

**HUNTINGDON RIVERSIDE PARK**  
**(Joint Report by the Estates & Property Manager,**  
**Head of Community Services & Planning Policy Manager)**

**1. PURPOSE**

T The purpose of this Report is to consider the Consultants' Report on proposals for the development of the Riverside Park area.

**2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 At the Cabinet Meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2003 the following were resolved:-

1. To support the principle of diversifying leisure activity in the Huntingdon Riverside area.
2. That further study and consultation to achieve 1 above be undertaken.
3. That Supplementary Planning Guidance be prepared for the whole of the Riverside area to incorporate a master plan and brief to guide the extent and design of any new development.
4. That negotiations take place with relevant stakeholders and partners concerning possible additional sources of funding.

2.2 Subsequently a Consultants' Report was commissioned from Gillespies, a landscape and urban design practice, in association with L & R Consulting, management consultants specialising in the leisure/tourism field, and Davis Langdon & Everest, quantity surveyors. In order to deal with items 1 and 2 above, a brief was provided for the consultants with the principal aims of:-

- ❖ Exploring options involving the community through consultation
- ❖ Producing an Options Report and Brief to guide the extent and design of any new development
- ❖ Providing indicative costs and possible sources of funding

2.3 A plan of the Riverside Park area is attached.

**3. CONSULTANTS' REPORT**

3.1 The final report contains the following sections:-

- ❖ A review of existing documents and studies, for example, Huntingdonshire Local Plan, Civic Trust Report on Huntingdon Town Centre
- ❖ A site analysis identifying key issues and outlining current problems facing users of the park

- ❖ Proposals for the park in the form of two alternative options based on recreational demand analysis and public and stakeholder consultation
- ❖ Design guidance for the final option derived from the results of public and stakeholder consultation
- ❖ Details of the consultation undertaken
- ❖ The final section considers ways of delivering the proposals through additional funding sources set against a breakdown of indicative costs

3.2 The key issues referred to in the Report may be summarised as follows:-

- ❖ Poor links and access to the town centre mainly due to the ring road
- ❖ Inadequate footpath/cycle routes and mooring points
- ❖ Lack of distinguishable gateway feature and arrival point to the town centre
- ❖ Negative impact of the existing car park and lack of space for park users
- ❖ Ecological and landscape features are not exploited to their potential
- ❖ Lack of distinctive and exciting leisure attractions or events - existing leisure facilities are under-utilised (football pitches), in need of upgrading (boat hire facility) or do not appeal to a broad range of people
- ❖ There are a number of visual detractors from the site and a lack of visual stimulation
- ❖ There is a need to create a critical mass of facilities in the centre of the park, for example, by providing catering

3.3. The Report identified the technical constraints.

3.3.1 Indicative Flood Plain:

Much of the site is within the 1:100 Year Indicative Flood Plain identified by the Environment Agency. This has implications for new buildings within the site and the use of flood attenuation and compensation measures, in particular, as a response to the resultant effect of the proposed road system along Riverside Road.

3.3.2 Requirement to Retain Capacity of Car Park:

Although visually poor and out of character with the Park, the car park is considered a valuable asset to the Park and, indeed, the town. There was a desire by many of the Groups consulted that it should be made less visually obtrusive and re-shaped in order to offer a more unhindered passage through the Park.

3.3.3 New Road Alignment and Guided Bus Route:

Part of the plans outlined in the Cambridgeshire Local Transport Plan are for a Cambridge to Huntingdon Rapid Transit System to include a guided bus route along Hartford Road and an additional lane along Riverside Road. Proposals for these schemes show the likelihood of the Park being partially affected along the northern edge.

### 3.3.4 Planning Policy Designation:

The Local Plan shows clearly that the Park is designated as an Area of Best Landscape and an Open Space and Gap Protection. The Plan looks to restrict development on land outside the built up framework of the market towns, other than to contribute to the operation of activities such as outdoor recreation. This would restrict the addition of large-scale leisure related developments.

### 3.3.5. Land Ownership

Huntingdonshire District Council owns the vast majority of Riverside Park. A small section of land at Riverside House, including the adjacent car park, is privately owned.

3.4 Initially, two options were drawn up for the second phase of public consultation. In order to assist the process, the Consultants considered that the Riverside Park split naturally into three sections:-

1. From Old River Bridge to the car park – formal park.
2. Car park to the football pitches including the boat hire, boat club and pavilion – activity area or zone.
3. From east of the car park to Church Lane – green lung.

3.5 For the two options, the proposals for Areas 1 and 3 were the same mainly due to the strength of public opinion wishing to retain the character of these areas subject to improved pathways, more water bodies, arrival points, moorings and additional lighting, seating, signage and public art. There were, however, a number of notable differences between the options for the activity area.

3.5 The preferred solution has been summarised as Appendix A.

## 4. **CONSIDERATIONS**

### 4.1. Development Opportunities:

4.1.1 There are clearly a number of constraints identified in the Report that prevent any large-scale commercial leisure development on the Riverside Park area. In addition there are a number of town centre issues relating to traffic management including the road widening of Riverside Road, parking management and bus lane provision along Hartford Road that could have a significant impact on the way the Park develops due to land possibly being taken away from recreational use and additional flood compensation areas having to be provided within the park.

4.1.2 The Report makes some references to these but concentrates on identifying the opportunities for raising the profile of Riverside Park and providing a range of attractions for the benefit of local people. Improving boat hire and riverside activities will also enhance the area as a tourist attraction.

## 4.2 Implementation.

4.2.1 In view of the additional points raised above, some initial work is likely to take place in the Park in the short term following the principles set out in the preferred solution. Any work carried out or planned will influence the shape of any future master plan.

4.2.2 Once an overall strategy or master plan has been approved in principle, implementation can take place in phases over a period of time. It is likely that key infrastructure alterations will need to be carried out at an earlier stage such as re-modelling the car park and provision of certain services.

## 4.3 Funding

4.3.1 There is at present only a small provision in the MTP Programme of about £70,000 towards improvements at the Riverside Park. It would be necessary to consider a MTP bid for the approved scheme having regard to external funding sources and any other opportunities such as Section 106 money. Private sector funding would also be considered for the commercial elements of the Scheme.

## 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The Consultants' Report provides a comprehensive analysis of the Riverside Park area identifying the key issues, constraints and leisure opportunities. If the preferred solution is accepted as a framework for the way forward then a more detailed programme of implementation and exploration of the funding sources will need to be undertaken.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It is recommended that Cabinet -

- (a) support the principle of the preferred solution for the development of the Riverside Park area; and
- (b) authorise the preparation of a programme of action for the work and exploration of funding sources, including opportunities for securing private sector funding where appropriate.

Contact Officers: Keith Phillips, Estates and Property Officer  
☎ (01480) 388260

Peter Jones, Head of Community Services  
☎ (01480) 388202

Richard Probyn, Planning Policy Manager  
☎ (01480) 388430

## APPENDIX A

### 1. Formal park area:

- ❖ Gateway entrance. The provision of new signage and environmental improvements to enhance pedestrian access and raise the profile of the Riverside
- ❖ More paths and cycleways. This will include circular loops and safe viewing areas by the river.
- ❖ Additional moorings. The provision of new 48 hr moorings together with improvements to the park such as better visitor signage to encourage people to visit Huntingdon as a destination.
- ❖ Enhance parkland image. This will involve new planting, paths and additional facilities for locals and visitors such as information signage, picnic tables, seating and lighting. There is potential to create a new water feature that may serve as flood storage. Informal tree planting would be provided to screen Hartford Road.

### 2. The Activity Zone

- ❖ Car Park. This would be re-configured and aligned alongside Hartford Road but retaining the existing capacity. This would provide a buffer between the Park and road junction and free up space to create a continuous green park setting along the river edge, serving to unite the current disjointed leisure and park areas. Some short stay spaces for park uses should be provided.
- ❖ Play Area. The existing area to be extended to appeal a broader age range of children and incorporate a water play area.
- ❖ Boat Hire. The provision of a new facility raised above flood levels in an extended site incorporating the existing Purvis Maine Site to the existing public slipway. In addition to boat hire, a small boat repair shop would be required to keep a fleet on the water. Small pump-out and water facilities could also be provided for boaters.
- ❖ Café. A Seasonal Riverside "stilt" Café, Refreshment Kiosk and Cycle Hire could be provided as part of the boat hire business. There is potential to enlarge the existing water inlet to enhance the café setting and provide additional flood storage. Proposals would also include the picnic area and seating to the east overlooking the water.
- ❖ Sport Leisure and Play. Sport and leisure facilities would be concentrated in the centre of Park served by the re-configured car park. The removal of the formal playing fields, replacing them with an informal kick around and 5 a side pitch, along with a new multi-play hard surface that can be used for different team sports such as tennis and basketball. There is also the possibility of enhancing the setting of the existing sports pavilion, which could also potentially be converted to include a café or refreshment kiosk.
- ❖ Events and arts. The introduction of more events and an expanded arts programme should be considered. This could include regattas, concerts in the park, craft fairs and fetes etc.

An outdoor amphitheatre provides a setting for outdoor concerts and the informal kick around area can be used for larger events and fairs. A sculptor trail could be created through the Park.

- ❖ Potential Wetland Area/Water Body. The provision of additional flood storage for the road widening scheme on Hartford Road and an extension of the ecological area further into the Park merging the current boundary between the Park zones.

### 3. The Ecological Zone

- ❖ Eco-learning and Management. The introduction of a management programme to increase the diversity of the existing wildlife habitats through a range of service with community involvement.
- ❖ Potential Wetland Area/Water Body. The provision of additional flood storage for the road widening as referred to in the Activity Area.
- ❖ More footpaths and cycleways. The provision of better paths and cycle routes including circular loops and safe viewing areas by the river. A small car park is also proposed adjacent to Hartford Road.
- ❖ Fishing Platforms. Proposals could include upgrading the existing fishing platforms or providing additional ones.

4. The above proposals have been costed at £3.375m, which includes new facilities for the boat hire/repair and café. L & R Consulting have made various comments regarding funding.

- 4.1 Possible external funding sources are as follows:-

Sports lottery (park, play and recreation)  
Environment Agency (flood works and moorings)  
Countryside Agency (wetland and woodland restoration, interpretation)  
Local Transport Plan (cycle route and structural changes along the ring road)  
Arts Council for England (public art in the Park and events)  
Commercial sector involvement in developing, owner or franchising facilities – catering, boat hire, development of multi-use games area etc.

- 4.2 In terms of the capital expense relating to the build facilities of catering and boat hire the following factors need to be considered:-

- ❖ The Council could consider the central commercial hub area (catering, boat hire, kiosk etc.) as one entity and fund the development themselves. The operations individually or as one whole package could then be leased to the private sector to run.
- ❖ Alternatively, the Council could advertise the development opportunity to be fully or substantially private sector funded on a long lease (99 years). This lease would define the terms upon which the land could be used and defined in appropriate uses.
- ❖ The development of a waterside café/kiosk new build, with associated boat hire and limited core repair/storage facilities is a relatively expensive option.

- ❖ Developing a catering facility around the structure of the pavilion is a comparatively cheaper option and could operate as an alternative catering facility or even as a separate evening restaurant facility unrelated to the Riverside café and boat hire – this split site function becomes more complex and is dependant upon attendances to the site.