

Cabinet



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Title of Report:	Proposals for Commercial Development of West Stow Country Park	
Report No:	CAB/SE/14/015 [to be completed by Democratic Services]	
Report to and date/s:	Cabinet	2 December 2014
Portfolio holder:	Sarah Stamp Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Heritage Tel: 01284 769360 Email: sarah.stamp@stedsbc.gov.uk	
Lead officer:	Richard Hartley Commercial Manager Tel: 01284 757055 Email: richard.hartley@westsuffolk.gov.uk	
Purpose of report:	West Stow Country Park will cost the Council £132,350 in 2014/2015. In the light of the budget gap for 2015/2016 and beyond, the Council is exploring possible opportunities to reduce this subsidy. Members are invited to consider a range of proposals which achieve a reduction whilst protecting the heritage asset that is the West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village.	

Recommendations:	It is <u>RECOMMENDED</u> that Cabinet: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) considers a range of proposals for appropriate commercial development of part of West Stow Country Park to complement the existing attractions; (2) considers minimising the risk of the preferred option by gaining planning permission in advance of selecting a partner to work with; and (3) approves taking the business plan, as contained in Exempt Appendix 1 to Report No. CAB/SE/14/015 to the market in order to secure a suitable operating partner for the preferred option. 		
Key Decision: <i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that do not apply.)</i>	<i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i> Yes, it is a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (a) Pending any further guidance from the Secretary of State, a decision which results in expenditure or savings of more than £50,000 will normally be considered as a key decision.		
<i>The key decision made as a result of this report will be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until seven working days have elapsed. This item is included on the Decisions Plan.</i>			
Consultation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation has been undertaken with the Portfolio Holder, other Cabinet Members and the Leadership Team. 		
Alternative option(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided in Exempt Appendix 1a 		
Implications:			
<i>Are there any financial implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Exempt Appendices 		
<i>Are there any staffing implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Exempt Appendices 		
<i>Are there any ICT implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 		
<i>Are there any legal and/or policy implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 		
<i>Are there any equality implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 		
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)
	Low/Medium/ High*		Low/Medium/ High*
See Exempt Appendix 1a for details			

Ward(s) affected:	All Wards
Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i>	None.
Documents attached:	<p>Exempt Appendix 1: West Stow Country Park Business Plan</p> <p>Exempt Appendix 1a: Table of Options</p> <p>Exempt Appendices 2-10 and A-C: Additional information relative to proposal</p>

1. Key issues and reasons for recommendation(s)

1.1 Background

Current Offer

1.1.1 West Stow Country Park currently provides the following facilities and amenities:

- Children's play area
- Café run by a local social enterprise
- Visitor Centre
- Gift Shop
- Nature trails and walks through woodland and around the lake/river
- Bird hides and feeding area
- Anglo-Saxon Museum
- Anglo-Saxon Village supported by volunteers through the West Stow Trust
- West Stow Heritage Storage Facility and training rooms (The Collections Building)
- Car Park

1.1.2 The Anglo-Saxon Village is recognised as a site of significant historic interest and value. One of England's great archaeological sites, West Stow has extensive indoor galleries and a stunning re-creation of an Anglo-Saxon village surrounded by 125 acres of unspoilt countryside.

1.1.3 The Council has freehold ownership of the site and has used the location to build a purpose built structure to house the Council's Heritage Collection¹.

1.1.4 *Current Usage*

Currently up to 23,000 people visit the Anglo-Saxon Village each year. This figure includes approximately 160-180 school trips to the Anglo-Saxon Village which bring a total of 8,000 school children to the site a year.

1.1.5 There are three full time and four part-time operational staff (6.3 FTE) running the Gift Shop/Visitor Centre/Museum which is open 9am - 5pm (the park itself is open from 9am - 8pm in summer). The Café is currently being run by a social enterprise providing an opportunity for people who may otherwise find it difficult to get employment to participate in work.

1.1.6 Overall in 2014/2015, the running of the site costs the Council £132,350 (as detailed in the table overleaf). In 2012/2013, the subsidy was £254,000, demonstrating that considerable costs have already been saved in this service.

1.1.7 This report has been prepared on the basis that the Council cannot sustain this level of financial support in the light of the budget gap for 2015/2016 and beyond. West Stow was identified as an area for investigation as part of the

¹ For the purposes of this piece of work the Collections Building is considered to form part of the Council's museums offer linked with Moyses Hall and other museums partnerships and the cost associated with the running of the Collections Building does not therefore form part of the cost of West Stow.

drive to operate more commercially, specifically possible opportunities to generate more income from the Country Park.

	2014/2015 Budget
Expenditure*	
Employees	£168,350
Premises (incl building maintenance contribution)	£ 76,100
Supplies & Services	£ 42,750
Corporate Support Services	£ 59,300
Purchase of stock for shop	£ 49,100
Total Expenditure	£395,600
Income	
Visitor entry / special events / hall hire	£116,050
Shop sales	£ 73,650
Car Parking**	£ 35,000
Fishing Licences	£ 11,550
Cottage rents***	£ 11,200
Café (including recharge of utilities)	£ 6,850
Other income incl donations	£ 8,950
Total Income	£263,250
Overall running costs	£132,350

* These figures do not include costs associated with the collections building or collections staff (2014/2015 budgeted cost of £59,150).

** The Council introduced car park charges in 2011.

*** The council owns and rents 3 cottages opposite the site.

1.2 **Key issues**

1.2.1 The Council is looking to behave more commercially in the way it delivers its services. There are a number of options for the development of a more commercial offer at West Stow. These are summarised in the Table in Exempt Appendix 1a Options attached to this report, which mentions commercial partners by name.

1.2.2 Also attached in the Exempt section of this report is the Business Plan for Option 4a, which officers propose offers the greatest potential gain in the short term. This does not preclude us considering Options 4b and 4c in the longer term.

1.2.3 There are a number of steps that could be taken to reduce any of the risks of Option 4a. These are:

- (1) Environmental assessment (boreholes) – already completed;
- (2) Electricity supply to the site may take up to one year to install – could instruct early (need to investigate cost of non-refundable deposit);
- (3) Seek planning permission for preferred option – obtain with a view to

improving partner negotiations.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To consider a range of proposals for the commercial development of West Stow Country Park.
- 2.2 To consider reducing the risk of the preferred option by gaining planning permission in advance of selecting a partner to work with.
- 2.3 To take the business plan to the market in order to secure a suitable operating partner for the preferred option.