
REPORT TO:	COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 6
DATE OF MEETING:	11 APRIL 2002	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	OVERVIEW COMMITTEE	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	CLLR R BELL (CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW COMMITTEE)	DOC:
SUBJECT:	EXIT STRATEGY - SWADLINCOTE WOODLANDS FOREST PARK: FINAL REPORT	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: CS07

1.0 Recommendations

1.1 The Committee is recommended to:

Receive this report from the Overview Committee on the future management and development of the Swadlincote Woodlands Forest Park.

Adopt the recommendations set out in Section 5 as the basis of a way forward for the Forest Park.

2.0 Detail

Introduction

- 2.1 At the January meeting of this Committee, members referred a report on the future management and development of the Swadlincote Woodlands Forest Park (the 'exit strategy') to the Overview Committee for further consideration.
- 2.2 The Overview Committee has discussed the matter on three occasions – 21 and 30 January and 18 March 2002.
- 2.3 Contributions were received from Chris Mason (Facilities and Development Manager), Malcolm Roseburgh (Community Regeneration Officer) and John Oake (Chair of the Swadlincote Woodlands Regeneration Board).

Matters discussed

- 2.4 At the first meeting, the Committee explored with officers:
- The background to the Forest Park project and the wider Swadlincote Woodlands Regeneration Scheme

- Implementation and funding of the Management Plan for the Forest Park
 - The vision for the Park and how it might be completed (including paths and cycleway, the 'Gateway Bridge', the Enterprise Trail etc.)
 - The long term management and development of the site
- 2.5 At the second meeting, the Committee took 'stock' of this information. Members agreed that prior to reporting back, they would like to have the views of the Swadlincote Woodlands Regeneration Board.
- 2.6 John Oake (Chair of the Regeneration Board) attended the March meeting. The discussion covered:
- The formation of the Made in Swadlincote Partnership, its objectives and the Swadlincote Woodlands Regeneration Scheme
 - The role and composition of the Regeneration Board both now and in the future (i.e. at the end of the lifetime of the Scheme)
 - The Board's vision for the Forest Park and the extent to which it had been achieved
 - Linkages with other facilities - locally and within the wider National Forest area
 - Partnership arrangements to secure the future management and development of the Forest Park
 - The potential contribution of a Forest Park 'Friends Group'

The key issues

- 2.7 In terms of the Council's 'exit strategy' for the Park, there are three issues that need to be addressed:
- Funding and implementation of the management plan for the site
 - Completion of the original 'vision' (in particular, the Enterprise Trail and the Gateway Bridge)
 - Long term management and development of the site

Management Plan

- 2.8 The Forest Park, comprising, 33 hectares of previously despoiled land, is a core element of the Swadlincote Woodlands Regeneration Scheme.
- 2.9 The development of the Park has been funded from SRB Challenge Funds (in excess of £500,000) with additional monies from the National Forest Company and local businesses.
- 2.10 The Swadlincote Woodlands Scheme has now reached the end of its life, although the Regeneration Board will continue for about a year to manage the 'exit strategy' for the different projects. Funding of the Forest Park from SRB Challenge Funds has ceased and with that, the Council has assumed 'day to day' responsibility for the management and development of the facility.
- 2.11 The Park comprises a mixture of woodlands, undisturbed areas for wildlife and specific areas for recreation. Members were informed that it had been designed in such a way as to cut down on the high maintenance costs that are often typical of

traditional urban parks. Thus, while some areas will need regular maintenance, other, more natural areas will require little intervention.

- 2.12 Landscape Architects have produced a plan for the management of the Park. This makes recommendations about how the site should be maintained, including the type and frequency of maintenance operations that the Council will have to undertake.
- 2.13 The Council also has to deal with a number of other 'on going' tasks. These relate to land drainage issues, removal of fly tipping, prevention of vandalism and the maintenance of buildings and equipment.
- 2.14 Details of the probable revenue expenditure for 2001/02 are set out below along with the budget provision for 2002/03.

	Probable Estimate 2001/02 £	Cash Limit Estimate 2002/03 £
Employees	13,260	29,870
Ground Maintenance	10,480	11,480
Supplies and services	180	180
Central Dept and Tech. Support	20,580	16,210
Capital Financing	40,090	47,070
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	84,590	104,810
Income (106 Agreement)	13,440	30,050
NET EXPENDITURE	71,150	74,760

- 2.15 At the present time, these costs are being met from a sum (£401,000) that has been made available through a Section 106 (planning) agreement for residential development on adjoining land. At current rates, making allowance for further growth in revenue funding, this fund will be depleted within approximately six/seven years.
- 2.16 It is clear, therefore, that present arrangements for funding the management and maintenance of the Park are not sustainable in the long term.

Completion of the Forest Park 'vision'

- 2.17 Although the basic Park infrastructure is in place (with the planting of 40,000 trees, the laying out of over 3000m of surfaced footpaths and the provision of an adventure play area, car park and toilets), a number of elements of the original 'vision' remain outstanding. They include:
- Access improvements (completion of the network of surfaced paths, the establishment of a cycleway through the site and the provision of additional boardwalks and decking)
 - Further development of specific areas within the Park (such as, the 'Gallery Grid' and 'Orchard Core')
 - Site signage and interpretation
 - Completion of the 'Enterprise Trail' project
 - Construction of the 'Gateway Bridge' across Derby Road

- 2.18 John Oake observed that whilst the 'operational' side of the Forest Park project had been delivered (i.e. an area of despoiled land had been turned into a fully usable park with related facilities), the 'aspirational' side had not been fully achieved, especially the community art provision. He believed that there were significant opportunities for linking the Park with other local facilities and heritage features.
- 2.19 Officers had begun to explore alternative sources of funding for the remaining projects such as the Derbyshire Environmental Trust, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and the Arts Lottery.
- 2.20 Funding applications had been made for a package of 'access improvements', including the proposed cycleway, and decisions from the funding bodies were imminent. However, even if these applications are successful, there is probably a minimum of £600,000 of capital works outstanding.
- 2.21 The 'Gateway Bridge' (with an estimated cost £250,000) is a major component of this outstanding expenditure. The Committee noted that, at the present time, there are no obvious opportunities for funding the project and whilst the bridge might serve to link the Park with other facilities, it was something upon which local people might legitimately have a view. (Members of the Committee also had different views on whether the bridge should go ahead.)
- 2.22 The Committee also discussed the Enterprise Trail. Work on the trail is currently in abeyance, following the resignation of the Arts Development Officer who managed the project. Officers explained that they were investigating other means of taking this project forward with partner organisations.
- 2.23 The Committee concluded that in the absence of a clear funding stream, it was doubtful whether the vision for the Park could be fully achieved.

Long-term management and development of the Park

- 2.24 Officers indicated that the future management and development of the Park could be delivered through a partnership arrangement. A partner with the necessary expertise would bring to the table specialist knowledge and management capacity and would be better placed to attract/generate additional resources.
- 2.25 It was likely that any partner would require a management fee. Officers suggested that over time, it would be reasonable to expect that the partner would be able to secure other funding or income streams, thereby reducing the requirement for revenue funding from the Council. The Committee considered that this was likely to be some time ahead, given that there is no obvious income generating opportunities at the present time.
- 2.25 The Committee noted that several organisations had already submitted expressions of interest following an initial advert. This would suggest that a partnership arrangement might be feasible and worth investigating further. Officers indicated that it would take at least 12 months to get a partnership in place.
- 2.26 John Oake also drew the Committee's attention to the potential contribution of a 'Friends of Swadlincote Woodlands Forest Park' Group in the maintenance of the site and the exploitation of fund raising opportunities. The nucleus of such a group

was already in place and helping the group to develop further, could form part of the brief for any prospective partner.

3.0 Conclusions

- 3.1 The Committee recognises and commends the tremendous amount of work that has already taken place to transform a substantial area of despoiled land into an asset for the local community.
- 3.2 The recommendations made in Section 5 are intended to support the management and development of the Forest Park in the short term (that is until a partnership arrangement is in place) and in the long term (in the event of the Council being unable to conclude a partnership arrangement and/or the partner failing to generate new income streams).

4.0 Financial implications.

- 4.1 These have been dealt with in the body of the report.

5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 It is recommended that:

1. **A business plan for the next 2 years is prepared. This should plan and prioritise work (both on and off site) and identify potential sources of funding. Specific consideration should be given to the promotion of the Forest Park (e.g. through signage) and to arrangements for consulting local people about proposals for the site.**
2. **Gradually reduce dependence on the Section 106 monies to meet revenue costs and increase reliance on the General Fund. This will extend the 'life' of the Section 106 monies (which might be needed as 'matched' funding for a particular project) and provide a gradual transition to the position where the full operating costs are borne by the General Fund.**
3. **Continue to progress plans for a partnership arrangement to take over the management and development of the Park. (The business plan will need to explain how the Park will be managed and supported in the interim).**
4. **Continue to support the development of the 'Friends of Swadlincote Woodlands Forest Park' Group (including the establishment of a formal constitution) and encourage and assist the Group to apply for external funding for Park projects.**

6.0 Background Papers

'From the legacy of pits and pots' Swadlincote Woodlands Regeneration Board (2001)

Minute No CS/70 Community Services Committee (10 January 2002)
Minute No CS/88 Community Services Committee (21 February 2002)
Minute No OV/19 Overview Committee (21 January 2002)
Minute No OV/23 Overview Committee (30 January 2002)
Minute No OV/26 Overview Committee (18 March 2002)

