

# **Cherwell District Council**

## **Executive**

**6 June 2017**

<b>Banbury Country Park</b>
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### **Report of Head of Environmental Service**

This report is public

#### **Purpose of report**

To consider the creation of a new country park in Banbury

#### **1.0 Recommendations**

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To approve the creation of a new open space, Banbury Country Park.
- 1.2 To support the approach of working with stakeholders to develop an inviting country park which provides a wide range of leisure activities for Cherwell residents & visitors as well as creating a diverse habitat for wildlife.
- 1.3 To note that the running costs of a new Country Park can be delivered within existing revenue budgets.
- 1.4 To agree to seek planning approval for change of use.

#### **2.0 Introduction**

- 2.1 Over recent years, the Council has acquired a number of adjoining pieces of land just to the north of Banbury. These pieces of land have been either historically owned by the Council, been passed to the Council in Section 106 planning agreements or purchased at low agricultural cost.
- 2.2 In addition two pieces of land have been recently purchased from the Environment Agency. This land largely consists of two fields which were acquired through a compulsory purchase order by the Environment Agency to facilitate the building of flood defences.
- 2.3 In total the land will cover a considerable area over 30 hectares. An opportunity exists to create a country park which will be a unique feature not only for the use of residents of Banbury & surrounding villages but also as a visitor attraction. A

country park can provide a wide range of activities including walking, cycling, bird watching, children's play & educational opportunities.

- 2.4 The site will be accessible from the west off Southam Road, the canal towpath and from footpaths around the Banbury reservoir, south from the Gateway retail development, eventually from the east off the A361 and north from the Canal.
- 2.5 The site will be a mixture of woodland areas, meadow areas and park land. The proposed layout includes six distinct areas and includes a small lake. The details of each area is set out in Appendix 1.
- 2.6 The development of the country park has involved a large number of stakeholders including Oxfordshire County Council, Environment Agency, Canal & Rivers Trust, Banbury Town Council, Woodland Trust, the RSPB and Banbury Ornithological Society who have contributed to the planning of the park.
- 2.7 A number of revenue reserves, S106 contributions and small capital schemes mean that there is sufficient funding to put in place the infrastructure so the land can be developed for use as a country park and open for 2018/19.
- 2.8 The intention, subject to Executive approval, is to commence work during 2017 so that the country park can open in April 2018.

### **3.0 Report Details**

- 3.1 Cherwell District Council has been responsible for a piece of green open space to the north of Wildmere Estate for a number of years. However there has been no public access route to this woodland area.
- 3.2 A few years ago the adjoining field became available and was acquired for the Council at a modest cost. This field would give access to the existing woodland area once a wooden bridge had been built to cross the river.
- 3.3 The Environment Agency acquired some fields, through a compulsory purchase order, adjacent to the M40 to build the Banbury flood defence barrier. The Banbury flood defences were completed in 2012 and the fields were not required once the work was completed. Unfortunately, although the Environment Agency has been supportive in the development of a country park, the negotiations regarding possible sale or transfer of land to the Council has taken some time. This is for a number of reasons including the agreement of public access rights along the top of the flood barrier. Agreement of all terms have been agreed and the transfer of the land for £35k is imminent.
- 3.4 Finally another adjoining field, Hardwick Fields, has been passed through to the Council by Bellway Homes as part of a S106 agreement.
- 3.5 These five pieces of land along with the flood defence barrier creates a substantial area of land with has created an opportunity to develop a country park.
- 3.6 A substantial number of stakeholders have become involved and contributed to the development of the facility. This has largely been through two workshops on the design of the Country Park.

- 3.7 Appendix 1 sets out the Banbury Country Park Masterplan highlighting the background, the proposals and how to proceed with the development.
- 3.8 The objectives of the country park include to:
- be a fun safe place to visit and also provide quiet relaxation for its users
  - encourage as many different users into the country park
  - be as accessible as possible for users with different mobility levels
  - promote linkages between the different areas for recreation and traffic free commuting
  - retain existing areas of ecological interest and create new habitat wildlife
  - improve biodiversity along the river and canal corridors creating continuous green space linking Spiceball Park in the south to open countryside in the north towards Little Bourton
  - be straight forward and cost efficient to manage & maintain
  - continue to be developed and managed with the aid of national and local partner organisations.
- 3.9 There are a number of access points to the proposed facility including from the Gateway shopping development, the Oxford Canal towpath, a proposed footpath off Southam Road and a link from Daventry Road.
- 3.10 The development of the country park will require a planning application for change of use and will need to be submitted in the coming months.
- 3.11 The aim is to open the country park to the public from April 2018. Once the park receives planning approval, tenders will be let for the construction of footpaths and bridges. Installation of benches and sign posting, planting of trees and shrubs will be carried out by existing contractors.
- 3.12 It is expected that this initial work will be completed in Q3/Q4 2017/18 with the park open from April 2018.
- 3.13 It is likely that there will be further development of the park for a number of years after opening. Improvements will be achieved through a mixture of the use of volunteers and contributions from other stakeholders. In addition applications for grant funding for further facilities will be made as and when opportunities and funding streams become available.
- 3.14 The revenue costs for the country park will be low. The facility will be low maintenance due to its rural nature and location. Grass cutting will be largely confined to mowing strips either side of footpaths and litter picking and bin emptying will be carried out with the existing street cleansing team. Grazing for biodiversity will be utilised for the meadow areas, and volunteers/community groups will help with habitat improvement works and annual planting initiatives.
- 3.15 A number of existing approved capital projects and reserves exist to a value of £240k. These funds will allow the installation of the footpath infrastructure, litter bins and dog bins, appropriate signage and bridges to link the land parcels across watercourses.
- 3.16 The new facility will offer a number of opportunities for enhancing residents' health and wellbeing. Other benefits will be increased bio-diversity through the range of land types which include wetland meadows, woodland and a lake area. It is also

hoped that a cycleway linking the Southam Road developments with the Gateway Shopping Centre can be achieved.

## **4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1 The development of a new country park with strong stakeholder support will provide leisure and healthy life style benefits as well as becoming a visitor attraction.
- 4.2 Sufficient capital resources exist to open the facility. Running costs are expected to be minimal and no additional revenue budget is required.

## **5.0 Consultation**

Stakeholders including:  
Oxfordshire County Council  
Banbury Town Council  
Environment Agency  
RSPB  
Banbury Ornithological Society  
BBOWT  
Canal and Rivers  
Trust Woodland Trust  
OPFA

## **6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To support the proposed development of a Country Park

Option 2: To reject the proposed development of a Country Park

Option 3: To ask officers to consider other uses for the land acquired

## **7.0 Implications**

### **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 7.1 £240k exists for the installation of the infrastructure for the Country Park through a mixture of allocated capital reserves and Section 106 funds. The revenue impacts are low with the daily running of the facility being run from existing resources.

Comments checked by:  
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## Legal Implications

- 7.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report. As is made clear above planning permission for change of use will be required.

Comments checked by:

Kevin Lane, Head of Law and Governance, 0300 0030107

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## Risk

- 7.3 There are no risk implications. Any risks arising will be managed as part of the services operational risk register and escalated to the Corporate Risk Register as and when necessary.

Comments checked by:

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## 8.0 Decision Information

### Key Decision

**Financial Threshold Met: No**

**Community Impact Threshold Met: No**

### Wards Affected

All

### Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Cherwell: Safe, Clean and Green

### Lead Councillor

Councillor Debbie Pickford, Lead Member for Clean and Green

### Document Information

Appendix No	Title
1	Banbury Country Park Masterplan
Background Papers	
None	
Report Author	Ed Potter, Head of Environmental Services
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