick Day, Street Scene and Parks Manager, Braintree District Council, providing Members with an update on progress and performance with the Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at the Country Park from 1 July 2016 to 31 January 2017. The following points were highlighted during the update:

Sports Facilities Update

In addition to the main partner organisation using the facilities, Great Notley Youth Football Club, there were an additional 35 football teams, representing 16 sports organisations using the facilities over the last 7 months. Most bookings were for a 1 hour period.

Income received so far this financial year was £31k with a projected income of £42k for the full year in line with the budget figure for 2016/17.

External monitoring of the facility

A condition of the grant funding from the Football Foundation was the annual Monitoring and Evaluation form which had been completed and submitted on the 1 November 2016 and a response was awaited.

The usage numbers required for the survey had shown that it remained steady.

Football Development Plan Update

Work continued with Braintree Town Football Academy who were now part of the charity 'Community Iron' established to encourage sport and community cohesion across the Braintree District. In association with Essex FA, Community Iron runs Soccability Festivals each year and Community Iron also continues to run the holiday Soccer Camps.

Future Development

There were signs of some premature ageing of the AGP surface and therefore a condition survey was being carried out to assess whether this will need replacing earlier than expected. The sinking fund which is being maintained to fund the re-surfacing was currently at £116k.

Discussions were currently taking place with the Environment and Leisure department at Braintree District Council regarding how future management and operation of the facilities could be incorporated within the overall Leisure Contract with Fusion Lifestyle, making use of the online booking facilities.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- In response to a question regarding whether the sinking fund would cover the cost of re-surfacing if it needed replacing sooner than expected, it was reported that indicative costs would need to be looked at. However the results of the condition survey would determine how soon it may need replacing. The report of the survey would give an indication of timing.
- It was explained that there were broader issues to consider around whether these facilities are kept at the Great Notley location or whether there may be an opportunity to relocate them depending on the timing and development of other potential parks and sporting facilities within the district. The use of the facilities by the local schools had not materialised due to travel to the site and the area could potentially be used for

something else if the facilities were moved elsewhere.

The Board noted the report update.

6 Presentation of Great Notley Masterplan Baseline Report and Next Steps

The Board received report GTP/03/17 presenting the Great Notley Masterplan Baseline Report and Next Steps. The report was presented by Ryan Nicholls, Place Services, Essex County Council (ECC) and Peter Dawson, Place Services, ECC.

A workshop had been held between Essex County Council officers and Braintree District Council officers which was looking at the future vision and range of options for the Country Park to feed into the Baseline Report.

During the presentation some key points were highlighted to the Board and discussed:

Context

There was future pressure on Braintree District with regard to the number of new homes to be delivered and the impact of this on the increased usage of the Country Park was unknown. Therefore it was considered to be an appropriate time to review the long-term strategic aspirations and vision for the Country Park.

Physical Constraints

With regard to the existing facilities on the current site, the Discovery Centre was quite small, the football facilities were not full size and the location of the Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) restricted development in that area. The vehicular access was good but was restricted to a single access point. Potential expansion of the site was restricted to the North, South and East of the Park so the only option was to the West.

Stakeholder Analysis

It was identified from the feedback received that more indoor facilities were needed going forward and it was recognised that currently the only facility for food and drink was in the Discovery Centre.

Going forward engagement would be needed to consider any open spaces included with future developments such as within a garden village.

With regard to other current facilities in the local area, it was noted that Hatfield Forest had a different approach to visitor usage due to the protection of the historical forest. It was recognised that there were potential options to encourage visitors to go to the Country Park during the winter periods when the Forest was less accessible due to the protection work.

Market Information

Some key points identified within the market information included:

- A significant increase in population
- 35-44 was the dominant age group including young families
- There was no train infrastructure nearby
- There was no bus stop nearby and the bus service was infrequent and did not cover all areas
- The cycleways link to the Flitch Way
- Within the road infrastructure there was the congestion of the nearby A130/A131

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Operational Analysis

With the current staffing numbers, the staff struggle to cope with peak times. There was potential to look at an event licence. There were also opportunities to look at extending site opening times, however access, security and lighting were all considerations.

Finances

Car parking was a main revenue stream

Next Steps

The report set out an indicative timeframe to align with the production of Local Plans, with the sign off for the Masterplan scheduled for September 2018.

Operational management and asset management required more information.

The Board was asked to consider how this masterplan progresses and to consider developing a brief for the next steps. It was noted that future steps needed to be supported locally, publically and by Members. It was also acknowledged that as opportunities arise through new developments, they need to be considered with regard to the Country Park.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- Chelmsford and Great Leighs development should be included in the considerations, along with other Districts such as Uttlesford, Colchester and Tendring.
- It was suggested that the Wilderness Trust should also be included in future considerations.
- It was noted that it would be important to align with the Local Plan process and have a future vision for the Country Park so that discussion could be influenced regarding new developments, section 106 and potential garden city development, to complement the current facilities.
- Members considered that the Country Park had achieved a good balance of conservation and activities for families that complemented each other, whilst protecting the physical and natural environment of the park. Any future development should enhance this.
- Members considered that it was important going forward that any future

planning considers green space and its sustainability. It was acknowledged that garden communities provided options for green spaces which were considered vital. The link between green spaces and health benefits relied on engagement between different Cabinet Members.

- Members welcomed the masterplan baseline report and the considerable information which it contained.
- Funding for any future development was not currently in place and would need to be identified.

Members **Agreed** that the principles going forward should include:

1. Continuation of the same balance between, conserving, protecting and enhancing the natural environment of the country park and activities for children and outdoor informal recreation, as a formula which currently worked well, subject to space.
2. If a suitable alternative location for the MUGA and AGP presented itself, to consider moving these facilities.
3. Continue to develop other relationships where opportunities arise.

Members noted the report.

7 **Date of Next Meeting**

The Board considered when would be an appropriate time to hold its next meeting. During the discussion it was noted that in future it may be appropriate to increase the number of meetings per year to quarterly meetings rather than the current pattern of twice per year. However in terms of the progress of taking forward the Great Notley Masterplan, it was **Agreed** that the next meeting should take place in six months, in September 2017. The Committee Officer would co-ordinate setting a meeting date in due course.

8 **Urgent Business**

The Chairman agreed to accept an urgent item of business regarding an update on the proposal for car parking improvements.

9 **Update on Proposal for Car Parking Improvements**

At its last meeting the Board was advised that a local business, Tamdown Engineering Group, close to the Country Park had offered to fund a re-design of the public car park and create some additional spaces in return for their staff being able to use the car park free of charge.

Following advice it had become clear that it would not be possible to pursue this option as the car park would become rateable. Following discussion with Tamdown Engineering Group, they were now looking to relocate elsewhere within the District.

It was acknowledged that the expansion of the car park would have been advantageous to the Country Park, however as planning permission was already

in place it could still be pursued as a capital bid, although consideration would need to be given as to whether it would be financially viable. Currently, other than the odd extremely busy day, the parking facilities were manageable.

There being no further urgent business, the meeting closed at 3.05pm.

Chairman