

TITLE OF REPORT: BANCROFT RECREATION GROUND, HITCHIN

REPORT OF STRATEGIC DIRECTOR CUSTOMER SERVICES & PROJECT EXECUTIVE
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR JANE GRAY

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 At the Cabinet meeting of the 5th August 2014 Members were informed of the Heritage Lottery Funds (HLF) decision not to award a lottery grant for the refurbishment of Bancroft Recreation Ground, Hitchin.
- 1.2 Officers have met with the HLF to discuss the decision in more detail and have now considered a range of future options for Bancroft Recreation Ground.
- 1.3 There were a number of reasons why the bid was unsuccessful as listed at 7.5 in the report. Some of these such as the site only having medium heritage importance and the area having a low level of deprivation can not be altered.
- 1.4 Lottery funding is a very competitive arena where sites with a high heritage value and a high level of deprivation generally stand a better chance of securing funds. There is therefore no certainty that a revised future bid for Bancroft would receive funding. In view of this it is officers view that limited use of the Council's capital fund, Section 106 contributions and possibly smaller external grants for incremental improvements in accordance with the Master Plan over a number of years may provide the most sustainable option to still provide a refurbished site.
- 1.5 Due to their popularity at other sites it is recommended that the first phase of the improvements should include the construction of an interactive water play feature and associated toilet and baby changing facilities.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet agree to a phased approach to deliver limited incremental affordable improvements based on the previously approved master plan, using section 106 and other limited internal and external financial resources.
- 2.2 That subject to the approval of a revenue growth bid of £15K pa, Cabinet agrees to the inclusion of a water splash park and associated toilet / baby changing provision for Bancroft Recreation Ground in the capital programme for 2015/16.
- 2.3 That the limited incremental improvements for Bancroft are incorporated into the green space management strategy work programme and in consultation with relevant portfolio holders are managed by officers without the need of a project board.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide new facilities in a town centre Recreation Ground that meets the needs of local residents and the wider community.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 As listed in Appendix A.

5. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

5.1 An extensive programme of consultation and engagement has been undertaken during the development of the unsuccessful lottery bid.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This Report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first included in the Forward Plan in 28th March 2014.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 On the 25th September 2012 Cabinet approved the development of a Parks For People Lottery application for Bancroft Recreation Ground. The management of the project was undertaken by a project board.

7.2 This project has been identified in the Priorities for the District 2014/15 as a key project to support the priority of Working with our Communities.

7.3 On the 24th June 2014 the HLF board met to consider the Council's grant application to refurbish Bancroft Recreation Ground. Their decision not to fund the refurbishment was reported to Cabinet on the 5th August 2014.

7.4 At the Cabinet meeting of the 5th August 2014 the following resolutions were made:

(1) That the decision of the Heritage Lottery Fund be noted; and

(2) That a range of future options for Bancroft Recreation Ground, Hitchin, be considered by officers, and reported back to a future meeting of Cabinet.

7.5 On the 29th September 2014, officers met with representatives of the HLF and discussed in more detail the decision not to award a lottery grant. Notes from the meeting are shown below:

- *The need for investment in the park was recognised.*
- *It would be desirable for the opposition to the proposals expressed by local users and groups to be balanced by evidence of broad community support based on statistically robust opinion research.*
- *It would also be desirable to establish an active Friends Group or similar to show community involvement in the proposals.*
- *Reconsideration could be given to strengthen the historical aspects of the submission.*
- *Greater emphasis should be made on the restoration of existing features rather than new building works.*
- *Training and Activity Plans need to be strengthened and these activities adequately resourced.*

- *A re-submission of a revised scheme would still go through a competitive bidding process with no guarantee of success.*
- *Bancroft meets the criteria for the Parks for People lottery programme, however it has been assessed as being of medium heritage importance and Hitchin does not suffer from high levels of deprivation. A future bid would be strengthened by incorporating measures to engage disadvantaged groups in the vicinity and attract a wider range of users. In a competitive arena sites with a high heritage importance in areas where there is also a high level of deprivation may stand a better chance of achieving a pass but this will vary depending on the quality of the bids submitted.*
- *A re-application could be made without a detailed Master Plan which could be developed as part of the Second Round process.*

7.6 The Bancroft Project Board which was formed to deliver the Parks For People Lottery Bid met on the 20th November 2014 and made the following recommendations:

- To note the decision of the HLF not to award the Grant.
- To note the lessons learned contained within this report.
- To note that in accordance with Cabinet's resolution 37 (2) dated 5th August 2014 Officers are considering a range of future options for Bancroft Recreation Ground which will be reported back to Cabinet for consideration.
- To note that as the project did not receive lottery funding the project will need a new resolution of Cabinet to proceed any further.

7.7 The broad view of the Project Board members, supported also by the Project Executive, was that the incremental improvements suggested on paragraphs 2.1 and 2.3 offered a satisfactory way forward.

7.8 Members should note that as part of the previously approved works of the Community Halls Strategy, Bancroft Hall, located in the Recreation Ground is scheduled to be demolished in the next financial year, once the District Museum and Community Facility open (previous Cabinet recommendation) and a separate capital bid has been submitted to fund this work in 2015. Those costs include re-provision of electrical supply to the Hitchin Tennis Club, as their current supply is provided via the Bancroft Hall.

8. ISSUES

8.1 In the development phase of the scheme that the Heritage Lottery Fund Board of Governors received letters of opposition from a number of local groups and the Tennis Club had launched an online petition against the proposals. Local media carried extensive coverage of this opposition.

8.2 The HLF have advised that if the Council were to resubmit a lottery bid it would need to be a totally newly worked up scheme where it would be desirable to have any local opposition to the proposals balanced by evidence of wider community support.

8.3 The cost of the lottery submission was £43K which will need to be charged to the general fund. If some of the previous work was reused it is estimated that a new stage

1 bid would cost in the region of £25 – £30K which if unsuccessful would also have to be charged to the general fund.

- 8.4 The HLF only listed Bancroft Recreation Ground as a site of medium heritage value and Hitchin does not have a high level of deprivation. Lottery funding is a very competitive arena and sites with a high heritage value in areas of high deprivation may stand a better chance of funding.
- 8.5 The Council has allocated significant Section 106 contributions towards improvements to Bancroft Recreation some of which is time restrictive and needs to be spent in 2015.

9. OPTIONS

- 9.1 The table shown in appendix A identifies the options considered by officers:
- 9.2 For each of the options listed there are a number of connected issues in respect of the tenancy arrangements of existing lease holders and the former toilet block which would need to be considered and reported to Cabinet in due course. However as the recommendations in the report suggest proceeding in accordance with the previous Master Plan principles these issues are not considered in detail here.
- 9.3 Of the four options considered Officers view is that the option for incremental improvements provides the best overall outcome for the Council in achieving refurbishments to this town centre Recreation Ground. This pragmatic approach allows development as opportunities arise and would meet the Councils overall vision of the park as described in the approved master plan. Any new developments would be restricted to the Council financial ability to fund the capital and revenue requirements of any proposals.
- 9.4 If Cabinet approve the option for incremental improvements the works would be delivered by a number of minor projects that could be incorporated into the green space management strategy work programme. Such projects in consultation with relevant portfolio holders are normally managed by officers and a project board would not be required.
- 9.5 If Cabinet decide to resubmit a lottery bid or that NHDC fully fund the approved master plan Cabinet will need to consider the formation of a project board to manage the project.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Under Cabinet's Terms of Reference as set out in section 5 of the Council's Constitution, Cabinet has responsibility for agreeing policies and strategies other than those reserved to Council and to approve those major service developments which also constitute Key Decisions.
- 10.2 The Council provides parks, recreation grounds and open spaces under its discretionary powers.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The aborted work undertaken to date totals £43K which will need to be charged to the general fund.

- 11.2 £160K sections 106 funding has been allocated for improvements to Bancroft Recreation Ground. £32K of this is time restricted and should be spent by 17/10/2015.
- 11.3 The estimated capital cost to provide a water splash park is £160K. The capital cost for the conversion of an existing disused toilet facility in the bowls pavilion is estimated at £30K.
- 11.4 The on-going revenue cost to run a water splash park is estimated at £10K pa. The revenue cost to clean and service a new toilet provision is estimated at £5k pa.
- 11.5 The £160K section 106 contributions along with £30K from the capital fund could be used to fund these works.
- 11.6 To fund the on-going maintenance of these facilities a revenue growth bid estimated at £15K pa would need to be approved.
- 11.7 There is also the on- going capital / revenue liability for major repairs or replacement of the asset.

12. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 A re-submitted lottery bid has no certainty of success and any abortive work will need to be charged to the general fund.
- 12.2 Failing to use the £32K section 106 contribution by the 17/10/2015 could result in the Council having to hand the contribution back to the developer.
- 12.3 The option for incremental improvements provides the least risk to the council and ensures expenditure is only made as and when it is affordable.
- 12.4 The introduction of a free water splash park in Hitchin may have a negative impact on usage figures for the Hitchin Swim Centre.

13. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1st October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5th April 2011. There is a General duty that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.
- 13.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 13.3 The proposals as made for the refurbishment of Bancroft Recreation Ground offer opportunities for a wide range of people to use the recreation ground, and through the provision of a free to use water splash feature, would benefit the significant number of younger families who have settled in the town in recent years. The proposals also contribute to the authority's commitment to improving the wellbeing of its residents through provision of open space for recreation, physical and social opportunity.

14. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of 'social value' as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section in Paragraph 13 above.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no human resource implications contained within this report.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – Bancroft Recreation Ground – Future Options for its development.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 17.1 Stephen Geach
Parks & Countryside Development Manager
01462 474553
steve.geach@north-herts.gov.uk

18. CONTRIBUTING OFFICERS

John Robinson
Strategic Director of Customer Services and Project Executive
01462 474655
john.robinson@north-herts.gov.uk

Vaughan Watson
Head of Leisure & Environmental Services
01462 474641
vaughan.watson@north-herts.gov.uk

Ladi Lapite
Senior Lawyer
01462 474370
ladi.lapitel@north-herts.gov.uk

Tim Neill
Accountancy Manager
01462 474461
tim.neill@north-herts.gov.uk

Liz Green
Head of Policy and Community Services
01462 474230
liz.green@north-herts.gov.uk

Reuben Ayavoo
Policy Officer
01462 474212
reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk

Kerry Shorrocks
Corporate Human Resources Manager
01462 474224
Kerry.shorrocks@north-herts.gov.uk

Fiona Timms
Risk Manager
01462 474251
fiona.timms@north-herts.gov.uk

Bancroft Recreation Ground – Future options for its development

Option	Description	Revenue Implications	Capital Implications	Pro's	Con's
Do nothing	Park remains in current condition and only carry out routine maintenance work and do not undertake any further major investment in the site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No additional revenue expenditure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No capital expenditure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retains a town centre Recreation Ground. There will be no further additional financial commitment from NHDC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The site would continue to be in decline. The site would not meet community expectations. Potential loss of circa £160K section 106 money which has been allocated to the site.
Limited incremental affordable improvements using section 106 and other limited financial resources	Work towards the broad aims of the agreed master plan and undertake improvements to the site over number years, using NHDC capital fund, smaller external grants & Section 106 contributions. First phase of improvements could include a water splash park and associated toilet & baby changing facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional circa £15K pa for limited season (early June to early Sept) 12-14 weeks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capital expenditure for first phase of improvement circa £190K (of which up to £160k would be from S.106) and would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water splash park £160K Toilet & baby changing facility £30k 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works would be in accordance Cabinets previously approved master plan. Sustainable improvements may still be achieved but over many years as and when financial opportunities arise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It will take many years to implement. There may be dissatisfaction at the time improvements are taking to implement.

Bancroft Recreation Ground – Future options for its development

Option	Description	Revenue Implications	Capital Implications	Pro's	Con's
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to apply for smaller grants to fund specific elements of the scheme. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no certainty that funds will be available to undertake all the work of the master plan. Existing user groups may become more frustrated at the lack of progress and still actively oppose elements of the master plan.
<p>Re-submit a lottery bid in 2015 or at a later date. New scheme</p>	<p>A new scheme not based on the previously approved master plan could be developed which may be better supported by local user groups. To meet the HLF's requirements it would require increased revenue contributions to deliver community activities and training.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circa additional £60K pa for first five years (increased maintenance £15K, £45K activity plan & staffing cost) potential 80% funded by HLF. On-going est. £15K pa after first 5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circa £2,2m Potential for 80% grant application Use of up to £160K Section 106 funds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would provide a totally refurbished Recreation Ground within the Town Centre which will benefit the wider community. Potential to secure 80% of cost from HLF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works would not be in accordance with Cabinets previously agreed master plan. As the HLF have previously rated Bancroft as only having medium heritage value and Hitchin has a low level of deprivation there is no certainty of a

Bancroft Recreation Ground – Future options for its development

Option	Description	Revenue Implications	Capital Implications	Pro's	Con's
					<p>lottery pass.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a grant was not awarded the abortive development costs would then have to be funded from revenue rather than capital expenditure. • Other projects would be delayed due to rescheduling the work programme. • Fewer risks if we submit later allowing adequate time for consultation • The conflicting demands of user groups could prevent overall community support for any new proposal, resulting in a second failure.

Bancroft Recreation Ground – Future options for its development

Option	Description	Revenue Implications	Capital Implications	Pro's	Con's
<p>NHDC fully fund the approved master plan</p>	<p>Develop the scheme in accordance with Cabinets previous endorsement for the master plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circa additional £15K pa for limited season (early June to early Sept) 12-14 weeks to operate new water splash park and associated toilet facility. • Up to an additional £45K pa for staffing costs, community activities and training plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circa £2,2m • Funded from NHDC capital and up to £160K Section 106 funds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works would be in accordance with Cabinets previously approved master plan. • Would provide refurbished town centre Recreation Ground that would meet the needs of the wider community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major capital and revenue commitment from NHDC. • Some local groups in Hitchin may still actively opposing the previously approved master plan.