

# Cabinet



St Edmundsbury  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Leisure Development Proposals for West Stow Country Park: Update</b>	
<b>Report No:</b>	<b>CAB/SE/15/024</b>	
<b>Report to and date:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	24 March 2015
<b>Portfolio holder:</b>	Sarah Stamp Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Heritage <b>Tel:</b> 01284 769360 <b>Email:</b> sarah.stamp@stedsbc.gov.uk	
<b>Lead officer:</b>	Richard Hartley Commercial Manager <b>Tel:</b> 01284 757055 <b>Email:</b> richard.hartley@westsuffolk.gov.uk	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To seek approval for officers to progress with the 'lots' as described in Section 2.2 of this report, by launching an 'Application to Bid' process. Final recommendations to implement any of the proposals received will require Cabinet and full Council approval in June-July 2015.	
<b>Recommendation:</b>	<p><b>Cabinet is asked to:</b></p> <p>(1) <b>note the progress made on the further leisure development of West Stow Country Park; and</b></p> <p>(2) <b>approve the proposed lots, as set out in Section 2.2 of Report No: CAB/SE/15/024, with the outcome of the 'Application to Bid' process to be reported back to Cabinet and full Council in June-July 2015.</b></p>	
<p><b>Key Decision:</b></p> <p><i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that <b>do not</b> 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 type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No, it is not a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The later decision to implement any of the proposals will be a decision of full Council.</p>	

<b>Consultation:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A market engagement exercise has been undertaken to establish the level of interest in West Stow Country Park. This was publicised through a range of methods including through Suffolk Sourcing, the local media and other tendering systems.</li> <li>• Staff that may be affected by the Transfer of Undertaking (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) Regulations 2006 (as amended) will be formally consulted at the appropriate time.</li> <li>• The West Stow Anglo Saxon Village Trust has been and will continue to be consulted about the options for development.</li> <li>• The Ward Member has been consulted individually prior to the market engagement event.</li> </ul>
<b>Alternative option(s):</b>	The process has looked at a range of options for future development. The alternative to these is that the Council continues with the existing business arrangements at West Stow at an annual cost to the Council of approximately £130,000.
<b>Implications:</b>	
<i>Are there any <b>financial</b> implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (not yet)
<i>Are there any <b>staffing</b> implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> See section 2.2 below.
<i>Are there any <b>ICT</b> implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Are there any <b>legal and/or policy</b> implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> (not yet) The lots referred to in this report will be awarded as leases, which may result in the TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) transfer of council employees and/or employees engaged in the provision of services currently outsourced at West Stow.
<i>Are there any <b>equality</b> implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> The equality impacts will be assessed as part of the process for allocating the lots and will be reported to Members in due course.

<b>Risk/opportunity assessment:</b>		<i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i>	
<b>Risk area</b>	<b>Inherent level of risk (before controls)</b>	<b>Controls</b>	<b>Residual risk (after controls)</b>
Planning application for camping/caravan site is unsuccessful	Medium	Extensive work has been undertaken to ensure that all of the planning requirements have been met for a camping/caravan site	Low
TUPE implications	Medium	The council has extensive experience of TUPE transfers	Low
Substation causing delay	High	It may be necessary to take a small amount of financial risk in order to prevent delay (see 3.1 below)	Medium
No interest in any of the lots	Medium	Significant work has been undertaken both to publicise the potential widely, and to create lots which bidders will find attractive	Low
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>		All Wards	
<b>Background papers:</b> <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i>		Cabinet Report No: <b>CAB/SE/14/015</b> 2 December 2015 <a href="https://democracy.westsuffolk.gov.uk/documents/s3938/CAB.SE.14.015.pdf">https://democracy.westsuffolk.gov.uk/documents/s3938/CAB.SE.14.015.pdf</a>	
<b>Documents attached:</b>		<b>Appendix 1</b> - Map of proposed camping/caravanning site, as submitted with the planning application.	

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Cabinet will recall that on 2 December 2014 (Report No: CAB/SE/14/015 refers), Members agreed to:
- (1) consider a range of proposals for appropriate further leisure development of part of West Stow Country Park to complement the existing attractions;
  - (2) consider minimising the risk of the preferred option by seeking planning permission in advance of selecting a partner to work with;
  - (3) take the business plan to the market in order to secure a suitable operating partner for the preferred option, as contained in Exempt Appendix 1 to Report No. CAB/SE/14/015.
- 1.2 This report gives an update on the progress made since December.

## **2. Update on Progress**

### **2.1 Market Engagement**

- 2.1.1 The Market engagement exercise was designed to draw out expressions of interest for the site, or parts of it. The exercise was publicised in the press and through Suffolk Sourcing (and therefore automatically linked through to a national website advertising the opportunities).
- 2.1.2 As part of the market engagement exercise we received a range of responses suggesting a series of different uses. Using this information, a series of draft 'lots' were developed and presented at a market engagement event held in West Stow on 26 February 2015. Information about each proposed lot and legal route was presented at the event and opinion sought on their viability or desirability to potential bidders. Useful feedback was received about what was included in different lots, for example whether the café would be linked to the camping lot or visitor centre lot (there are obvious synergies in terms of the customer base of each, and the café is important financially to each – hence the option to offer it as an alternative in both lots and assess the outcome during the evaluation process).
- 2.1.3 Using the information gathered following the market engagement exercise and event, the final lots have been drawn up, and are set out in 2.2 below.

### **2.2 Proposed Lots**

- 2.2.1 The lots, along with the legal route to completion, length of time, minimum opening hours and earliest possible start dates are set out in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Proposed lots**

<b>LOT</b>	<b>Route</b>	<b>Length (years)</b>	<b>Minimum opening dates each year</b>	<b>Earliest possible date to sign lease</b>
<b>1a:</b> Camping and caravan site and/or alternative use of land e.g. activities.	Lease	20 -25	01/03 to 30/10	08/15
<b>1b:</b> Camping and caravan site and/or alternative use of land e.g. activities <u>AND</u> Café	Lease	20 -25	01/03 to 30/10	08/15
<b>2a:</b> Visitor centre/museum with gift shop with offices*	Lease	7 plus 3	362 days/year	10/15
<b>2b:</b> Visitor centre/Museum with gift shop with offices <u>AND</u> Café*	Lease	7 plus 3	362 days/year Café 01/03 – 30/10	10/15
<b>3:</b> Pump House	Lease	3 (minimum)	N/A	Tbc

Those lots marked \* may have TUPE implications for SEBC employees.

- 2.1.2 Bidders will be able to submit responses for some or all of the lots. The evaluation process will then determine the best solution for the council, based on a combination of cost and quality. The preferred solution will need to be presented to full Council for approval before any leases are entered into. In the event of no acceptable bids for any of the lots, West Stow will continue to operate and pursue further efficiencies/income generation internally.
- 2.1.3 There may be additional options for smaller activities within West Stow and this will be highlighted within the 'Application to Bid', to inform potential bidders that the council is keen not to exclude any future viable propositions. Such options will not form part of any of the lots and will not be evaluated as part of the process described above but rather to advise potential bidders that their interest may be considered separately.

## 2.3 **Timetable**

2.3.1 The timetable for delivering the project is set out in Table 2.

**Table 2 - timetable**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Date(s)/Time</b>
Distribution of application to bid	By Friday 10 April 2015
Deadline for receipt of applications	15:00 on Monday 11 May 2015
Consideration and evaluation of applications	By Tuesday 26 May 2015
Final recommendations of the proposed lease breakdown (allocation and distribution of lots) to be taken to Cabinet and full Council	Cabinet: 23 June 2015
	full Council: 7 July 2015
Successful bidders finalised and notification to applicants	Following full Council meeting in July
Commencement agreement	To be negotiated following Council approval

## 3. **Potential Issues**

3.1 This is both a complex and exciting project, and the level of interest to date has been very encouraging. Naturally there are some issues which may potentially cause delay or need to be carefully addressed throughout the process, and a summary of these is set out below.

### **Electricity supply**

3.1.1 Application for planning permission for a campsite was submitted on 6 March 2015 and it is expected to be considered by the Development Control Committee on 4 June 2015. The drawing submitted is attached at Appendix 1 for information. As noted in the previous Cabinet report, uncertainty around the power supply to the campsite could cause a potential delay to the campsite opening. UK Power Networks require a lead in time of 'up to one year' from instruction to installation of the supply. If it becomes clear that this lead in time will cause an unacceptable delay (for example the risk of losing a significant proportion of the 2016 camping season) it may be sensible for the Council to place this order, with the view to novating the order (either formally or through some other arrangement) once a lessee is in place. This would have the effect of transferring the liability for cost of the supply to the lessee. Should there be no bids for this lot, the only cost would be the work already undertaken by the date of cancellation of the order with UK Power Networks, which would be minimal, given that this information would be known by early summer 2015. Depending on committee timetables, this might need to be done using the Chief Executive's urgency powers, although this would obviously be a last resort.

### **Protection of West Stow Anglo Saxon Village**

3.1.2 West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village is both an archaeological site and an open air museum. The principle aim of the West Stow Anglo Saxon Village Trust is to

protect the integrity of the Anglo Saxon Village. To maintain the integrity of the West Stow Anglo Saxon Village, the Trust will continue to monitor and provide direction on its management. Any new activities proposed for the wider country park will need to complement the Trust's existing aims and activities. The council's Commercial Manager has attended a recent Trust meeting and shown the Trustees a concept design. The Trust is supportive, in principle, of a sensitively designed campsite which does not visually impact on the site for which they are responsible.

### **Protection of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**

- 3.1.3 SSSIs are protected by law to preserve their special wildlife or geology. The proposed campsite development is located close to two SSSIs - West Stow Heath and Lackford Lakes. Given the proximity of the proposed development to the SSSIs, Natural England will be consulted on what is proposed as part of the planning process.
- 3.1.4 The typology of West Stow Heath is Breckland heath. Nearly a quarter (24%) of this country's rarest plant species (Biodiversity Action Plan 'BAP' priority species) are to be found growing on Breckland heath.
- 3.1.5 As well as the development control process, the impact on the SSSI will be considered as part of the qualitative scoring during the evaluation process. Advice was sought from a suitably qualified ecologist prior to the proposed campsite design being submitted for planning permission and certain features have been incorporated into the design to help mitigate the development's impact on the surrounding landscape.
- 3.1.6 The suitability of the non-camping activities referred to in the proposed Lots 1a, 1b, 2a and 2b will need to be carefully considered to ensure that they do not adversely affect the neighbouring flora and fauna.