

REPORT TO:	Environmental and Development Services Committee	AGENDA ITEM: 10
DATE OF MEETING:	6 th March, 2014	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	Director of Community and Planning	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	Philip Heath, Conservation and Heritage Officer x5936	DOC:
SUBJECT:	Public Consultation on Draft Vision and Plan for Elvaston Castle and Estate	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	Aston	TERMS OF REFERENCE: *see below

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the committee welcomes the consultation document and gives its written support to the vision and proposed strategy outlined in it.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 The purpose of the report is to summarise the present consultation document and the background to it, for the committee's information as an important long-standing and topical matter. Although Elvaston Castle belongs to Derbyshire County Council and is popularly perceived as an adjunct of Derby City, it lies within South Derbyshire and is one of the district's major assets both as a heritage site and as a green space for leisure and recreation.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 Derbyshire County Council purchased the Elvaston estate in 1969 and opened it as a Country Park in 1970. In doing so the County Council saved the estate from gravel extraction, a fact which is easily overlooked 45 years on. The high level of public access has engendered a strong sense of ownership by the public. This is a very positive force, but has also opened the County Council to criticism as the state of the buildings and grounds has entered a pronounced decline.
- 3.2 There are 18 listed buildings on the estate, and the park and gardens are also Grade II* on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. The chief interest of the estate stems from the exotic development of the gardens in the first half of the 19th century by the 4th Earl of Harrington and his wife Maria Foote, a former actress. Both these and the wider grounds (which Capability Brown is said to have seen no capabilities in), were transformed from 1830 onwards in the hands of William Barron of Elvaston who developed a way of transplanting mature trees, and were kept in a very high state of cultivation until the 4th Earl died in 1851. The grounds were kept very private until then.
- 3.3 Apart from the café, the Castle itself is no longer publicly accessible, and the museum failed to re-open after the latest outbreak of foot and mouth disease. A

detailed study part-funded by English Heritage in 2010 concluded that £6.42m was needed simply to put the buildings back into repair, not including the costs of adapting them to new uses. The estate costs the County Council £800,000 a year to manage, which is not sustainable, especially in a time of competing demands for funding and severe cuts. A bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for restoration of the grounds failed in 2000 because the Lottery wished to consider a solution for the whole entity, i.e. grounds and buildings, and not just the grounds in isolation.

- 3.4 A subsequent exercise to find a new partner to develop the estate resulted in Highgate Sanctuary Ltd. being selected as preferred partner in 2004. A scheme was worked up involving a hotel and golf course, but no planning permissions were ever granted and the scheme was opposed from some quarters, including English Heritage. The exercise to find a partner is therefore to be repeated.
- 3.5 It is now more than ten years since the County Council first embarked on a programme to find an alternative user for the estate, and the present consultation is the result of a short-term working arrangement between the County Council and the National Trust to define a way forward. There is no implicit assumption that the National Trust will be part of an eventual long-term future for Elvaston, although the possibility is not ruled out. The District Council's planning and conservation officers have been involved in the evolution of the draft consultation document, which was approved by the DCC cabinet on 21st January 2014 and can be both consulted and responded to online.
- 3.6 Meanwhile, English Heritage has helped to reduce the conservation deficit by grant-aiding the recent full repair of some structures including the Golden Gates and flanking walls, the Moorish Temple and adjacent terrace, the ha-ha on the Ambaston avenue and rebuilding of collapsed walling in the walled garden. The County Council has also tackled the re-roofing of part of the Castle itself, and is preparing to re-roof a further part. Some other localised structural repairs at the Castle have also been carried out.
- 3.7 The core parts of the consultation paper are the guiding principles, actions and estate masterplan, which are briefly considered in the following paragraphs:
- 3.8 **Guiding principles.** These comprise: involvement of the community and other stakeholders in shaping the future; retention of freehold by DCC; delegation of management responsibilities to a newly-created single management body; the need to move towards greater financial sustainability; preservation of the historic, landscape and biodiversity significance; and maintenance of public access (free of charge if arriving on foot, or by bicycle or horse, at least to the park). Submission of a major bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund is still envisaged as a key aim in fulfilling these principles.
- 3.9 **Actions:** In the first three years, the emphasis will be on creating the infrastructure – physically, financially and in terms of governance – that will provide a solid foundation on which to deliver the long-term aspirations of the Vision.
- 3.10 After the first three years, the emphasis will shift towards incrementally improving the visitor welcome, facilities, and 'offer', whilst strengthening the historic significance of the landscape through appropriate maintenance and management. It is also highly probable that the phased regeneration of the many buildings across the site will continue throughout this period.

- 3.11 **Estate masterplan.** This looks at preferred uses for existing buildings and spaces, infrastructure improvements (including site drainage), and sites for possible enabling development *if* there is a clearly evidenced need for it. A few salient points may be singled out for the purposes of this short report:
- 3.12 It is suggested that the main car park should be moved nearer to the buildings at the hub of the estate, along with the children’s playground. In the Castle itself, the ground floor is envisaged as a visitor hub with catering facilities, WCs, retail outlets, and space for celebrations and historic interpretation. Some of these uses would also apply to the neighbouring buildings. In the upper floors of the Castle, suggested uses include small-scale conference and meeting facilities, offices and residential accommodation for lettings or “staycations”. Managed public access to the upper floors is desirable to enjoy the views over the ground, and to see the unusual cast iron orchid house on the roof over the main staircase.
- 3.13 Possible locations for residential enabling development include the Frame Yard by the walled gardens, the Home Farm off Bedford Drive, site of the Thatched Cottage (demolished), site of former Kennels Cottage (demolished), the London Road Lodges (now reduced to a mere façade) and the Real Tennis Court.
- 3.14 Long term leases of existing buildings not required by the core visitor needs will be considered if these are necessary to encourage investors to buy into the vision.
- 3.15 The closing date for the consultation is officially Wednesday March 5th, but the National Trust has been informed of the present meeting and has agreed to take account of any comments arising from it.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 None

5.0 Corporate Implications

- 5.1 Although the District Council is not directly involved in the management of Elvaston, the facilities there are important to Theme L1 “Lifestyle Choices” of the Corporate Plan. It is one of the District’s most important leisure facilities for recreational, cultural and sporting activity, and the District Council therefore has a vested interest in its future.

6.0 Community Implications

- 6.1 Maintenance of the buildings, landscape and public facilities at Elvaston contributes to the “Healthier Communities” and “Vibrant Communities” themes of the Sustainable Community Strategy 2009-2029, by encouraging sport and active recreation, and by making South Derbyshire an attractive place to live.

7.0 Background Papers

- 7.1 See <http://www.futureelvaston.co.uk/engagement-consultation/documents.html>