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| REPORT TO:                 | COMMUNITY SERVICES<br>COMMITTEE                     | AGENDA ITEM:           | 10  |
| DATE OF<br>MEETING:        | 10 <sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2002                       | CATEGORY:              | DELEGATED   |
| REPORT FROM:               | DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE                              | OPEN                   |   |
| MEMBERS'<br>CONTACT POINT: | CHRIS MASON (5794)                                  | DOC:                   |   |
| SUBJECT:                   | EXIT STRATEGY – SWADLINCOTE<br>WOODLAND FOREST PARK | REF:                   | e:\leisure\committee<br>reports\woodlandsexit.d<br>oc |
| WARD(S)<br>AFFECTED:       | ALL   | TERMS OF<br>REFERENCE: | CSO7  |

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## 1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the actions outlined in this report be noted and approved by Members

## 2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To outline proposals for the future management and development of the Urban Forest Park.

## 3.0 Executive Summary

- 3.1 Single Regeneration Budget 2 (SRB2) spending at the site has now ended and the Council have assumed 'day to day' responsibility for the management and development of the facility. While the creation of the site has involved major capital spending from a number of partners, important elements of the initial vision for the park are still missing. In addition to outlining an approach to how these outstanding elements can be completed, the report also addresses shorter-term issues around the 'day to day' management of the facility. A number of the actions identified in this report also form 'key tasks' in the Technical Services Division's Service Plan.

## 4.0 Detail

### Background

- 4.1 The 'vision element' project, that included the provision of car parking, an office and toilet accommodation and an adventure play area was completed in time for the 'Showcase Event' in early September 2001. The completion of this project and of the 'Best Practice Guide' marked the end of SRB 2 spending at the site. Work on delivering the Enterprise Trail element of the project was being managed by the Council's Arts Development Officer. With this Officer having recently left the employment of the Council, the project is currently in abeyance.

4.2 In considering the 'exit strategy' for the Forest Park, both in the short and longer term, the following issues need to be addressed:

- Implementation and the funding of the site's management plan.
- Full completion of the original vision for the Park including the completion of the Enterprise Trail
- Long term management and development of the site

### **Implementing the Management Plan**

4.3 Members will be aware that Faulks Perry Culley and Rech (FPCR) were appointed as landscape architects and contract administrators for the Urban Forest Park project. Part of FPCR's brief was to provide a detailed management plan for the site. This plan involves recommendations for site maintenance, including specifications and type and frequency of operations. A draft of this plan has now been produced by FPCR. Annexe A contains a breakdown of estimated costs for the tasks identified in the plan.

4.4 In addition to the regular maintenance tasks identified in the 'management plan', assuming responsibility for the site also brought other issues to the fore that require addressing through revenue budgets. This includes land drainage problems, fly tipping, the maintenance of buildings and equipment and service charges arising from the use of these buildings. A breakdown of these costs is attached at Annexe B.

4.5 The revenue funding to implement the management plan should be funded from monies arising from the Section 106 agreement covering the development of the site.

### **Completing the original vision for the park**

4.6 The major capital work undertaken so far can realistically be described as completing the infrastructure of the Park. However, while over 40,000 trees have been planted on the site and over 3000m of surfaced footpath has been laid, major elements of the initial vision for the site remain outstanding. These elements include:

- Completion of the network of surfaced paths and the provision of a cycleway through the site. To allow full access to all areas, an important element of the scheme has always been the provision of quality, surfaced footpaths
- Provision of more boardwalks and decking to allow for further development of environmental education activities in the wetland areas.
- Completion of the boundary planting
- Further development of the Gallery Grid and Orchard Core. The Gallery Grid area was envisaged as the central activity core of the park. Important initial work has been undertaken in this area, including the creation of the Sensory Garden and outdoor education area. A large number of 'grids' however still require development.
- While some site interpretation has been installed a great deal of work still needs to be undertaken to provide quality signage and interpretation.
- Completion of the adventure play area and link footpaths to this facility. Because of financial constraints it was necessary to reduce the scope of the 'vision elements' project. This involved a reduction in the size of the play area and the

omission of footpath links.

- Delivering the vision of the 'Gateway Bridge' linking the Urban Forest Park to Gresley Common and other local green space.
- Completion of the 'Enterprise Trail' project

## **The Way Forward**

- 4.7 In 2000/2001, a scheme was developed under the heading of 'Access Improvements'. The details of the individual elements of this scheme are included in Annexe C. At this time applications were made to the Derbyshire Environmental Trust, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and the Council's own capital programme. While the application to Derbyshire Environmental Trust received a positive response we were unsuccessful in obtaining the remaining funding. A lack of staff resources meant it was impractical at the time to pursue other funding options for this project.
- 4.8 The appointment of the Temporary Project Officer in the Facilities and Development unit has now provided an opportunity to explore other options and applications have now been made to the organisations identified in Annexe C. Responses to these applications are anticipated in March / April 2002.
- 4.9 Initial investigation has been made into the possibility of obtaining funding for the Gateway Bridge. Apart from the possibility of Arts Lottery Funding for a small element of the project there are not, at the present time, obvious opportunities to fund what is likely to be a major project costing in the region of £250,000.
- 4.10 Clearly, even if successful with our applications there is probably in the region of a minimum of £600,000 of capital work that could/should still be undertaken at the site (including the Gateway Bridge and the necessary link footpaths). While it may be possible, in conjunction with the 'Friends of the Park' to tackle individual projects on a piecemeal basis obtaining funding of this level really requires the expertise and the backing of a wider partnership, similar to the 'Made in Swadlincote' partnership.
- 4.11 Following the loss of the Arts Development/Cultural Regeneration Officer the provision of public art on the Enterprise Trail has been difficult to progress. This progress has also been hampered by the offering of £2,500 saving from the Public Art Budget for 2002/3, which reduces the Council's ability to provide partnership funding in any grant application. Officers will continue to consider ways of progressing the project with applications to funding partners where appropriate. These applications will include management fees to enable external supervision of the project by an Art Specialist/Organisation.

## **Long Term Management and Development of the Site**

- 4.12 The Urban Forest Park, occupying as it does 35 hectares of land and hoping to attract in its early years, 30,000 visitors per annum, is an important facility in the creation of the National Forest. To develop the site to its maximum capacity it would seem appropriate to seek a partner with the necessary expertise to assist the Council with this task. Unlike Rosliston Forestry Centre, where there was existing and possible future income generating opportunities, this is not so obviously the case with the Urban Forest Park.

- 4.13 To see what interest existed in working with the Council on managing and developing the site, an advert was placed in the Countryside Job Search publication. Responses were received from four organisations and in the case of three of these organisations this interest was followed up with informal meetings. The organisations that expressed an interest at this early stage were from the private sector, the trading arm of a registered charity and another local authority. The next stage is to produce a document that would outline the basis of a partnership for consideration by Members and prospective partners. Unfortunately, other priorities and long term sickness to key personnel has meant delays in producing this documentation.

### **The Way Forward**

- 4.14 Progressing the seeking of a partner to assist in the development of the Urban Forest Park is a key task in the Technical Service's Service Plan. A draft timetable for delivering the project is contained at Annexe D. It should be stressed that at this stage delivery of this element is very much dependent on the unit returning to 'full strength' particularly given the likely staffing resource requirements of next year's Leisure Services Best Value Review
- 4.15 As a short-term measure, Park Wardens have been employed at the site since August 2001. The staff's current fixed term part time contracts are due to expire at the end of March 2002. The Wardens have had a major impact in both dealing with 'day to day' problems and tackling some of the larger specialist jobs that require doing

### **5.0 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 Revenue funding shortfalls should be met through Section 106 monies. Support for the 'Access Improvement' project is being sought through a bid for inclusion in the Council's 2002/2003 Capital Programme.
- 5.2 The revenue budget continues to be developed and some costs identified in Annexe B, particular for the service charges, are very much estimates. It is also likely that the more facilities are improved at the site, the greater the revenue commitment will be. However, it is possible at this stage to make an assessment of how long the £401,000 of 106 monies will last before the Council needs to totally fund the revenue requirements of the site. At current rates, making allowance for a further growth in the revenue requirements of the site, the 106 monies are likely to last for 6, possibly 7 years. This does not include any interest the 106 allocation may generate over future years.

### **6.0 Corporate Implications**

- 6.1 The further development of the Urban Forest Park would make a major contribution to a number of the Council's Key Corporate Aims.

### **7.0 Community Implications**

- 7.1 A key feature in the creation of the Urban Forest Park has been the high levels of community involvement. It is intended to retain this interest and commitment in the future development of the site.

### **8.0 Conclusions**

8.1 The report is intended to highlight the current position in the development of the site and to bring to Members' attention actions proposed for the future. The site is already well used and its future development will make a major contribution to regeneration of the area. Members' comments are sought on the proposals, particularly those relating to the future management of the site.

## 9.0 Background Papers

9.1 Draft Management Plan produced by FPCR

