

Cabinet



Forest Heath
District Council

Title of Report:	Brandon Country Park	
Report No:	CAB/FH/18/012	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	13 February 2018
Portfolio holders:	Councillor Andy Drummond Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Culture Tel: 01638 751411 Email: andy.drummond@forest-heath.gov.uk Councillor David Bowman Portfolio Holder for Operations Tel: 07711 593737 Email: david.bowman@forest-heath.gov.uk	
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Purpose of report:	The purpose of this report is twofold: (1) To consider a proposal from Suffolk County Council for Forest Heath District Council to acquire the freehold of Brandon Country Park. (2) To obtain Member approval to proceed with the transfer based on the position negotiated with Suffolk County Council.	
Recommendation:	It is <u>RECOMMENDED</u> that, subject to successful negotiations: (1) Members approve a transfer of the freehold of Brandon Country Park from Suffolk County Council to Forest Heath District Council for the nominal sum of £1;	

	<p>(2) Forest Heath District Council operates Brandon Country Park consistent with the management of other parks in West Suffolk;</p> <p>(3) Members note the estimated 2018/19 revenue budget position for the park outlined in paragraph 3.4 and Appendix 2 of Report No: Cab/FH/18/012 and the potential costs thereafter; and</p>
<p>Key Decision:</p> <p><i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that do not apply.)</i></p>	<p><i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i></p> <p>Yes, it is a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No, it is not a Key Decision - <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(a) A key decision means an executive decision which, pending any further guidance from the Secretary of State, is likely to:</p> <p>(ii) result in any new expenditure, income or savings of more than £50,000 in relation to the Council's revenue budget or capital programme;</p>
<p><i>The decisions made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item is included on the Decisions Plan.</i></p>	
Consultation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not at this stage
Alternative option(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do nothing and let SCC try and find an alternative operator or close the facility.
Implications:	
<p><i>Are there any financial implications? If yes, please give details</i></p>	<p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The council will need to review the revenue implications of running the facility beyond financial year 2018-19.</p>
<p><i>Are there any staffing implications? If yes, please give details</i></p>	<p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Staff will TUPE to the council as outlined in the body of the report.</p>
<p><i>Are there any ICT implications? If yes, please give details</i></p>	<p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>We will install ICT facilities in the engine/pump house to serve our staff working there.</p>
<p><i>Are there any legal and/or policy implications? If yes, please give details</i></p>	<p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>A legal transfer of asset is proposed from SCC to FHDC.</p>
<p><i>Are there any equality implications? If yes, please give details</i></p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>

Risk/opportunity assessment:		<i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i>	
Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
Costs of running the site exceed expectations	Medium	Financial modelling has been undertaken based on actual cost data received from the current owners SCC	Low
Revenue generated at the site fails to meet amounts assumed and budgeted	Medium	Estimated revenue based upon current actuals and potential identified by our partners Verse and the car parks team	Low
Ward(s) affected:		All Wards (but located in Brandon West)	
Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i>		N/A	
Documents attached:		<i>(Please list any appendices.)</i> Appendix 1 – Map of the park Appendix 2 – Draft budget for managing the site in 2018-19	

1. Background

- 1.1 In 2010 Suffolk County Council (SCC) took the decision to try and transfer the ownership of all its parks, country parks and nature reserves to other organisations. Brandon Country Park is now the only such facility owned and managed by the County Council.
- 1.2 In recent years, SCC have invested in the site and made some significant improvements. These improvements have included capital investment in the café facility (including additional space for café seating, a new purpose built kitchen and a new shop) and achievement of Visit England's 'Quality Assured Visitor Attraction'.
- 1.3 The County Council has recently reviewed its activities and would like to transfer the park to FHDC on the basis that the West Suffolk Parks Team already manages a large portfolio of sites across both FHDC & SEBC and is therefore able to realise economy of scale savings that could be realised were the facility to be managed by that team. SCC also wants to see continued use of the site as a country park, so a transfer to FHDC would be a good fit.
- 1.4 Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) has been invested in the site's infrastructure on two separate projects in recent years. In 2005 funding was received to improve the café facility and in 2017 funding from the Brecks 'Breaking New ground' fund was invested in the recently restored pump house (leased from the Forestry Commission on a 20 year lease) and meeting room facility.
- 1.5 In accepting the HLF grant money SCC agreed to comply with various conditions pertaining to the park's ongoing custodianship. In its capacity as another public body, FHDC would be an acceptable alternative recipient of custodianship but would be required to continue to manage the facility for the same/similar purpose for the agreed period set out in the original grant conditions, which are for a fixed period and are not considered too onerous.

2. Current position

- 2.1 Brandon Country Park is owned by SCC and FHDC contributes around £20,000 towards the overall cost of managing the facility, which is approximately £50,000.
- 2.2 The site covers an area of 12.95 hectares (c.32 acres) and acts as a significant gateway to Thetford Forest. A map of the park is shown at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.3 The country park comprises of the following:
 - Visitor centre with office facilities, gift shop, toilets, and 'Copper Beech Tearooms'
 - Children's play park
 - Pay & display car park
 - Walled garden
 - Lake
 - Lodge (occupied by one of the site staff)
 - Mausoleum

- A recently restored Victorian pump house and meeting room (which stands on land leased by the Forestry commission – 20yrs)
- 2.4 The country park contains some spectacular trees both broad leaf and coniferous. The park is a well-used local recreation and leisure facility for surrounding communities and is also popular with visitors from further afield. It hosts approximately 175,500 visitors each year helping support the local economy. It also hosts a Parkrun every week and a regular programme of guided walks and events throughout the year. These events encourage physical activity and mental wellbeing
- 2.5 Although always accessible, the park is open dawn to dusk. The visitor centre (including tearoom), toilets and walled garden is open 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. weekdays and to 5.30 p.m. weekends (March to October), then 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. daily during November to February.
- 2.6 FHDC currently employs a Park Warden on a fixed term contract to promote volunteering activities and to oversee various improvements in public open spaces in the District. This post is currently funded via section 106 funding specifically earmarked for Parks & Open Spaces and is due to cease in early 2019.

3. Proposal:

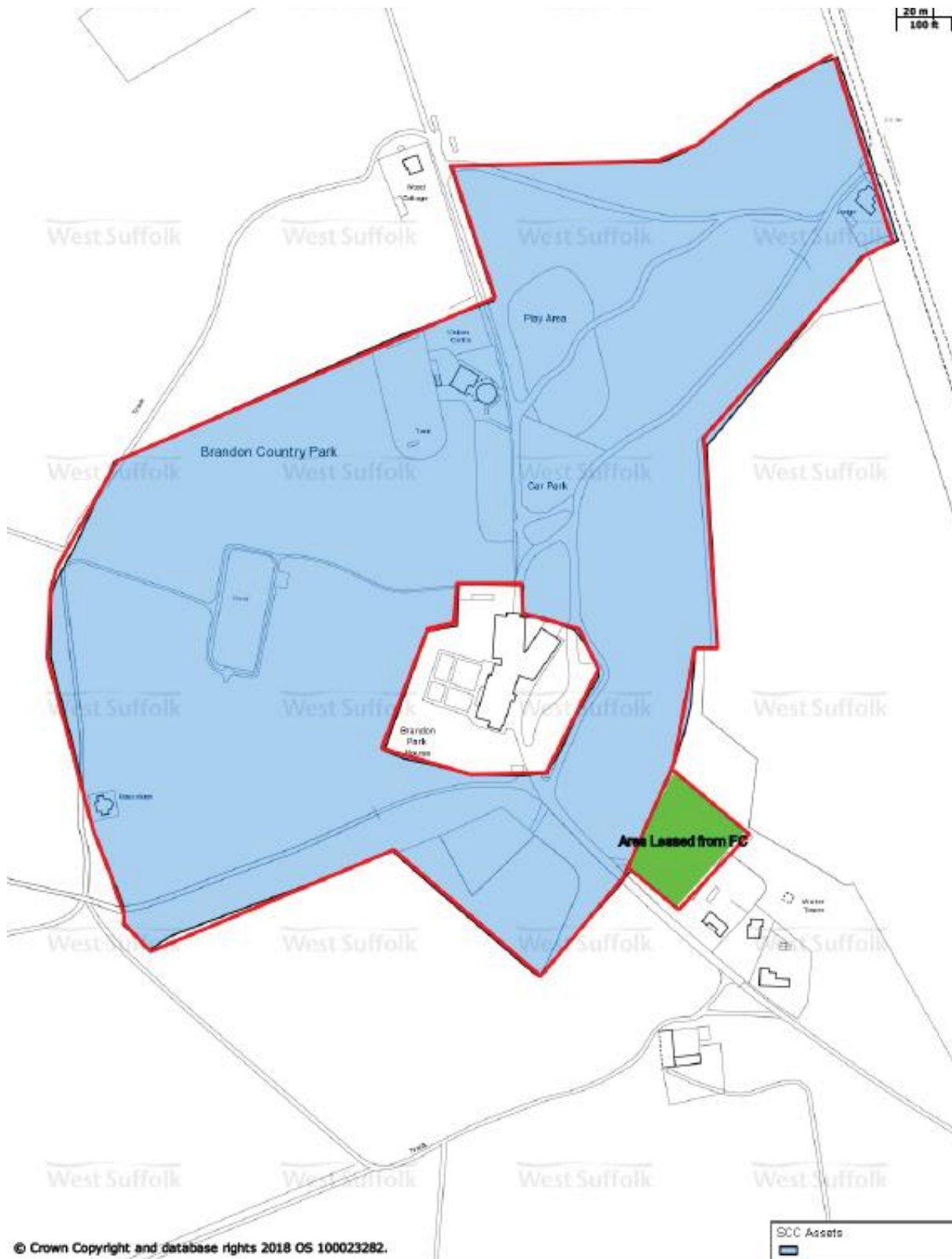
- 3.1 Initially the County Council offer was that they would transfer the park asset to the District Council for £1.00 and that this would exclude the gate lodge which currently houses the site's cleaner. Prior to transfer SCC also wanted FHDC to submit a strategic plan to SCC for the park for next 10 years to include:
- a) Commitment to ongoing use of the site as a Country park, in the long term;
 - b) Provision of a range of events for the public;
 - c) Use of the Engine House as a community/volunteer facility (to meet HLF commitments), as well as any use for corporate bookings they may wish to use it for, and to meet requirements of the FC lease;
 - d) Ensuring access to the park for vulnerable groups; and
 - e) Support public health objectives around exercise and healthy eating.
- 3.2 Following recent negotiations between SCC & FHDC the agreed position is as follows:
- SCC will transfer the park AND the gate lodge to FHDC for £1;
 - SCC will also provide a one-off payment of £25,000 to assist FHDC during the initial year of operation;
 - FHDC will provide a 10 year strategic management plan which meets SCC's requirements; and
 - The freehold transfer will be subject to a protective covenant which will ensure that the facility remains a public asset for the benefit of the people of Suffolk (the exact wording of this is still to be agreed).
- 3.3 In order to reduce the current subsidy to the park it is proposed that the following actions would be progressed on transfer:

- FHDC to transfer the running of the café and shop element (including the TUPE transfer of the current SCC kitchen staff) to Verse who would be tasked with raising income and providing an annual rent geared to income as well as a share in profit;
- FHDC to transfer the building cleaning function (including the TUPE transfer of the current SCC cleaner) to Verse;
- FHDC will bring the car park under a Traffic Regulation Order as an off street car-park. This will enable the authority to enforce payment and levy fines. The administration of the car park, emptying of the cash boxes and banking of collected money would transfer to West Suffolk's Car-Parking Service.
- West Suffolk's Parks Service would seek to appoint a Senior Ranger, in place of the current manager position (the current site manager position is vacant) and in time the team of rangers on site would then also serve the needs of the other parks & open spaces in the Forest Heath areas as well as the Country Park.

3.4 A draft budget for the park in 2018-19 based upon the above proposals is provided at Appendix 2. This includes the one-off payment of £25,000 from SCC to assist FHDC during the initial year of operation. The total estimated subsidy for the first year of operation is £22,000, matching FHDC's current financial commitment to the park. Whilst seeking to maximise the income and minimise the cost of the park, this subsidy will rise from year two once SCC's financial support comes to an end. Officers' will continue to work with the portfolio holders to drive forward initiatives to reduce this funding gap across the medium term. This position will be reviewed annually as part of the budget process and budget assumptions, however to add stability to its operations (on top of its existing £22k grant budget), it is proposed that the Council utilises its reserves to support the Country Park operations for the first 4 years of ownership.

3.5 It is therefore proposed, subject to Members approval, that a target transfer date be set for 1 April 2018.

Brandon Country Park – Site Transfer Plan



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SCC Assets

Draft Budget for Brandon Country Park 2018/19

Appendix 2

A/C Code	Description	Budget £
	Employees	
R1000	Salaries - Basic Pay	47,235
R1001	Salaries - Employers National Insurance	3,399
R1002	Salaries - Other Pay	464
R1003	Salaries - Overtime	2,976
R1006	Salaries - Employers Superannuation	14,343
R1010	Salaries - Vacancy Savings	-1,710
R1500	Staff Advertising Costs	500
	Sub-total	67,207
	Premises	
R2002	R & M of Buildings	15,000
R2006	Grounds Maintenance - Additional Works	7,500
R2100	Electricity	7,295
R2300	Business Rates	1,037
R2400	Water Services	2,104
R2700	Contract Cleaning	7,100
R2725	Waste & St. Cleansing - Operational Charge	3,407
R2750	Grounds Maintenance - Operational Charge	4,000
R2800	Insurance - Premises	295
R2900	Annual Contribution to Premises Reserves	13,500
	Sub-total	61,238
	Transport	
R3000	Vehicle Fuel	1,141
R3026	Vehicle Telematics Charge	29
R3050	Vehicle workshop - operational charge	1,445
R3500	Insurance - Vehicles	282
	Sub-total	2,897
	Supplies & Services	
R4000	Tools & Equipment - Purchase	800
R4003	Tools & Equipment - R & M	500
R4010	Materials - General	1,358
R4880	Miscellaneous Expenses	2,000
	Sub-total	4,658
	Income	
R9100	Contributions - Suffolk County Council	-25,000
R9173	Reimbursement - Utility & Other Costs	-7,000
R9220	Sales - Commission (Income from café concession)	-10,000
R9304	Fees - Car Parking	-48,000
R9308	Fees - Leisure Services	-6,000
R9404	Rents - Other Property	-3,000
R9890	Financed from Reserves	-15,000
	Sub-total	-114,000
	Total	22,000

NB. £22,000 is FHDC's current budget allocation for the contribution towards the Park.