
TITLE: Draft Ely Country Park Improvement Plan 2017-20

Committee: Commercial Services

Date: 17th January 2017

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[R174]

1.0 ISSUE

1.1 To provide Members with an update on progress made with delivering the Ely Country Park Improvement Plan 2015-17, and to seek approval for the 2017-20 Improvement Plan.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Members are requested to:

- (i) Note the progress update made with the Ely Country Park Improvement Plan 2015-17,
- (ii) Approve the Ely Country Park Improvement Plan 2017-20 (as set out in Appendix 1), and
- (iii) Delegate authority to the Director, Commercial, in consultation with the Chairman of Commercial Services Committee, in accordance with 5.2 of this report.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 On 13th January 2015, Members approved a third phase of improvements works.

3.2 All works were shaped by consultation with site users and the community groups including Ely Access Group, site users and local families.

3.3 Below are some of the key improvement works and achievements that have taken place during the Improvement Plan 2015-17:

- In August 2016, the Country Park successfully obtained Green Flag status for the third time. This status is recognition that Ely Country Park is one of the best green spaces in the country. Ely Country Park continues to be an 'accredited country park,' making it one of just seven accredited country parks in the East of England accredited by Natural England.

- Toilet provision was provided during the summer months of 2015 and 2016.
- Access improvement works were carried out at Springhead Lane gateway and slope.
- New seating was provided.
- The Communities and Partnerships department undertakes regular site inspections and consultation with users to gain valuable feedback.

3.4 Ely Country Park Improvement Plan 2017-20

The Draft Ely Country Park Improvement Plan 2017-20 has been developed following feedback from site users and local community groups. The Plan proposes five areas for improvement, including additional play provision, seasonal toilets and the installation of additional seating and shade provision. It is important that the site continually improves to ensure that the park retains its Green Flag and Natural England accreditations.

3.4.1 Junior/Youth Play Provision

Following consultation during summer 2015 and 2016, site users determined that additional play equipment would enhance the appeal and visitor experience of the Country Park.

The site's climbing frame was removed in October 2016 as it was beyond economic repair, following an ECDC routine health and safety inspection. This piece of equipment was one of the most popular items in the play area and it is recognised that having a mixture of play 'types' (e.g. swinging, rocking, bouncing, climbing) is beneficial for a child's physical and cognitive development.

3.4.2 Seasonal toilets

Following consultation in 2014, toilet provision has been provided by the Council in summer 2015 and 2016. Following consultation in summer 2016, 100% of site users consulted advised that toilet provision was necessary during the summer school holidays. The nearest public toilets are approximately 10 minutes walk from the country park. Consultation with the Ely Access Group identified that there is a requirement for accessible toilet provision at the Country Park during the busy, summer months.

3.4.3 Seating, shade provision, baby/toddler provision

The two most popular desired areas for improvement were more shade provision and more play equipment.

At present only two benches are covered by shade and feedback has indicated that some families are reluctant to visit the Country Park during warm weather because of this. As the site has become more and more popular, seating is occupied quickly leaving the majority of visitors without anywhere to sit or be shaded.

In 2016/17, additional seating was installed around the tree belts (as part of the 2015-17 Improvement Plan) but not in the play area due to the concerns about lack of shade provision.

There is currently no specific baby provision at the country park. It is important to provide provision for all age groups to ensure that the Country Park appeals to families and groups with children of all ages.

4.0 ARGUMENTS/OPTIONS

4.1 The Council needs to continue to build on the success of the Country Park project and achieve the following objectives:-

- Continue to develop Ely Country Park as an area of high quality open space usage for a growing local population
- Ensure a high quality visitor experience
- Achieve good value for money for both current and new investment put into the facilities on the site.

4.2 Development of the Country Park is being carried out using a phased approach so that proposals can be influenced through consultation with users and local interest groups.

4.3 Below are the options available to the Council for addressing the demands in 3.5:

4.3.1 Junior/Youth Play Provision

The installation of a climbing unit for juniors and youths would provide a full mix of 'play types,' this is particularly important due to the recent removal of the park's only unit of this type in October 2016. There is demand from site users for another piece of equipment to be installed containing climbing provision.

4.3.2 Portable, seasonal toilets

It is proposed that there is summer toilet provision for the next three years. An external cleaning contractor is required to open and close, stock and clean the toilets daily. Based on industry guidance, the toilets will need to be serviced once weekly.

4.3.3 Seating, shade provision, baby/toddler provision

It is proposed that additional baby/toddler play provision and seating is provided in the play area with shading.

4.3.4 External funding

As the Country Park's popularity as a visitor destination increases, it is essential the site continues to meet visitor needs therefore it is proposed that external funding opportunities are explored.

4.3.5 Further improvement opportunities

Further consultation will be carried out with site users and stakeholders to identify further improvement opportunities as the site continues to grow in popularity and to ensure that the Council is meeting the needs of users.

4.4 The Draft Ely Country Park Improvement Plan 2017-20 is attached at Appendix 1.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Members are asked to consider and approve the improvement priorities set out in Appendix 1; and instruct officers to proceed with undertaking the works within the estimated budget specified.

5.2 The estimated costs (set out in Appendix 1 and 6.1 below), may increase depending on any changes to work specification, the passage of time between the writing of this report and the purchase of goods and services. Therefore it is proposed that authority is delegated to the Director, Commercial, in consultation with the Chairman of Commercial Services Committee, to agree additional funding, up to a maximum of 20%.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 A total project budget of £100,000 which can be met from Section 106 to deliver the Ely Country Park Improvement Plan 2017-20 (based on estimated costs).

7.0 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Draft Ely Country Park Improvement Plan 2017-20

| <u>Background Documents</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Contact Officer</u> |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| None | Room 008 The Grange Ely | Lewis Bage Communities and Partnerships Manager (01353) 665555 Email: lewis.bage @eastcambs.gov.uk |