

PART A

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 21 January 2013
Report of: Parks and Open Spaces Section Head
Title: Update on the progress of the HLF/BIG funded restoration of Cassiobury Park

1.0 **SUMMARY**

This report sets out progress to date on the HLF/BIG funded project for Cassiobury Park and to note the award of a Round 1 grant award; the process and progress towards securing a Round 2 grant; the appointment of a multi-disciplinary consultancy team and Project Officer to deliver the Round 2 application as well as, if successful, the delivery stage. The report also summarises the proposed Inland Waterways Association (IWA) Waterways Festival, proposed for the park in July 2013.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Accept the offer of a Round 1 Award of £ 418,600 from the Heritage Lottery Fund / BIG and proceed to a Round 2 application based on a project value of £6.5 million.
- 2.2 Approve delegated authority to the Head of Community Services for appointment of a multi disciplinary team to deliver a Round 2 application and possible delivery stage as well as appointment of staff associated with the project delivery.
- 2.3 Note the delivery of the Inland Waterways Association Waterways Festival in July 2013 with Council Officers working with the IWA to ensure all requirements are met.
- 2.4 To note the contents of the report and the progress made to date.

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Report approved by: Lesley Palumbo, Head of Community Service

3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

3.1 Cassiobury Park is Watford's best loved and most popular park with over 2 million visits a year. It is enjoyed by local residents as well as many visitors from neighbouring areas and during the summer months, many "holiday" in the Park in and around the Paddling Pools area. Cassiobury Park is also recognised by Green Flag and has retained this status for over 5 years. It benefits from support and input from a wide range of stakeholders including the Friends of Cassiobury Park, the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and operators such as the Cha Cha Cha tea rooms and the Pools.

3.2 However, despite its popularity, Cassiobury Park is in need of significant investment if it is to meet the needs of park users now and in the future in relation to current infrastructure and its level of existing usage. The current Management Plan for the Park endorses this view that, despite the Park being well managed, it requires considerable investment in its declining infrastructure. The Green Spaces Strategy also highlights the need to invest in the Park, in particular through an HLF bid.

A Facilities Study was carried out in 2010 which looked primarily at the built facilities in the park, including the Depot, Cha Cha Cha tea rooms, Paddling Pools and the Shepherds Road entrance. As a consequence, capital funding was allocated to look at enhancing these. Allocation was:-

- Cassiobury Park Depot - £160,000
- Shepherds Road Entrance - £85,000
- Tea Pavilion - £140,000
- Toilets - £240,000
- **TOTAL - £625,000**

However, after re-considering these initial proposals in light of wider potential opportunities and greater concerns for the whole Park, it was felt that this needed looking at further. Watford, in particular, has had little in the way of funding from HLF/BIG and, after initial assessment, it was felt that Cassiobury Park had significant potential of succeeding in obtaining HLF/BIG funding. The HLF/BIG Parks for People programme offers grants for projects that regenerate public parks of national, regional or local heritage value.

The definition of a park for this programme is as follows:

- an existing designed urban or rural green space, the main purpose of which is for informal recreation and enjoyment. It includes parks, gardens, squares, walks and promenades.

Programme priorities

For HLF/BIG to consider Cassiobury Park for funding the council had to demonstrate:

- the community values of the Park as part of local heritage;
- the Park meets local social, economic and environmental needs; and
- the Park management actively involves local people.

The project must deliver all the following five outcomes:

1. increasing the range of audiences;

2. conserving and improving the heritage value;
3. increasing the range of volunteers involved;
4. improving skills and knowledge through learning and training; and
5. improving management and maintenance.

3.4 Progress to date

3.4.1 A pre-application was submitted to HLF, which received positive feedback and subsequently the council appointed consultants to develop a Round 1 application to HLF/BIG which was submitted in February 2012. The Round 1 process is now a much simplified process and required:-

- Conservation Statement
- Outline Plans
- Application Form (underpinned by evidence of public support)
- Cost Plan

The proposals were, at this stage, very much outline and required less detail than in previous application processes. The Cassiobury Park Steering Group was also resurrected and now includes the Friends Group and all organisations with businesses in the Park.

3.4.2 The most significant proposals for the Park included the following:-

Capital

- Improvements to park entrances including Rickmansworth Road entrance;
- Cha Cha Cha improvements and extension to allow better operation as a Tea Pavilion and toilet facilities;
- Depot improvements and Shepherds Road entrance enhanced, with changing rooms demolished;
- Bandstand re-located from the town centre to its original location in the Park;
- Park “hub” building centred on a revamped and 21st century pools facility to be centre of operations for the Park, and to include park ranger office, education/community room, changing facilities, toilets, café and plant room;
- Improvements to the Local Nature Reserve;
- Hydro electric power source based on former Mill site on River Gade;
- Improved management of Whippendell Wood and reinstatement of Lime Avenue and Mile Walk;
- Cycling connections and network enhanced; and
- Street and Landscape improvements throughout the park.

Revenue

- 4 staff to include Cassiobury Park Project Officer (2 years); Community Park Ranger (5 years) and Education Officer (5 years) and a Park Manager (5 years);
- Activity Planning; and
- Enhanced Park Maintenance.

Consultation

This has been significant to date and has included:-

- Friends of Cassiobury Park;
- Cassiobury Park Steering Group;

- Ward Councillors;
- Park Users and visitors;
- Local residents;
- Portfolio holder;
- Council Officers (Planning, Property Services, Legal, Environmental Services, Asset Management Group);
- Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust;
- Environment Agency; and
- HLF.

Consultation has shown **significant support** for the project overall at all levels.

3.4.3 In June 2012, HLF/BIG confirmed that the Council had been successful in obtaining a Round 1 pass from the Heritage Lottery Fund and BIG and had secured a development grant of £418,600 towards delivering the next stage. In total, £608,604-00 is currently available towards developing a Round 2 application as well as to appoint a Project Officer and Community Park Ranger with a project total of £6.5 million. Officers met with HLF in Cambridge in July to determine the best way forward and met the project monitors appointed by HLF.

3.4.4 Progress throughout late 2012 included the required procurement of a large multi disciplinary consultancy to deliver all aspects of this very diverse project including project management, landscape architecture, archaeology, architecture, ecology, energy and sustainability, hydrology, engineering and cost consultancy. The Pre Qualification Questionnaire stage saw 10 submissions with 5 short-listed to ITT stage, with final tenders due back on 7th January 2013. Tenders have also been sought for the Activity and Business Planning work and both will be appointed in January 2013.

3.4.5 Two posts have also been advertised as part of the development stage:- a Project Officer and a Community Park Ranger with interviews being held in mid January.

3.4.6 Permission to start has also since been given by HLF after meeting certain criteria.

3.5 **The next stage and timescales**

3.5.1 On appointment of the Project Officer, Park Ranger and consultancy team in January / February 2013, the project team will progress all requirements associated with the Round 2 Stage, which will include significant consultation, detailed design and further historical and ecological research for submission in February 2014, with possible final award in June 2014. Delivery stage is anticipated towards the end of 2014.

3.5.2 All work associated with the project will be co-ordinated and managed by the Project Officer, supported by the Community Park Ranger.

3.6 **The Waterways Festival**

3.6.1 In July 2012, the Inland Waterways Association made a presentation to the Mayor and officers with regards to the potential of holding the National Waterways Festival in Cassiobury Park due to the adjacent and obvious links with the Grand Union Canal and availability of such a large open space as Cassiobury Park. Officers and the Mayor

were keen to support and consultation with ward councillors and the Friends of Cassiobury Park also showed initial support. The Waterways Festival is organised and operated by volunteers and is the largest Inland Waterways Association boating event in the year, campaigning for the conservation, use, maintenance, restoration and development of the Inland Waterways. The 2013 event will be the 62nd such annual festival, and it is anticipated that the 2013 festival will attract 6,000-10,000 people per day, 400 boats along with over 250 traders and a full entertainments programme, offering something for everyone participating in this event will be on offer.

There are over 300 volunteers who pull together the event, split into a number of key areas: Administration, Personnel, Commercial, Attractions, Finance, Marketing, Site and Services, Supplies, Waterspace and Campsite.

The IWA has detailed operational plans for each area above and a core organising group of directors who oversee the event management. They will also be providing an overall Event Plan which will touch on all of these plans.

The IWA has formally applied for permission to stage this event in Cassiobury for 19th to 21st July 2013. Presentations have since been made to the Safety Advisory Group and the council is now working with the Group, IWA and fellow officers to ensure all issues are covered accordingly, including health and safety, statutory requirements, traffic and car parking for a successful event. Staff from Parks and the Events officer [Events team] will oversee plans for the event by attending meetings as required and by reviewing relevant paperwork, to ensure they meet all the council's requirements. In addition, the council will enforce all the relevant stipulations (such as on site and off site agreed parking restrictions and other parking areas, having a full traffic management plan in place, assisting with and co-ordinating the consultation with residents and friends groups) are effectively addressed by the organisers.

There will be frequent organiser meetings and representatives from Watford BC will attend to keep up-to-date with their plans and to ensure they are meeting our requirements.

The Events Officer will act as a point of contact for directing them to the relevant services and contractors in the local area, and assist them with any arrangements they need to make for permissions such as licensing. The Safety Advisory Group will also play a key role in ensuring that the event is managed and run to event safety standards. The Events Officer is a member of this group.

- 3.6.2 The event is seen as beneficial for the Round 2 stage of the HLF/BIG project, particularly in widening the range of audiences in the Park, experience of managing a significant event in the Park and an opportunity for significant consultation on developing proposals prior to submission in February 2014. The Community Park Ranger will also have a major role to play in developing opportunities as part of this significant event.

3.7 Conclusions

- 3.7.1 The HLF/BIG funded restoration of Cassiobury offers a significant opportunity to restore one of the most valuable open spaces in Watford and the region, restoring and

preserving heritage as well as ensuring its long term sustainability and future.

4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Financial**

- 4.1.2 The Head of Strategic Finance comments that there are significant implications in developing a project such as this. HLF/BIG will fund both capital and revenue activity and match funding is required. The Council have identified £1.3 million of match funding with funding allocated from S106 contributions, a commitment from Herts County Council towards cycling improvements in the park, Cassiobury Croquet Club, as well as volunteer in kind contributions. A grant of £5 million has been requested and this includes capital and revenue activity for the Park and formed part of the Round 1 application and was approved as the basis for the Round 2 application.

Funding for 4 new posts is available from HLF/BIG and is highlighted above. Currently the park costs circa £312,000 (*figure based on current staffing and other staff commitment and a percentage of grounds maintenance codes*) to maintain and HLF/BIG will be looking at enhanced maintenance for the park. At Round 2, we will be developing costs further but at present, costs for utilities are significant due to outdated facilities, especially the Pools. There are also opportunities for looking at existing facilities such as the Pools and how they are managed. With over 2 million visits per year, the potential for “shared profits” or new terms for new facilities are very attractive. Schools in Watford have also been contacted in relation to use of the Education Room and opportunities in the Park. The feedback was significant and most would use and over 60% would pay for Ranger led activity, between £1.00 and £5.00 per child.

In essence, there are real opportunities for income generation in the park, currently not being realised.

The Head of Strategic Finance also comments that the redevelopment of Cassiobury Park should not put any further strain upon the Council’s future revenue or capital resources. In that respect once the improvements are completed it is essential that all commercial operations are exposed to a full procurement process to ensure best consideration is achieved

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

- 4.2.1 The Legal and Democratic Service Section Head comments there are no legal implications in this report.

4.3 **Equalities**

- 4.3.1 The Activity Planning Consultant will ensure the following HLF requirements are met as they are particularly relevant in relation to equalities.

- the parks meets local social, economic and environmental needs; and
- the park management actively involves local people.

The project must deliver all the following outcomes:

1. increasing the range of audiences;
2. increasing the range of volunteers involved;
3. improving skills and knowledge through learning and training; and improving management and maintenance.

4.3.2 If changes are made to service delivery as part of the project, it is important that the impact of any changes is considered in relation to groups and individuals identified as having protected characteristic.

4.4 Risk

4.4.1 The project team will develop a detailed risk register for the delivery of the project which sets out all the current risks and identifies the mitigating actions needed to manage the risks. This will continue to be monitored and updated throughout the life of the project.

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
Unable to recruit consultants within available funding	1	3	3
Delays in recruiting key staff impacting on timetable	1	3	3
IWA requirements are unable to be fulfilled	1	4	4

4.5 Staffing

4.5.1 The park currently has two full time gardeners and a roving operative as and when required. These will be retained and supported by the existing Park Ranger Service (or Partner if outsourced), with the new “Park Hub” supported and managed by three fixed term posts funded by HLF for 5 years.

4.5.2 If outsourcing is pursued, the Project officer and Ranger will remain as part of the Client Team. On completion of the project, the Ranger will potentially transfer via TUPE to the new provider with the new Park Manager and Education Officer roles employed by the new partner. (subject to HLF approval).

4.6 Accommodation

4.6.1 The project will see significant improvements to accommodation within the park through the removal of redundant buildings and re-provision of:-

- Improved depot accommodation

- Improve Croquet Club accommodation
- Creation of new park hub building.

4.7 **Community Safety**

4.7.1 The Cassiobury Park Stakeholder Group includes representatives from the Park Ranger Service as well as Herts Constabulary. The consultancy team will be required to work closely with relevant bodies to ensure proposals do not compromise community safety for local residents and park users and that community safety can be enhanced wherever possible.

4.8 **Sustainability**

4.8.1 The Round 1 consultants developed an Energy Strategy and Climate Change Risk Assessment for the Park. The report recommended:

“That there is significant potential for the renewable and low carbon resources within the park to generate a large proportion of the estates energy demands and contribute considerable CO2 savings. The preferred technologies which should be considered further for the estate are hydropower, roof mounted PV and wood fuelled boilers”.

The development stage of the project will see these areas explored in greater depth.

Background Papers: None

File Reference: None