

FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS TO RIVERSIDE PARK HUNTINGDON
(Report by Heads of Planning Services, Operations, Environmental Management, Legal and Estates)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Further to the established commitment to enhance the Riverside park, a Masterplan for its improvements that includes new planting, footpaths and cycleways, additional recreational areas, new hard surfacing, and moorings and signage together with costings has been produced and members are asked to approve this plan for further public consultation.

2. SUPPORTING/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 In November 2004 the findings of an earlier consultants report entitled 'Riverside Park Options Study' was discussed by Cabinet. The consultant's aim, supported by an earlier Cabinet meeting (April 2003), was to look at ways to positively diversify leisure activity in the Riverside Park. The brief for consultant's was:

- To explore options involving the community
- Produce an options report and brief to guide the extent and design of any new development
- Provide indicative costs

- 2.2 In arriving at the options the consultant's considered a number key issues concerning the Riverside Park as follows:

- Poor links and access to the town centre mainly due to barrier of the ring road and poor links through and within the park
- Inadequate footpath/cycle routes and mooring points
- Lack of distinguishable gateway feature and arrival point within the town centre
- Negative impact of the existing car park and lack of dedicated spaces 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

- 2.3 Two options were drawn up and in-order to assist the process the Consultant's considered that the Riverside Park split naturally into three sections:

1. From the Old Bridge to the car park – formal park
 2. Car park to the eastern side of the football pitches- including the boat hire, boat club and pavilion - activity area or zone
 3. From the eastern end of the football pitches to Church lane- green lung
- 2.4 In drawing up these options a number of particular constraints were identified. The nature of the land, much of which is within the indicative flood plain, would preclude any large scale leisure development. The proposed bus lane along Hartford road and the associated cycle lane would potentially reduce the available land on that frontage. A preferred option was arrived at after consultation with the public and is set out in Appendix A.
- 2.5 The potential scheme was costed at £3.375 million which was well above the level of funding available or that could be achieved through an MTP bid. It was agreed therefore to produce our own masterplan as an alternative way forward.
- 2.6 In the preferred option the shape of the car parking area was to be altered to achieve the principles set out in the plan. The car park was to be extended along the Hartford Road and the existing car park was to be reduced in size. A planning application made in 2007 to extend the car park without carrying out any of the proposed improvements was met with some hostility from local people. The application was withdrawn as it was considered to be premature ahead of the development of a car parking strategy and further consideration to achieve a more realistic masterplan for the Riverside Park.

3. THE NEW MASTERPLAN (see Appendix B)

The new masterplan reflects the key issues identified in 2.2 above and has used specialist consultants as well as our own staff to produce the plans. The proposed new scheme now looks at the park in three areas with suggested improvements as described below.

For Area 1 (the Formal Park) the following improvements are suggested :

- Make the two entrance areas opposite the Bridge Hotel and along the ring road more welcoming. In association with the Bridge Hotel entrance, investigate the greening of the traffic island crossing
- Create a new path parallel to the ring road inside the park
- Create a focal point with shelter in the centre of the park
- Improve the mooring facility and the paved area adjacent to Bridge Foot works
- Remove certain trees and carry out new tree planting
- Clear the river bank in certain locations to encourage easier access, temporary moorings and formal fishing areas.
- Standardised signs and interpretation boards erected

3.3 For Area 2 (the Activity Area) the following improvements are suggested:

- Reconfigure the equipment in the play area and reduce the area in size to enable a footpath to be created on the southern side.
- Removal of certain trees to allow more light into the play area.
- Remove southern side of car park (loss of 17 spaces) and incorporate into a wider landscaped walkway
- Make up for the removal of car park spaces by providing an additional 16 spaces adjacent to the Pavillion and Boat House
- Replace adult football pitches with 2 mini soccer pitches
- Create an area of reinforced grass on part of the former football pitch closest to the Pavillion for use as an events area (fair/circus/Town events)
- Provide a Multi Use Games Area adjacent to the Boat Club
- Retain tarmac path linking the Boat Club area with Area 3 but remove chain link fence
- De-formalise the large green open space with additional planting and a less rigid management regime
- Clear riverbank in certain locations to encourage easier access.
- Make allowance for loss of land to cycleway and bus priority measures
- Encourage the redevelopment of the boat yard in accordance with the brief
- Standardise signs and interpretation boards erected

3.4 For Area 3 - (the Green Lung)

- Carry out management plan to enhance the biodiversity and attractiveness of the area (see Appendix C for copy of draft management plan)
- provide better signposts to car park in Church Lane and pedestrian signposts to the entrance to the Riverside park
- Provide small informal parking area adjacent to pumping station for both visitors and to assist with maintenance
- standardise signs and interpretation boards erected

3.5 The future of the Purvis Marine boatyard has not been included in this report, as separate discussions are taking place with the owners, for them to come up with a development plan for the site. The options being consider by the owners generally fit with our plans.

4. COST IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The costings for the scheme are detailed in Appendix D and are split into the different areas as described above.

4.2 The construction costs for each area are:

Area 1	£317,000
Area 2	£213,000
Area 3	£ 32,000
Total	£552,000

Design costs of 10% need to be added to these costs to give a final cost of £607,000

- 4.3 A revised MTP bid has been submitted for this scheme to give a new expenditure of £ 610,000. No formal decision has been made on this bid as yet. If this is approved, then the full funding for the scheme will be available.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Huntingdon Riverside Park is an important entrance feature to the town of Huntingdon, and as it contains the main long stay car park for the town, is the area that visitors see first.
- 5.2 Various reports have been carried out in the past on the park and all come to similar conclusions. The site has a potential to be greatly improved by: enhancing the views from and through it; replacing certain trees with better specimens; giving better footpath access that link the three areas; providing signage within the park and to and from the park to the town centre, and; replacing the adult football pitches with mini soccer pitches together with more general playing areas that are usable by a wider group.
- 5.3 In view of the time lapse since the Gillespie proposals were considered and the changes in the detail that are now proposed it is important that a similar consultation exercise is carried out. This would include a manned exhibition during times and at a location to maximise publicity.

6. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 6.1 It is recommended that –

(1) Cabinet approve the scheme for consultation and receive feedback at a future meeting.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Riverside Park Options Study October 2004 (Gillespies)

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