
REPORT TO:	Housing and Community Services Committee	AGENDA ITEM: 6
DATE OF MEETING:	27th November 2008	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	Councillor C. Jones	DOC:
SUBJECT:	Rosliston Forestry Centre	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	All	TERMS OF REFERENCE: HCS08

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee wishes to record its full support for the excellent partnership work being undertaken at the Rosliston Forestry Centre. It recognises the value for money that the Centre provides and makes the following recommendations to Housing and Community Services Committee:
- 1.2 That the partners seek to maximise the potential for increasing income and reducing costs on an ongoing basis.
- 1.3 That partners be asked to consider increased contributions to the Business Plan's marketing budget, on the basis that an investment in promotional work will achieve an enhanced return in site income.
- 1.4 That the Committee supports the Partnership's work to secure capital funds to deliver projects that will contribute income or reduce expenditure to the Business Plan.
- 1.5 That a further update on the Vision / Strategic Plan and Business Plan be brought to the O&S Committee at the start of 2009/10 work programme.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To provide a report on the O&S Committee review of the Rosliston Forestry Centre and to consider future actions, to improve the Business Plan performance of the Centre.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 This review was undertaken on 17th September at the Rosliston Forestry Centre. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from the Head of Leisure and Community Development, Stuart Batchelor accompanied by Ian Hickman from the Forestry Commission, Clive Keble from the National Forest Company Debbie Chesterman from Aurora Country Developments Limited (Site Management Company) and the Councils Partnership and Development Manager, Malcolm Roseburgh.

Background

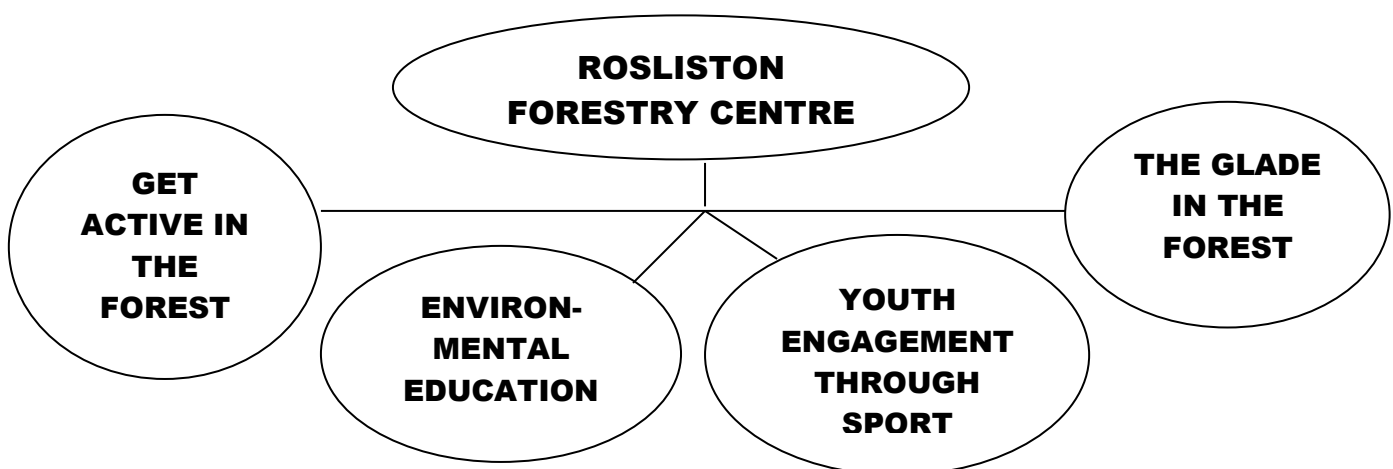
- 3.2 The Centre was established in 1993 through a partnership of South Derbyshire District Council, The National Forest and the Forestry Commission. In 1998 an Executive Group was formally established to oversee the future development of the site as a community and visitor venue and introduce private sector management.
- 3.3 Expressions of interest were sought and from a shortlist of five companies/individuals Aurora Country Developments Ltd were asked to submit a formal business plan. The basis of the contract was to develop the visitor base of the Centre and develop its long-term sustainability. Following the successful development of the Centre under the management of Aurora Country Development the Executive agreed in 2006 to negotiate a long-term contract that was subsequently signed for a 10-year period in line with a Business Plan which would be financially supported by the District Council and Forestry Commission.

Developments

- 3.4 Over the past ten years the Centre has been subject to significant development. Prior to 1998 the Centre was primarily used by walkers, many of whom were exercising dogs and it was struggling to meet the aspirations attached to it being the National Forests first visitor centre. Since then the Centre has been developed as the Forest Physical activity centre with annual attendances increasing from 20,000 to 190,000 (2007/8). In 1998 the Centre had no site management and a number of failing businesses. It now has established site managers and 3 businesses firmly established on site.

RFC Vision and Strategy

- 3.5 In March 2005 a 5 year Vision and Strategy was adopted by the partners. This Vision/Strategic Plan has been achieved already and a new Vision is currently being developed.
- 3.6 Although the vision and subsequent business plan focussed on the Centre itself, it did consider the Centre as the 'hub' for other activities and projects. This is illustrated as follows: -



Performance and Business Planning

- 3.7 The Centre has grown in both financial and customer terms over the past ten years. It is important to illustrate these changes and also to benchmark the Centre with other comparable countryside and leisure facilities.

10 YEAR PERFORMANCE

YEAR	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09 (target)
VISITS	52,398	60,000	78,000	98,854	90,396	131,785	170,276	196,226	200,000
NET EXPEN' (SDDC)	17,119	18,784	32,096	32,860	28,232	48,080	66,974	67,793	65,375
SUBSIDY P.H.	0.33p	0.31p	0.41p	0.33p	0.31p	0.36p	0.39p	0.33p	0.32p

- 3.8 The above table illustrates the increase in costs and number of visitors at the Centre over the past 10 years. The Centres' expenditure has increased significantly due to the change in running costs incurred by the move from a small unmanaged set of buildings to a busy managed visitor centre which has a significant local and regional profile.
- 3.9 The income has also increased significantly which is of particular note as the facility can only operate as a 'free' access leisure facility with a number of revenue streams that complement the Centres' core function, i.e., car parking, rental of business space and overnight accommodation.
- 3.10 The numbers of visitors have significantly exceeded targets, with the rain hit summer of 2007 not affecting the annual increases.

SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL SUPPORTED LEISURE FACILITIES (2007/08)

FACILITY	GREEN BANK LEISURE CENTRE	ETWALL LEISURE CENTRE	SHARPES POTTERY	ROSLISTON FORESTRY CENTRE
VISITORS	82,000	40,000	47300	196,000
NET EXPENDITURE	£155,000	£117,000	£58,000	£67,973
SUBSIDY P.H.	£1.89	£2.92	£1.22	0.33p

- 3.11 The above table demonstrates the comparative costs of the principle leisure / community facilities in South Derbyshire. The facilities are those supported by the District Council either in partnership with other providers or in the case of Green Bank Leisure Centre as the sole funder.

COUNTRYSIDE/FORESTRY CENTRE COMPARISONS (2007/8)

FACILITY	RUSHCLIFFE COUNTRY PARK (78h.a)	POOLEY COUNTRY PARK (62.5ha)	WARWICKSHIRE COUNTRY PARKS (06/07) 8 Parks	ROSLISTON FORESTRY CENTRE (62ha)
VISITORS	200,000	32,500	590,000 estimated	196,000
NET EXPENDITURE	£202,000	£75,000	£189,000	£67,973
SUBSIDY P.H.	£1.02	£1.75	0.32p	0.33p

- 3.12 The above table provides a benchmark against similar countryside facilities. Many countryside parks are significantly larger than Rosliston so are difficult to compare as maintenance cost are not equitable. It is also difficult to compare with urban parks because visitor numbers are not kept. However the above shows two facilities of comparable size that serve as both community facilities and visitor attractions.
- 3.13 The Forestry Commission confirmed that Rosliston Forestry Centre is their one site that delivers the full range of their social and recreational objectives and frequently use the Centre as a showcase of what can be achieved at Forest sites through partnership working.
- 3.14 The National Forest Company have invested significant funds in facilities and activities at Rosliston over the past 10 years and consider the Centre as one of the main gateways to the National Forest. They are extremely pleased with the partnership approach to the development of the Centre and will continue to support its development.

Future Development

Vision and Strategy

- 3.15 Following the rapid delivery of the last Vision and Strategy work has started on the development of a new Strategy. The Strategy will involve the views of the partners along with consultation with Centre users and the local community.

Initiatives

- 3.15 Prior to the extensive consultation envisaged in developing the new strategy the partners have already identified or started work on a number of potential initiatives that contribute in a positive financial manner to the existing vision, values and aspirations. These are tabled below.

RFC Potential Future Developments			
Initiative	Cost Estimate	Financial Benefit	Status
4-6 demonstration standard wooden construction business units	£600,000	£20-25,000 rental income if fully occupied. Offset by management and other costs	Feasibility study completed. Application to DDEP imminent.
Glade Arena developments	£100,000 plus	Increase range of activities possible and thereby income	£50,000 secured
Crazy Golf facility	£30,000	Potential for £8,000pa income based on previous figures and increased visitor numbers	Drawings and estimates available
Wind turbine	£23,000	Reduce electrical energy costs	Initial cost estimates produced
Marquee	£12,000	Improve rental income opportunity for events on site	Identified as opportunity. Business case pending.
Improve Barn Room acoustics	£10,000	Improve rental income from room hire	Feasibility complete.
Bore Hole	£9,000	Reduce water costs.	Initial feasibility commenced.

4.0 Financial Implications

5 Year Business Plan

- 4.1 A business plan has been developed which illustrates the projected financial cost of the Centre for the next 5 years. It makes an assumption of 65% occupancy of the cabins (67% in 2007/8) and that no further income generating or cost reducing developments are provided. The Plan predicts that the Centre will perform at the same cost to the two funding partners based on the experience of operating the facility in its enhanced form for the last two years.
- 4.2 The partners will work with Aurora Country Developments Ltd to further maximise income and reduce expenditure on the site.
- 4.3 The one area that is considered under resourced is the marketing budget, which is very low for promoting the visitor accommodation on the site. The recent peak time TV and media coverage should have a significant positive effect. However, it is generally the case with visitor attractions that the income return on increased marketing activity is greater than the cost of the investment.

5.0 Corporate Implications

- 5.1 Rosliston Forestry Centre makes a significant contribution to the Council's Corporate Plan. Some examples of how it contributes to the six themes are as follows:
 - **Safer and Healthier Communities:** Hub of physical activity in the National Forest and home to the lottery award winning Get Active in the Forest project. Used as a base for sports and play schemes by the Youth Engagement Through Sport (YETS) project in reducing youth nuisance and anti-social behaviour. Provides placements and volunteering opportunities for prisoners and young people at risk.
 - **You at the Centre:** supports the development of the National Forest and investment in community and recreational facilities.
 - **Higher Quality Services:** contributing to EMAS accreditation. 2 green Flag awards. Excellent rating in other QA and customer satisfaction tests.

- ***Prosperity for All:*** Promotes the area as a visitor destination. Targets people with disabilities as visitors. Encourages visitor spend. Social inclusion is a key strategic aim.
- ***Rural South Derbyshire:*** provides access to leisure and recreational activities, especially for young people. Involves community in development of site.
- ***Stronger in the Region:*** Helps to shape south Derbyshire by realising the opportunities ---provided by the National Forest for making the district a great place to live, work and visit.

6.0 Community Implications

- 6.1 The Forestry Centre has developed into one of the District's biggest, busiest and most well used community/leisure/visitor facility. Significant numbers of local people and tourists use the Centre on a regular basis as a venue for exercise, play and holiday.
- 6.2 The development of timber cabin accommodation has resulted in the Centre being a significant contributor to the local tourism economy. Based on 2006 tourism industry figures the 6000 overnight stays themselves generate a spend in the area of £189,240 per annum.
- 6.3 The Centre has an excellent track record in community engagement and social inclusion. All facilities of late have been developed for people with disabilities in mind and the cabins are specifically targeted at that section of the market. There is evidence of engagement with a wide variety of ethnic minority groups in events and activities e.g. Asian walking groups, Chinese New Year celebrations, Afro Caribbean Sculpture etc. The Centres Community Group meets quarterly and has just brought in its first grant (£2,000 for tree signage) to support work at the site. In addition Aurora supply placements for schools, school exclusions, day centres and local prisons.

7.0 Conclusions

- 7.1 The report and evidence provided illustrate that Rosliston Forestry Centre is considered as good value for money when compared with other leisure facilities and similar countryside centres and that the partners responsible for the site are continuing to manage and develop the Centre to achieve increased income and reduced public subsidy.
- 7.2 The Centre was provided and has been operated as a community leisure facility that also attracts visitors from the wider region/country and is a vital part of the emerging National Forest as an area to live, work and visit. .

8.0 Background Papers

- 8.1 None.