

The Vale of Glamorgan Council

Cabinet Meeting: 16th April 2018

Report of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Planning

Development of Tourism and Commercial Opportunities at Countryside Service Sites

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval to offer areas of open space land (under lease agreements) to third party partner organisations to develop new activities and facilities that will enhance the product offer for both residents and visitors within the Vale of Glamorgan, within Cosmeston Lakes Country Park, Porthkerry Country Park and Leckwith woods as set out in Appendices A-F attached to this report.

Recommendations

1. That the Council undertakes a marketing exercise and invites tenders for development of tourism and commercial opportunities at the locations identified in the Appendices [A](#) - [E](#) attached to the report and in accordance with the contents of this report.
2. That authority be granted to the Head of Legal Services in consultation with the Head of Finance, to advertise the areas of land shown in Appendix [B](#), [D](#), [E](#), [G](#) & [H](#) for disposal by lease to third party partner organisation as required by Section 123(2A) of the Local Government Act 1972, and, subject to no objections being received, to proceed with disposal, subject to the use of appropriate delegated powers.
3. That the Head of Regeneration and Planning be given delegated powers, in consultation with the Managing Director and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning, to agree fees/charges, terms and conditions for new commercial (leisure and tourism) activities in respect of Leckwith Woods and to authorise the Head of Legal Services to enter into the appropriate legal agreements on behalf of the Council in this regard.
4. That the Head of Legal be authorised to prepare, complete and execute the necessary legal documents required to enter into commercial partnerships.

Reasons for the Recommendations

1. To improve the tourism capability of the Vale of Glamorgan Council and secure income to support the costs of running Countryside facilities.

2. To address legal requirements.
3. In order to select the appropriate tenders.
4. To expedite decisions and enter into arrangements.

Background

2. A report was submitted to Cabinet (Tourism and Commercial Opportunities at Countryside Service Sites C3043 - 11th January 2016) to seek authority to invite tenders from potential commercial partners in order to create new tourism and commercial opportunities in Cosmeston Lakes and Porthkerry Country Parks, and to investigate opportunities at Leckwith Woods. Two separate invitations to tender for the provision of tourism and commercial activities at the country parks were subsequently submitted to the Sell2Wales web site.
3. As a result, a new ice cream parlour was established at Cosmeston Lakes and discussions are ongoing in respect of other operations, the most likely to progress shortly being an open water swimming commercial partnership at Cosmeston. In parallel a number of organisers have been signed up to provide weddings at both country parks.
4. These new partnerships will enhance the product offer for visitors to Cosmeston Lakes Country Park, developing the tourism offer, whilst providing income to the Council to contribute to future savings.
5. It is envisaged that these new business partnerships will provide further evidence of the potential viability of the commercial opportunities that exist within the Country Parks and will help promote the sites for further investment.

Relevant Issues and Options

6. Delegated powers are already in place for the Country Parks and Medieval village, that allow the Head of Regeneration and Planning, in consultation with the Managing Director and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning, to agree fees/charges, terms and conditions for new commercial (leisure, tourism and retail) activities and to authorise the Head of Legal Services to enter into the appropriate legal agreements on behalf of the Council in this regard. This was restricted to the country parks only and hence the same delegated authority is required for any future negotiation relating to Leckwith woods (see recommendation 4).
7. The previously submitted Cabinet report (Tourism and Commercial Opportunities at Countryside Service Sites C3043 - 11th January 2016) proposed that officers investigate tourism and commercial opportunities at Leckwith woods.
8. The Commercial Opportunities Officer identified and contacted a number of external companies, who provide commercial leisure activities and facilities at other locations throughout the UK. Providers were invited to inspect the sites identified in this report to gauge interest and to ascertain if the sites were viable for investment. A number of companies expressed an interest in developing camping pods at all three sites due to their unique setting and market potential, with the favoured locations being set out in the Appendices.
9. The area selected at Cosmeston Lakes Country Park (appendices A & B) is approximately 4 acres in size and sits within a semi improved field system approximately 35 acres in size and lies to the south west of the country park and abuts Lavernock Road. Due to the site's seclusion and its close proximity to Penarth

and Cardiff it has high potential as an area for development as a possible camping / pod site.

10. The area selected at Porthkerry (appendices C, D & E) consists of the current site used as a pitch and putt golf course and is approximately 7.5 acres in size. The proposed site would be offered as two separate commercial opportunities, plot `A` will be offered as a development site for camping / pods, with plot `B` developed as an outdoor tourism activity area, such as a high ropes facility.
11. With the development of a number of open access golf courses (such as Cottrell Park and the Vale of Glamorgan) which are able to offer high quality 18 hole courses open all year, golf user numbers at Porthkerry continue to fall. Due to management costs and issues with flooding during the autumn / winter months the course opens from April through to September. Over the past 5 years the revenue generated has failed to cover the costs of providing the course.
12. Based on much reduced opening hours, wage costs for 2017/18 exceeded £9k, with receipts for the use of the pitch and putt £5k. This figure does not include the considerable maintenance costs for the golf course.
13. An initial assessment of Leckwith woods has ascertained what activities would be best suited and have a low impact on the ecology of the site. Activities such as cycling, bush craft, low level rope courses and eco-friendly camping pods are deemed potentially suitable. A number of areas have been identified and it is considered they will have a low impact on the environment.
14. The Council owns two large tranches of woodland within the Leckwith area (Appendix F). One is generically known as Leckwith Woods and is 142 acres in size (Appendix G) and the other, generically known as Cwm Cydfin Woods, is 109 acres in size (Appendix H).
15. Leckwith Woods lies within close proximity and with easy access of Trelai Park in Cardiff. Only Leckwith Woods has any formal public right of way, but this has been supplemented in recent years by a large timber extraction track potentially suitable for service vehicles. Such tracks were earlier installed throughout Cwm Cydfin Woods (Appendix H) in the late 1990s.
16. Since 1996 both woodlands have been continually managed by the Council. Management has taken place in accordance with several approved woodland management plans produced by the Council and approved by the Forestry Commission [Wales] and its successor authority Natural Resources Wales.
17. The area of existing woodland has been considerably supplemented by the creation of new native woodland areas on previously grazed land at Cwm Cydfin. This is now well established and serves to further diversify and enhance the existing mature woodland, whilst buffering the potential effects from adjacent newly developed residential ownership and a busy highway.
18. Due to the close proximity to Cardiff and the M4, the site potentially has high value with regard to development in relation to outdoor activities such as Zip wires, high rope course, mountain bike trails and other activities such as camping pods that have a low impact on the site`s ecology and appearance.
19. Leckwith woods require continued management to ensure that all trees abutting highways are managed in accordance with health and safety guidelines. There are considerable resource implications on the Council due to these factors. Resources

are not adequate to continually manage the area and other income streams will have to be developed to ensure the future protection and management of the site.

20. Proposed site `X` at Leckwith wood is 142 acres in size (Appendix G) and was deemed the favourable option with regard to development as an area for outdoor activities such as mountain biking, tree rope courses and zip wires. It is not envisaged that any of these activities will require the whole area of the woodland, but will utilise natural path ways and selected small scale areas to develop individual land based activities.
21. Due to logistical issues with regard to access points and the requirements of any potential development it is expected that any commercial proposal would require an appropriate feasibility study carried out by the proposer prior to development. It is not envisaged that the whole of the area will be required as most land based activities are confined to small areas not exceeding 20 acres.
22. Proposed Site `Y` at Cwm Cydfin Woods (Appendix H) is 109 acres in size and is best suited as an area for camping pods. It is envisaged that an area of between 12 and 14 acres of land would be set aside for the development of this activity.
23. Countryside sites within the Vale of Glamorgan are seen as destination venues for both residents and tourists. They are pivotal in attracting tourists and vital to the local economy, however they constantly need to adapt to the needs of users. The development of new sustainable activities/attractions will improve the offer to users and encourage greater footfall and have a direct impact on the future development of the Vale of Glamorgan as a destination venue, benefiting the local economy and leisure industry.
24. Any new activity will improve the Council's asset and develop the visitor experience. In addition any new activity will secure increased income generation for the Council.
25. An initial environmental assessment has been carried out on the locations identified, however environmental considerations will need to be taken into full account before any agreement is reached.
26. Any successful proposal may need to obtain appropriate detailed planning consent whilst meeting any recommendations or requirements made by Natural Resources Wales and other statutory consultees.
27. It is not intended that the Council invests in any such activities itself, but that the Council enters into a series of agreements with third parties. This will enhance what is currently offered at the sites, increase footfall and tourism opportunities leading to a significant increase in income, which will contribute to future savings targets.

Resource Implications (Financial and Employment)

28. Saving targets for the Countryside Service include the generation of additional income and these proposals seek to raise income from service providers, in a fair and balanced way, whilst also maintaining viable competitive services and attracting visitors and tourists as appropriate.
29. Income generation will enable the continued management of Countryside sites and ensure that the future management of all facilities are adequately catered for.
30. Estates and Legal officer`s resource will be required as a result of entering into any legal agreement with a third party, some of these costs will be reimbursed by the third party where appropriate.

Sustainability and Climate Change Implications

31. The Countryside Service offers a comprehensive environmental education package to schools, community groups and users.
32. The proposals seek to ensure sustainability of sites and promote local economic development and employment through tourism.
33. Increased leisure and tourism activities within the Vale of Glamorgan will primarily reduce the need to travel for residents.

Legal Implications (to Include Human Rights Implications)

34. The Council will be required to negotiate terms and conditions and enter into appropriate legal agreements e.g. contracts, leases and licences as appropriate.
35. Planning permission may be required for the proposals.
36. In the event of any disposal of open space, it will be subject to the statutory consultation provisions of S123 and subject to approval, in addition the Council has a statutory and fiduciary duty pursuant to Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to secure the best consideration possible for any property disposal.

Crime and Disorder Implications

37. Investment in facilities will create higher levels of use and effective supervision in the evenings, helping to reduce vandalism and antisocial behaviour.
38. Appropriate charges allow the Council to provide staff at sites which reduce crime and disorder.

Equal Opportunities Implications (to include Welsh Language issues)

39. No equality implications were identified at this stage.
40. Any proposal received from a third party organisation will be assessed to ensure it meets the Council's Equal Opportunities policies and if necessary a further Equality Impact assessment will be undertaken based on a detailed proposal.
41. Third party delivery organisations will be required to comply with the Council's Welsh Language policies.

Corporate/Service Objectives

42. It is a Regeneration & Planning, Service Plan objective to explore opportunities for commercial partnerships on Council sites for the provision of tourism based activities (ER6).
43. The proposals directly relate to the Corporate Plan objective to work in partnership to deliver a range of activities through our leisure, community facilities and parks to increase levels of participation and physical activity.

Policy Framework and Budget

44. This report is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.

Consultation (including Ward Member Consultation)

45. The following Ward Members covering the Countryside Service sites have been consulted:

Iltyd Ward: Cllr Janice Charles, Cllr Anthony Hampton, Cllr Marguerita Wright.

Baruc Ward: Cllr Nic Hodges, Cllr Steffan Wiliam.

Plymouth Ward: Cllr Benjamin Gray, Cllr Kathryn F McCaffer.

Sully Ward: Cllr Kevin Mahoney, Cllr Bob Penrose.

Llandough Ward: Cllr George Carroll.

Dinas Powis Ward: Cllr Robert Crowley, Cllr Vincent Peter Driscoll, Cllr Stephen John Griffiths, Cllr Andrew Robertson.

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

46. Environment & Regeneration.

Background Papers

Income Generation and Commercial Opportunities Policy December 2017 (Min. C158).

Contact Officer

Steve Pickering, Team Leader, Countryside Services

Officers Consulted

Head of Regeneration & Planning
Bob Guy, Operational Manager, Regeneration
Legal Services (Committee reports)
Strategic Estates Manager
Operational Manager, Accountancy

Responsible Officer:

Rob Thomas, Managing Director