

Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee

5th January 2016

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

A sustainable future for Mote Park

Final Decision-Maker	Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee
Lead Director or Head of Service	Dawn Hudd, Head of Commercial and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Marcus Lawler, Commercial Projects Manager
Classification	Non-exempt
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to Committee:

1. That the Committee notes the progress of the programme of projects known as 'A sustainable future for Mote Park.'
2. That the Committee agrees the development of the outline spatial framework for locating the projects in Mote Park.
3. That the Committee approves a request to Policy and Resources Committee for £3.96m (subject to future review) of capital to deliver the programme of projects and improvements and to maximise operational and commercial opportunities.
4. That, should the capital programme bid be successful, the Committee delegates authority to the Head of Commercial & Economic Development to spend up to £100,000 developing the detailed plans; including the business case for the new visitor centre.
5. That officers report regularly on further progress.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- **Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all** – By establishing a range of new leisure activities the Council will be contributing to the Action Areas of: Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions; and Encouraging good health and wellbeing.
- **Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough** – Delivery of the three project streams referred to in this report will create local employment. This allows the Council to contribute to its Action Area: Promoting a range of employment opportunities across our Borough.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee	5 th January 2016

A sustainable future for Mote Park

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is designed to inform Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee of the progress made with various projects that the Council has already approved; to seek approval for the recommended spatial framework; and to recommend that the Committee approve a capital bid to Policy and Resources Committee to deliver the parks improvements programme outlined in this report and to maximise operational and commercial opportunities. Considerable progress has been made delivering the three projects now grouped under the 'A sustainable future for Mote Park' programme. One of the projects has been completed (bringing the café operation back in-house) and we have now moved to a 'business as usual' phase; the second will imminently be completed (the implementation of parking charges in Mote Park); and the remaining project is on track with a planning application due to be submitted in February 2016 (creation of the Adventure Zone).
- 1.2 In executing these projects, officers have identified a number of parks maintenance and improvements projects that will need to be delivered over the next five years. In order to coordinate these works, mitigate any risks, and exploit the commercial opportunities the Committee is invited to approve a bid to Policy and Resources for an indicative capital budget to be included in the capital programme; and, should that bid be successful, to delegate authority to the Head of Commercial & Economic Development to spend some of that money for professional fees to develop detailed plans. These plans being presented to the Committee in further reports during 2016.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Through various formal decisions the Council has previously decided, in the face of increased funding pressure to undertake various projects designed to secure the long-term future of the borough's parks and open spaces; and improve the leisure offering within the borough. It was envisioned that these improvements would have secondary benefits in support of health and well-being, the local economy and the Destination Management Plan. Those projects were: the introduction of parking charges at Mote Park; bringing the existing café operation back in-house; and the creation of a pay-to-use leisure facility, or 'Adventure Zone'. The relevant reports and records of decision are attached at para.9. A summary of the reports and decisions is as follows:

Project	Decision making body	Decision date	Allocated budget
Implementation of parking charges	HCL Committee	13 th July 2015	£87,000
Bringing café operation in-house	Operational decision to bring operation back in-house (Maidstone Culture and Leisure). Project budget approved in the Council's Budget Strategy	February 2015 11 th February 2015	£80,000
Creation of an Adventure Zone	Cabinet	11 th February 2015	£790,000

2.2 For reasons of securing the best possible commercial and operational mutual support between the different strands of the projects, they have been grouped as a programme, which is known as 'A sustainable future for Mote Park'. This also allows the Council to achieve the best possible 'joined-up' approach to planning and secures savings against project budgets through pooling those budgets; sharing professional fees; etc. It also provides a clear vision for investment in Mote Park. The officer team has various major specified (as defined by the various Council decisions) and implied tasks. Progress against these tasks is as follows:

2.3 **Establishment of an officer programme team** – The team is now established and includes officers from Parks and Leisure, Commercialisation, Planning, Procurement, Property, Legal, Finance and Communications. A landscape architect has been appointed to advise the team. In order that the projects will be delivered in mutual support (and vice versa) of our wider aspirations for our parks and open spaces the board is referencing the emerging draft 'Parks and Open Spaces ten year plan'; this will contain a vision for Mote Park:

Mote Park 10 year vision (Draft)

"To continue to improve the quality and range of services for visitors to and users of Mote Park, whilst protecting, conserving and enhancing the natural and historic parkland environment.

We will encourage the use of Mote Park by everyone, with particular focus on improving their health and wellbeing.

We will manage the park efficiently and effectively with a view to making the park as financially sustainable as possible in the long term.

We will work with the Mote Park Fellowship and other community and volunteer groups to improve the quality of the park, by providing meaningful opportunities to improve their environment and develop themselves.”

2.4 Spatial framework – To ensure that the proposed projects are aligned, and that the minimum ecological and heritage impacts are made on the park it was important that a spatial plan was developed. The board has completed its work regarding this plan and it can be viewed at Appendix A with the recommended layout. This work has included consideration of specialist reports from heritage and ecological experts. The reasons behind the recommendation are explained in full within the body of the spatial framework, but in summary this layout affords the following principal advantages:

- Minimum ecological impact.
- Minimum heritage impact.
- Are likely to be most acceptable to planners.
- Provides the best mutual commercial and operational support between the elements.
- A relocated visitor centre will have better views and will allow the important lake vistas to be opened up.
- The layout creates the best sense of ‘place’ and reinforces Mote Park’s importance as a destination.

Approval of the spatial framework recommendation will allow the officer team to develop the outline into a detailed proposition.

2.5 Introduction of parking charges in Mote Park – The proposal has been through the required consultation and has been approved by Strategic Planning, Sustainability & Transport Committee on 1st December 2015. The Traffic Regulation order will be sealed on 6th January 2016 and shortly after the relevant equipment will be installed. Charging will commence in the last week of January 2016 or the first week of February 2016.

2.6 Bringing the Mote Park café operation back in-house– The café operation has now been brought back in-house. The café has undergone extensive refurbishment and the previous staff TUPE’d onto the Council’s establishment. They have undergone retraining and the café reopened on 12 December 2015 following a refurbishment and is offering an improved layout and menu.

2.7 Creation of an Adventure Zone – The completion of the spatial framework has allowed the siting of the Adventure Zone to be recommended. The board has now appointed a consultant to prepare, and submit a planning application on the Council’s behalf and this is scheduled for February 2016. The Committee should note the re-positioning of various existing facilities within the spatial framework and how they will relate to the Adventure Zone. The current plan calls for the removal of the existing skateboard facility. The decision on whether to provide this facility in the park requires discussion.

2.8 Improvements to existing free facilities – The emerging 10 Year Parks and Open Spaces Strategy has provided the schedule of maintenance and equipment replacement for all of the parks and open spaces in the Borough.

These will be aligned to ensure that there is appropriate coordination between replacing the existing children's play area (for example) and the construction work for the projects in this programme. Work is underway identifying what S106 funds might be available to improve them further and mitigate the Council's capital requirements.

2.9 Risks and opportunities

The programme is running the usual risks register in accordance with the Council's Risk Management Framework. In this way the usual risks surrounding these types of project are being managed. Three major risks and one major opportunity have been identified; as follows:

2.9.1 Inadequate visitor centre – Due to a doubling in visits numbers since the completion of the park improvement project in July 2012, the existing provision is simply too small to cope with demand at peak times. This is true of the café offering; and also the current building does not allow the provision of visitor information; operational space; educational facilities or retail. The building needs replacing to meet demand but this would also afford an opportunities if the Committee approved a quality and design led development which reflects the heritage of the park and respects the environment within which it sits; as follows:

- Provision of a multi-functional building.
- Provision of outreach education services linked with the Maidstone Museum and Bently Art Gallery.
- Provision of parks education services.
- Provision of operational facilities such as ticket sales and Adventure Zone management.
- Provision of a visitor information service which will improve visitor's experience.
- Provision of space for the Friends of Mote Park which will help maximise the impact of volunteer groups through increased capacity to manage extra hours.
- Improved commercial opportunities including retail and events space.

Obviously any development would require a quality design which fully reflects Mote Park's national importance as a major destination; it being the third most popular park in the United Kingdom.

2.9.2 Toilet provision – With over 1.2 million visitors the existing toilet facilities in Mote Park are inadequate and rates poorly in our market research with park users..

2.9.3 Provision of infrastructure improvements and maintenance - The borough's parks and spaces enjoy a maintenance budget for their day-to-day running. Major works are covered by bids to the capital programme. A consolidated list of major works required in our parks and open spaces has been compiled by the programme board and this can be viewed at Appendix C. Failure to make provision for these works would result in a drop in the standard of our open spaces and this would be directly contrary to the draft vision at para.2.2.

Furthermore, the business case upon which the decisions at para.2.1 were based on would be compromised.

Detailed analysis and planning needs to be carried out to accurately define the future needs, and costs of meeting those needs. The recommended way of dealing with this is to propose a bid to Policy and Resources Committee for a capital amount to be allocated to deal with these issues; this amount being subject to review following further analysis. Should this bid be successful the Committee would then delegate authority to the Head of Commercial & Economic Development to spend up to £100,000 of the proposed project capital to carry out further work regarding a new visitor centre an capital maintenance for further reports to be bought back to this Committee in 2016.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 That the Committee reviews and comments on the progress of the programme:

Option	Advantages/disadvantages	Recommendation
To review and comment	This ensures officers have current feedback and guidance from members.	Recommended
To not review and comment	This would mean the members were not fulfilling their Committee's terms of reference.	Not recommended

3.2 That the Committee approves the recommended spatial framework:

Option	Advantages/disadvantages	Recommendation
The Committee approves the framework	This means all the professional advice regarding the projects is being followed. The minimum negative heritage and ecological impact will be made on the park.	Recommended
The Committee does not approve the framework	This will introduce a delay in project delivery. The decision could inadvertently introduce risks to delivering the project; for example: in planning; or by alienating an influential special interest group.	Not recommended

3.3 That the Committee approves a capital bid of £3.96m (subject to further review) to Policy and Resources to deliver the capital programme outlined in this report and maximise the operational and commercial opportunities.

Option	Advantages/disadvantages	Recommendation
The Committee approves the bid	<p>The Council is able to make some prudent financial planning to deal with the issues the bid relates to.</p> <p>The original business cases and the draft Parks and Open Spaced 10 years Development Plan are supported.</p> <p>The detailed analysis is not yet completed and so this figure will need to be reviewed and, potentially amended.</p>	Recommended
The Committee does not approve the bid	<p>The standard of the leisure offering in the Borough will decline.</p> <p>The business cases upon which the original decision were made would be undermined; along with the draft 10 year vision for Mote Park.</p>	Not recommended

3.4 That should the capital bid at 3.3 be successful the Committee delegates authority to the Head of Commercial and Economic Development to spend up to £100,000 developing detailed reports which will be brought back to this Committee in 2016:

Option	Advantages/disadvantages	Recommendation
The Committee approves the delegation	<p>Detailed work can be completed resulting in a report to this committee which will:</p> <p>Offer options for an improved visitor centre</p> <p>Offer a detailed programme of maintenance and improvement works</p> <p>A proper schedule of</p>	Recommended

	mutually supporting works An accurate picture of the true financial costs will be achieved allow the Committee to review its capital bid	
The Committee does not approve the delegation	Amy further report on these issues will be incomplete.	Not recommended

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To approve the recommendations contained within the report.
- 4.2 This will provide the officers of the programme board with an essential insight to the views of the Committee when delivering the already approved projects.
- 4.3 This will ensure that there is a capital allocation in the Council's budget to deal with the programme of maintenance and improvements and maximise the commercial opportunities connected with the café, potential new visitor centre and Adventure Zone.
- 4.4 This will allow officers to prepare a detailed report on options of dealing with the issues referred to at para.4.3. This will also allow a detailed review of the budget required to execute these options; this in turn will indicate if a review of the capital bid at para.3.3 should be reviewed.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 An extensive piece of market research was undertaken in 2014 with residents and park users; this has previously been presented to Members. This research formed a large part of the business cases for the approved projects; and is a background document to this report.
- 5.2 When considering the recommendation to make a capital bid for a new visitor centre the Committee's attention is drawn to para. 3.3 of the report which shows that satisfaction with the existing café and toilets at very low levels when compared with other facilities provided.
- 5.3 The statutory Traffic Regulation Order consultation was carried out prior to the SPS&T committee decision of 1st December 2015. The results can be viewed in the background papers attached at para. 9. In summary: 22 respondents made submissions to that committee; 8 were in favour and 8 were objecting; the remainder were general comments (mostly regarding the possibility of displaced parking).
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6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

6.1 Assuming the Committee approves the recommendations contained in this report, the next main actions will be as follows:

Action	Date
Ward member engagement	February 2016
Refining the spatial framework	February 2016 (completed)
Planning application for the Adventure Zone	February 2016 (submitted)
Develop business case for the visitor centre	June 2016 (completed)
TRO implemented	January 2016
Procurement for Adventure Zone	June 2016 (supplier selected)
Construction of Adventure Zone	February 2017 (construction completed)
Adventure Zone operational	March 2017

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	This project impacts on both of the Council's Strategic Priorities and is important to establishing Mote Park as a stand-alone visitor attraction and destination.	Head of Commercial & Economic Development 21/12/2015
Risk Management	A risk register will be maintained as part of the project, setting out the likely risks and the actions that will be taken to mitigate them.	Head of Commercial & Economic Development 21/12/2016
Financial	<p>The report sets out the level of capital resources required to achieve the identified vision for Mote Park. In part, the resources required exist within the capital programme.</p> <p>Appendix C identifies where the resources do not currently exist the committee will need to bid for resources. Consideration will be given by Policy & Resources Committee on whether to include the details in its recommendation to Council. Council will make the final decision on the revenue and capital budget in March 2016.</p>	Head of Finance & Resources

Staffing	No impact from this report, staffing issues will be dealt with at individual project level.	Head of Commercial & Economic Development 21/12/2016
Legal	There will be the appropriate legal input at individual project level.	Deputy Head of Legal Partnership Mid Kent Legal Services
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken to ensure there are no equality implications.	Policy and Performance Officer
Environmental/Sustainable Development	No impact	Head of Commercial & Economic Development 21/12/2016
Community Safety	No impact	Head of Commercial & Economic Development 21/12/2016
Human Rights Act	No impact	Head of Commercial & Economic Development 21/12/2016
Procurement	There are no direct implications from this report.	Property & Procurement Manager
Asset Management	The recommendations align with the principles of the Council's Asset Management Plan	Property & Procurement Manager

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A – Spatial framework.
- Appendix B – Business case.
- Appendix C – Consolidated list of future capital requirements.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Lake Market Research's report.
- Lewis Ecology's report.

- Purcell's heritage statement.