

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Executive Summary

- The county council's countryside sites and maintenance of the county's public rights of way network have been appraised to determine which proposals present the strongest management options going forward.
- The sites were appraised based on broad groupings of sites, reflecting similarities in complexity and type of management. A summary of the appraisal scoring is on the following pages; the closer the score is to 1000, the stronger the management option.
- The options appraisal identifies that:
 - a) For all country parks, transferring management to an environmental body, creating a bespoke trust or retaining in-house are the best options. Transfer to an environmental body scores particularly well for Cannock Chase (though this would depend on the particular skills and experience of the environmental body) as it would be likely to have the expertise and resilience to offer a sustainable future for this complex site. A bespoke charitable body could be effective though would require a 'critical mass' to be viable.
 - b) Major local sites could remain in-house, form part of a bespoke trust's portfolio linked with larger sites, or management could be transferred to environmental or community groups.
 - c) Minor local sites could have management transferred to community bodies, be managed through a commercial body or be retained in-house. It should be noted that while community management would be ideal for these sites, there was limited interest in the previous EOI exercise and capacity building would probably be required.
 - d) For greenways and public rights of way, commercial or in-house options scored best.
 - e) The partnership option did not score well for any category of site; this was largely due to concerns over feasibility of this type of arrangement based on previous exploration. However, it should be noted that this does not mean that the council would not work in

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

partnership – this could still be incorporated within other management models but it is not recommended as an option in its own right.

Sites	Category	Option 1	Option 2			Option 3	Option 4
		Retain in house	Transfer to environmental body	Transfer to commercial body	Transfer to community body	Partnership	Trust
Cannock Chase	Large country parks	<u>760</u>	<u>835</u>	705	515	710	<u>770</u>
Chasewater		<u>760</u>	<u>745</u>	675	515	710	<u>770</u>
Apedale	Small country parks	<u>780</u>	<u>795</u>	705	585	725	<u>790</u>
Deep Hayes							
Greenway Bank							
Brownshore Lane (Essington)	Major local sites	<u>755</u>	<u>725</u>	595	<u>725</u>	625	<u>750</u>
Froghall							
Hatherton							
Hanchurch Hills							
Redland Claypit							
Sevens Road							

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Sites	Category	Option 1	Option 2			Option 3	Option 4
		Retain in house	Transfer to environmental body	Transfer to commercial body	Transfer to community body	Partnership	Trust
Hanbury Common	Minor local sites	<u>555</u>	500	<u>665</u>	<u>710</u>	500	545
Oakamoor							
Leek to Rushton	Greenways						
Oakamoor to Denstone		<u>605</u>	475	<u>620</u>	530	475	545
Stafford to Newport							
Public rights of way maintenance		<u>590</u>	320	<u>585</u>	465	320	435

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Introduction

1. The countryside estate review aims to find a sustainable operating model for Staffordshire County Council’s country parks, local sites and greenways, ensuring the sites remain in positive management to safeguard their environmental and recreational value in a more financially sustainable way. At the start of the countryside estate review, ten potential options for the future operation of the estate were identified. Following public consultation and initial appraisal these were narrowed to four options to be explored further:

Option 1 – retain in house with efficiencies and development
Option 2 – transfer management to an external body
Option 3 – manage through partnership arrangements
Option 4 – establish a bespoke charitable trust or social enterprise
2. A decision was made early in the process that no sites would be sold and that any transfers would be of management rather than ownership.
3. The objectives for the review are:
 - To develop a financially sustainable operating model for the countryside estate;
 - To ensure delivery of statutory duties and legal requirements in relation to the estate;
 - To maximise the contribution the estate makes to Staffordshire’s communities and visitors.
4. For the purposes of this options appraisal, the objectives are defined by four measures which each option is scored against:
 1. Efficient operating model that is achievable, flexible and resilient to future change
 2. Ability to generate income & secure additional funding to enhance the visitor experience
 3. Ability to attract and retain volunteers and engage communities
 4. Ability to meet legal and environmental requirements
5. The countryside estate is varied and it is therefore unlikely that one option will suit all sites; a combination of approaches is likely to be required. For this reason the options appraisal has been undertaken based on the following site categories:

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Category	Sites*	Outline
Large country park – Cannock Chase	Cannock Chase Country Park	Our largest and most complex country park at c.1300Ha, nationally and internationally significant environmental assets, high recreational demand, complex partnership context.
Large country park – Chasewater	Chasewater Country Park	Large site with nationally significant environmental assets, high recreational demand and significant liabilities (e.g. reservoir and dam).
Small country parks	Apedale Country Park Deep Hayes Country Park Greenway Bank Country Park	Small country parks with significant environmental assets and moderate recreational demand.
Major local sites	Brownshore Lane Froghall Wharf Hanchurch Hills Hatherton Reservoir Sevens Road Redland Claypit**	Local sites with environmental assets and liabilities (e.g. reservoirs and historic structures) which require management.
Minor local sites	Hanbury Common Oakamoor	Local sites with limited liabilities and environmental requirements.
Greenways	Stafford to Newport Oakamoor to Denstone Leek to Rushton	Disused railway lines managed as multi-user routes, requiring maintenance for safe public use
Public Rights of Way	Public path network across the county	4,400km of public rights of way, including footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and BOATS. The Council has a statutory duty to maintain the network for safe public use.

* Sites do not include Consall Nature Park or Wimblebury Picnic Area as negotiations are progressing on long-term lease arrangements for these sites which would take them out of county council management.

**Redland Claypit will come into SCC ownership in 2019 under an agreement made many years ago linked to construction of the M6 Toll road.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

6. The four options were appraised against the measures for each category of site outlined above. Option 2 was broken down into three sub-options, since different types of external body would be likely to have different strengths and weaknesses, as follows:

Option 2a – transfer to an environmental body (i.e. an environmental organisation experienced in operating countryside sites, likely to be not for profit)

Option 2b – transfer to a commercial body (i.e. a for profit organisation experienced in countryside management)

Option 2c – transfer to a community body (i.e. a not for profit community based organisation such as a parish council or community action group)

7. Each measure was assigned a weighting (as a percentage) relevant to each site category, reflecting the relative importance of the measure. Each option was then scored out of ten and this figure multiplied by the weighting to give a weighted score for each option. By adding the scores for each option together, the option(s) likely to be most effective for each type of site were determined, with those scores closest to 1000 being deemed the most effective.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Options appraisal – large country park – Cannock Chase

Vision and requirements for the site: Cannock Chase is a large and complex country park with significant designated and undesignated environmental assets – it is the jewel in the crown of the estate. The site has extremely high recreational use which must be balanced with conservation of its special environmental qualities. Any development of the site for visitors must therefore be sensitive to its surroundings and not increase pressure on fragile habitats, meaning that retail offers, camping / lodges etc. would be unlikely to gain planning approval. However there is a need to improve the visitor facilities such as the café and visitor centre, upgrading them to facilities more appropriate for a flagship site in a nationally important landscape (Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and to develop a natural and cultural heritage-based visitor experience utilising less sensitive areas of the site. This in turn could increase income generation which could then support improved maintenance of the site, improving sustainability.

Key objectives:

- Bring habitats and features into favourable environmental condition
- Reduce visitor pressure in sensitive areas
- Enhance visitor experience by developing non-sensitive areas of the site with improved facilities and natural / cultural heritage offer
- Support overall management of the site and facilities through income generated via environmental grants, enhanced café / visitor centre offer, car parking as part of wider AONB strategy and through membership / giving.

Options appraisal

Measure	Weight- ing	Option 1	Option 1 score	Option 2a	Option 2a score	Option 2b	Option 2b score	Option 2c	Option 2c score	Option 3	Option 3 score	Option 4	Option 4 score
Efficient operating model that is achievable, flexible and resilient to future change	30	6	180	8	240	7	210	4	120	5	150	7	210

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Ability to generate income & secure additional funding to enhance the visitor experience	20	8	160	9	180	8	160	5	100	8	160	9	180
Ability to attract and retain volunteers and engage communities	15	7	105	9	135	6	90	8	120	8	120	9	135
Ability to meet legal and environmental requirements	35	9	315	8	280	7	245	5	175	8	280	7	245
Total	100%		760		835		705		515		710		770

Rationale

Weighting: Cannock Chase is a large and environmentally complex site with significant risks and legal requirements, therefore measure 4 is most heavily weighted; the ability to achieve a flexible and resilient operating model is also considered a major factor; there is significant scope to enhance visitor experience and improve the visitor offer, albeit sensitively given the fragile nature of the habitats, which should enable the site to be more financially sustainable if realised; volunteer input is also an important factor but will always be supporting a staff-based model.

Option 1: Retain in-house: The revised operating model under option 1 is readily achievable though will impact on staff; it will include use of more efficient working practices, however its resilience will always be vulnerable to future pressures on local authority funding. SCC has a good track record of securing funding and can cash flow projects, however its access to some funding sources is restricted and resources will be limited for developing bids; there is a good foundation of volunteering and community involvement that can be developed further; there is in house expertise available to support health & safety and a broad range of environmental specialisms.

Option 2a: Transfer to environmental body: There is potential to reduce running costs especially if there were economies of scale linked to management of other sites; in terms of feasibility Cannock Chase previously attracted expressions of interest and is a nationally and internationally

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

important site likely to attract interest from significant environmental bodies; such a body would be likely to have a good ability to generate income and could access a broader range of funds if a registered charity; established NGOs are often well set up for volunteers; if an environmental body then should have access to specialist expertise in house (though may not have local access to the full range of expertise).

Option 2b: Transfer to commercial body: Potential to reduce running costs especially where economies of scale linked to other contracts could apply though overheads required to generate a profit could offset this; as a commercial body some charitable funding would not be accessible though may be better placed to generate commercial income; volunteers may be less prepared to work for a commercial body; environmental expertise may be available though may be shared across many sites or may have to buy in.

Option 2c: Transfer to community body: TUPE implications might be difficult for a community group plus unlikely to have capacity to deliver economies of scale; as a community body they would potentially be able to access funding that others can't however would be limited by capacity and cash flows; would have good ability to generate community involvement; would probably have to buy in environmental expertise which may be more costly.

Option 3: Partnership: Potential to reduce running costs by sharing equipment and staff across sites, however this may be offset by complex partnership arrangements and conflicting priorities and may take significant time to establish as an option in itself, possibly even reducing SCC's flexibility; could be effective at generating income and accessing funds as would be able to access a variety of sources and use strengths of different partners; could be effective at pooling volunteer efforts and community engagement resources; different partners may have access to a variety of expertise.

Option 4: Trust: Potential to reduce running costs over time; initial cost and some complexity to establishing and running the trust however it might be more resilient in the longer term; would be able to access funding sources that local authorities can't and people may be more willing to donate to a bespoke trust and become a member; people are likely to be willing to volunteer for a bespoke trust; would require an arrangement with SCC or others to gain full environmental expertise or would need to buy in. May be a potential complexity with other trust models being proposed in the Cannock Chase area.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Conclusion - The highest scoring option is 2a - transfer to an environmental body; running via a bespoke trust / charitable body and retaining in-house are also high scoring options. A commercial arrangement may be less viable as would community or partnership options. These latter options are not considered feasible as stand-alone options for this site.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Options appraisal – large country park – Chasewater Country Park

Vision and requirements for the site: Chasewater Country Park is part Site of Special Scientific Interest and managing its wildlife habitats is therefore a priority. The site has a strong recreational demand from its local communities and people visiting to experience the railway, sailing and Wakelake activities. There is significant scope to enhance the visitor experience by upgrading facilities such as the café, visitor centre and play park. The Innovation Centre is currently used as a conference centre but the use of this building should be reviewed to explore how it could better support the park. Other buildings such as craft workshops create a small rural hub, which could be further developed to help support wider management of the site. The site has significant liabilities, including the reservoir and dam. Car parking charges have already been introduced and are contributing to the management costs of the site.

Key objectives:

- Manage habitats and ensure SSSI is in favourable condition
- Enhance visitor facilities and develop the visitor offer through events and activities
- Explore alternative uses for the innovation centre that support the running of the site
- Management of risks and liabilities

Measure	Weighting	Option 1	Option 1 score	Option 2a	Option 2a score	Option 2b	Option 2b score	Option 2c	Option 2c score	Option 3	Option 3 score	Option 4	Option 4 score
Efficient operating model that is achievable, flexible and resilient to future change	30	6	180	5	150	6	180	4	120	5	150	7	210
Ability to generate income & secure additional funding to enhance the visitor experience	20	8	160	9	180	8	160	5	100	8	160	9	180

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Ability to attract and retain volunteers and engage communities	15	7	105	9	135	6	90	8	120	8	120	9	135
Ability to meet legal and environmental requirements	35	9	315	8	280	7	245	5	175	8	280	7	245
Total	100%		760		745		675		515		710		770

Rationale

Weighting: Chasewater is a relatively large park with significant risks and legal requirements, therefore measure 4 is most heavily weighted; the ability to achieve a flexible and resilient operating model is also considered a major factor; there is significant scope to enhance visitor experience and improve the visitor offer which should enable the site to be more financially sustainable if realised; volunteer input is also an important factor but will always be supporting a staff-based model.

Option 1: Retain in-house: The revised operating model under option 1 is readily achievable though will impact on staff; it will include use of more efficient working practices, however its resilience will always be vulnerable to future pressures on local authority funding. SCC has a good track record of securing funding and can cash flow projects, however its access to some funding sources is restricted and resources will be limited for developing bids; there is a good foundation of volunteering and community involvement that can be developed further; there is in-house expertise available to support health & safety and a broad range of environmental specialisms.

Option 2a: Transfer to environmental body: There is potential to reduce running costs, especially if there were economies of scale linked to management of other sites. However, Chasewater is unlikely to be as attractive to environmental bodies as Cannock Chase given its liabilities and minimal interest was expressed previously; environmental bodies would be likely to have good ability to generate income and could access a broader range of funds if registered charities; established bodies are often well set up for volunteers; if an environmental body then should have access to specialist expertise in-house (though may not have local access to the full range of expertise).

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Option 2b: Transfer to commercial body: Potential to reduce running costs especially where economies of scale linked to other contracts could apply though overheads required to generate a profit could offset this; site liabilities may be a limiting factor; some charitable/external funding would not be available to a commercial body, they may be better placed to generate an income from the site; volunteers may be less prepared to work for a commercial body; environmental expertise may be available though may be shared across many sites or may have to be bought in.

Option 2c: Transfer to community body: The liabilities on this site would make it difficult for a community body to manage; TUPE implications might be difficult for a community group, plus unlikely to have capacity to deliver economies of scale; as a community body they would potentially be able to access funding that others can't however would be limited by capacity and cash flows; a community body would have good ability to generate community involvement, but would probably have to buy-in environmental expertise, which may be more costly.

Option 3: Partnership: Potential to reduce running costs by sharing equipment and staff across sites. However, this may be offset by complex partnership arrangements and conflicting priorities, and may take significant time to establish as an option in itself, possibly even reducing SCC's flexibility; could be effective at generating income and accessing funds as would be able to access a variety of sources and use strengths of different partners; a partnership could be effective at pooling volunteer efforts and community engagement resources, and different partners may have access to a variety of expertise.

Option 4: Trust: Potential to reduce running costs over time; initial cost and some complexity to establishing and running the trust, however it might be more resilient in the longer term; would be able to access funding sources that local authorities can't and people may be more willing to donate to a bespoke trust and become a member; people are likely to be willing to volunteer for a bespoke trust; would require an arrangement with SCC or others to gain full environmental expertise or would need to buy in.

Conclusion - The highest scoring option is 4 – management through a bespoke trust; retaining in-house scores second highest, with transfer to an environmental body third. A commercial arrangement may be less viable as would community or partnership options. These latter options are not considered feasible as stand-alone options for this site.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Options appraisal – Small Country Parks

The small country parks include: Apedale, Deep Hayes and Greenway Bank Country Parks

Vision and requirements for the sites: While relatively small sites, these three country parks in the north of the county offer enjoyable places for visitors and local residents based around wildlife and cultural heritage. All have biodiversity interest, including protected species and features on some sites and cultural heritage assets. At Greenway Bank there is significant potential to restore the historic landscape, including the Prospect Tower, a listed building currently on the Heritage at Risk register. There are also buildings that could be better utilised to support the sustainability of the sites.

Key objectives:

- Ensure natural and cultural heritage assets are protected and conserved in line with legal requirements
- Ensure sites are managed and maintained to provide a safe and enjoyable visitor experience
- Develop the cultural and natural heritage offer through trails and enhancement / restoration of heritage features
- Explore restoration of the Prospect Tower and repurpose the building to retain its natural and cultural interest while creating a sustainable use
- Explore better utilisation of buildings
- Explore car parking charges, concessions etc. to generate income to support financial sustainability

Measure	Weighting	Option 1	Option 1 score	Option 2a	Option 2a score	Option 2b	Option 2b score	Option 2c	Option 2c score	Option 3	Option 3 score	Option 4	Option 4 score
Efficient operating model that is achievable, flexible and resilient to future change	25	7	175	6	150	7	175	5	125	5	125	7	175

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Ability to generate income & secure additional funding to enhance the visitor experience	25	7	175	9	225	8	200	6	150	8	200	9	225
Ability to attract and retain volunteers and engage communities	20	8	160	9	180	6	120	8	160	8	160	9	180
Ability to meet legal and environmental requirements	30	9	270	8	240	7	210	5	150	8	240	7	210
Total	100%		780		795		705		585		725		790

Rationale

Weighting: Safety issues and environmental considerations remain an important factor as these sites include waterbodies, historic structures and protected species; efficiencies and resilience plus the considerable scope to enhance the offer at these sites and support their financial viability mean these are also significant considerations; there is also good scope for volunteering and community involvement with the more local scale of these sites making this an important factor.

Option 1: Retain in-house: The revised operating model under option 1 is readily achievable though will impact on staff; it will include use of more efficient working practices, however its resilience will always be vulnerable to future pressures on local authority funding. SCC has a good track record of securing funding and can cash flow projects, however its access to some funding sources is restricted; there is a good foundation of volunteering and community involvement that can be developed further; there is in house expertise available to support health & safety and a broad range of environmental specialisms.

Option 2a: Transfer to environmental body: There is potential to reduce running costs especially if there were economies of scale linked to management of other sites; in terms of feasibility there was some interest in the smaller sites in the EOI process though they were more attractive to more locally based bodies; good ability to generate income and could access broader range of funds if a charity; established NGOs often well set

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

up for volunteers; if an environmental body then should have access to specialist expertise in house (though may not have local access to the full range of expertise)

Option 2b: Transfer to commercial body: Potential to reduce running costs especially where economies of scale linked to other contracts could apply though overheads required to generate a profit could offset this; as a commercial body some charitable funding would not be accessible though may be better placed to generate commercial income; volunteers may be less prepared to work for a commercial body; environmental expertise may be available though often shared across many sites and may have to buy in.

Option 2c: Transfer to community body: TUPE implications might be difficult for a community group plus unlikely to have capacity within organisation to deliver economies of scale; as a community body would potentially be able to access funding that others can't however would be limited by capacity and cash flows; would have good ability to generate community involvement; would probably have to buy in environmental expertise, likely to be more costly.

Option 3: Partnership: Potential to reduce running costs by sharing equipment and staff across sites, however this may be offset by complex partnership arrangements and conflicting priorities and may take significant time to establish, possibly even reducing SCC's flexibility; could be effective at generating income and accessing funds as would be able to access a variety of sources and use strengths of different partners; could be effective at pooling volunteer efforts and community engagement resources; different partners may have access to a variety of expertise.

Option 4: Trust: Potential to reduce running costs over time; initial cost and some complexity to establishing and running the trust however it might be more resilient in the longer term but would hinge on enough of the sites going to the trust to make it viable; would be able to access funding sources that local authorities can't and people may be more willing to donate to a bespoke trust; people are likely to be willing to volunteer for a bespoke trust; would require an arrangement with SCC or others to gain full environmental expertise or would need to buy in.

Conclusion: The three highest scoring options are transfer to an environmental body, establish a trust or retain in-house. Commercial, community and partnership options do not score well and it is suggested that these should not be pursued further as separate options in their own right, though elements may be included within the high scoring options.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Options appraisal – Major Local Sites

The major local sites include: Brownshore Lane, Froghall, Hanchurch Hills, Hatherton Reservoir, Sevens Road and Redland Claypit*

Vision and requirements for the sites: These local sites vary in size though tend to be relatively small and local in nature, however they each have management needs and liabilities requiring some expertise due to the presence of local or national environmental designations, protected species, historic structures or reservoirs. All are used as local amenity sites, valued by their communities. There is some scope to enhance the sites and develop trails etc. but income generation opportunities are generally minimal.

Key objectives:

- Ensure sites are managed and maintained to provide a safe and enjoyable visitor experience
- Ensure natural and cultural heritage assets are protected and conserved in line with legal requirements
- Enhance the amenity value of the sites through trails and interpretation

Measure	Weighting	Option 1	Option 1 score	Option 2a	Option 2a score	Option 2b	Option 2b score	Option 2c	Option 2c score	Option 3	Option 3 score	Option 4	Option 4 score
Efficient operating model that is achievable, flexible and resilient to future change	25	7	175	6	150	7	175	7	175	4	100	7	175
Ability to generate income & secure additional funding to enhance the visitor experience	20	7	140	8	160	6	120	8	160	7	140	8	160

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Ability to attract and retain volunteers and engage communities	30	8	240	8	240	5	150	8	240	7	210	8	240
Ability to meet legal and environmental requirements	25	8	200	7	175	6	150	6	150	7	175	7	175
Total	100%		755		725		595		725		625		750

Rationale

Weighting: Some of the work on these sites will be basic maintenance and there is potential to reduce costs, however some environmental input will be required for aspects of the sites. There is a strong potential to increase community and volunteer involvement to support management of these sites though community capacity will need to be developed. Income generation is likely to be limited, however there is potential for general improvements to the sites through small scale funding.

Option 1: Retain in-house: There may be potential to reduce running costs further through the in-house model though costs are already relatively low; SCC has a good track record with fund raising but access to small funds is not always possible for local authorities; resources are limited for supporting volunteering and community involvement at smaller sites and this could be a limitation; there is good access to a broad range of environmental expertise.

Option 2a: Transfer to environmental body: While it may be possible to reduce running costs through another body, this option scores relatively low on feasibility as it is less likely significant environmental bodies would be interested in small scale sites; if registered charity then an environmental body would be able to access a broader range of funding; may have good ability to support volunteering but also likely to focus this resource on larger sites; would have good expertise but may not include the full range of skills and may be spread across numerous sites.

Option 2b: Transfer to commercial body: A commercial body may be able to reduce running costs though would also be looking for profit, smaller sites tend not to be economical; commercial bodies cannot always access a broad range of funds and volunteers may be less willing to work with them; environmental expertise may be available however it is often shared across many contracts if available at all.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Option 2c: Transfer to community body: These sites are of a scale where community management could be viable though some support may be required due to the complexity of aspects of the sites and associated liabilities; community bodies may be well equipped to raise local funds, support volunteering and local involvement. Support would probably be required with environmental aspects and liabilities, e.g. reservoirs etc.

Option 3: Partnership: Partnership options could offer many benefits but are likely to be time-consuming to develop and may have limited certainty for SCC with regard to ongoing management responsibilities. This would be difficult to explore as a separate option in its own right but might sit better as a component of other options.

Option 4: Trust: There may be benefits to these sites being managed by a bespoke trust, including the ability to fundraise through a wider range of sources, the ability to support community involvement and volunteering, etc. For these sites the trust model would only be viable if the trust also had some larger sites as well.

Conclusion: There are four potentially viable options for the major local sites, including retaining in-house, managing via a bespoke trust, transferring to an environmental body or community management. The trust option would only be viable if a trust were being set up to manage some of the larger sites as these would not be a viable portfolio on their own; transfer to an environmental body scores well but may not be feasible as there was no interest from such bodies through the previous expression of interest exercise.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Options appraisal – Minor Local Sites

The minor local sites include: Hanbury Common, Oakamoor

Vision and requirements for the sites: These are small local sites used for local amenity, e.g. as picnic sites. They have no significant environmental requirements and therefore the focus is on maintaining them as an accessible and enjoyable local resource.

Key objectives:

- Ensure sites are managed and maintained to provide a safe and enjoyable visitor experience

Measure	Weighting	Option 1	Option 1 score	Option 2a	Option 2a score	Option 2b	Option 2b score	Option 2c	Option 2c score	Option 3	Option 3 score	Option 4	Option 4 score
Efficient operating model that is achievable, flexible and resilient to future change	35	5	175	3	105	9	315	7	245	3	105	4	140
Ability to generate income & secure additional funding to enhance the visitor experience	15	4	60	5	75	4	60	7	105	5	75	7	105
Ability to attract and retain volunteers and engage communities	30	6	180	6	180	5	150	8	240	6	180	6	180
Ability to meet legal and environmental requirements	20	7	140	7	140	7	140	6	120	7	140	6	120
Total	100%		555		500		665		710		500		545

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Rationale

Weighting: These small local sites are relatively simple and mainly require grounds maintenance type work. A higher weighting has therefore been given to efficiency of operation and the ability to increase community engagement and volunteering since this could be very effective to support management and local use and value of the sites, increasing their benefits to local people. Ensuring the sites are safe and accessible is also important but there are less other legal requirements on these sites. There is also limited opportunity for income generation and enhancement of facilities.

Option 1: Retain in-house: These small sites could be retained in-house and require relatively little work; long term viability and flexibility will always be subject to pressures on council budgets however and as small sites within a more complex portfolio these sites are always likely to be lower on the priority list. Other options may therefore offer better scope to maximise the benefits the sites could offer to local communities.

Option 2a: Transfer to environmental body: While environmental bodies could manage the sites well, they are ultimately unlikely to be interested in these sites, preferring sites with greater environmental interest. There was no interest in these sites from environmental bodies in the previous EOI process.

Option 2b: Transfer to commercial body: Commercial management may be an option for these sites since they largely require grounds maintenance work. Commercial bodies may however be less successful at developing volunteering and community involvement and this would need to be considered.

Option 2c: Transfer to community body: These sites could be ideal for community management; community groups would be able to reduce running costs and greatly support an involvement by the community in the management of the site. They could effectively secure funding for small-scale enhancements that would maximise benefits to the community. Liabilities are at a manageable level.

Option 3: Partnership: The partnership option could offer many benefits but scores low on feasibility as a stand-alone option due to the likely complexity of setting it up; it is also likely to be less feasible for such small sites. Partnership working could however be explored as a component of other options.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Option 4: Trust: The sites could be included in a portfolio of sites for a bespoke trust, however they would only work as part of a wider portfolio - this option would not stand alone. The sites may be less attractive as their potential to add to the viability of the trust would be limited.

Conclusion: Community management is the highest scoring option for the minor local sites - the sites lend themselves well to this approach and community management would be more likely to engender community involvement and maximise the benefits these sites could offer to local people. However the previous EOI process found that there would need to be a support and capacity-building process required to facilitate this. Commercial management may offer an efficient way to manage the sites though may not achieve the community benefits that would be desirable. Retaining in house remains a default option.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Options appraisal – Greenways

The greenways include: Stafford to Newport; Oakamoor to Denstone; Leek to Rushton

Vision and requirements for the sites: The greenways are an important multi-user recreational resource providing popular amenity and utility routes in the county. Ensuring they are maintained to a high standard is a priority, plus in some cases surfacing could be enhanced to make them more suitable for a wider range of users.

Key objectives:

- Ensure sites are managed and maintained to provide safe and enjoyable routes for amenity and utility purposes

Measure	Weighting	Option 1	Option 1 score	Option 2a	Option 2a score	Option 2b	Option 2b score	Option 2c	Option 2c score	Option 3	Option 3 score	Option 4	Option 4 score
Efficient operating model that is achievable, flexible and resilient to future change	35	6	210	2	70	7	245	4	140	2	70	4	140
Ability to generate income & secure additional funding to enhance the visitor experience	10	3	30	4	40	3	30	4	40	4	40	4	40
Ability to attract and retain volunteers and engage communities	20	6	120	6	120	5	100	7	140	6	120	6	120
Ability to meet legal and environmental requirements	35	7	245	7	245	7	245	6	210	7	245	7	245
Total	100%		605		475		620		530		475		545

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Rationale

Weighting: The linear nature of greenways and the presence of significant items of infrastructure (e.g. bridges) has meant the highest weighting has been given to measure 1 - efficiency of operation. As greenways often connect urban areas and provide easy access to the countryside, it is also important that they are well-maintained so ensuring our legal responsibilities also scored high. Greenways run through many communities and therefore provide an ideal opportunity to increase community engagement and volunteering, although it is recognised that this might prove difficult to co-ordinate. There is limited opportunity for income generation and enhancement of facilities other than at key entry points onto greenways.

Option 1: Retain in-house: Greenways could be retained in-house, requiring basic grounds maintenance activities i.e. regular inspections and vegetation control, and reactive path and infrastructure maintenance. Greenways are often promoted as leisure routes and alternative routes for walkers and cyclists, meaning that their constant upkeep must remain a priority and the council is well placed to deliver this; it can deploy its staff to meet business need anywhere across the county at short notice. It is recognised however, that the long term viability of Option 1 will always be subject to pressures on council budgets.

Option 2a: Transfer to environmental body: While environmental bodies could manage greenways, they are unlikely to be interested in them as an asset since they have limited environmental interest. Environmental bodies offer no benefits beyond option 1 (default option) and scores joint lowest with the partnership option.

Option 2b: Transfer to commercial body: Commercial management may be an option for greenways since they largely require grounds maintenance type work. Commercial bodies should be able to offer private sector efficiency and dynamism, but may not be able to be flexible in emergency situations and may be less resilient to future changes. They would be able to meet legal and environmental requirements as this would be a condition of the contract.

Option 2c: Transfer to community body: Many of the liabilities attached to greenways are manageable at a local level (except bridges), meaning they could be managed by community groups. However, where communities have got involved in their management, this has tended to focus on the section of the greenway within the confines of the settlement rather than the sections further away. The linear nature of greenways makes the opportunity for community management more complicated.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Option 3: Partnership: The partnership option could offer many benefits but scores low on feasibility as a stand-alone option due to the likely complexity of setting it up; the greenway network is likely to be less attractive to a partnership than all other countryside assets. Greenways would have to be explored as part of a package of measures.

Option 4: Trust: Greenways could be included in a portfolio of other countryside sites (e.g. country parks and local sites) and form part of a bespoke trust model but this would not work as a stand-alone option. They would however be unlikely to be attractive to a trust as they have little potential to raise income and can be costly to maintain.

Conclusion: Commercial management is the highest scoring option for greenways. The physical nature of greenways lends them to this approach as it is recognised that the private sector may well bring greater efficiencies. The council must ensure that any tender provides an improved service specification. Retaining in house remains a feasible default option.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Options appraisal – Public rights of way (maintenance)

These include 4,400km of designated public rights of way including approximately 3,700km of footpaths 700km of bridleways and small distance of BOATS and restricted byways.

Vision and requirements for the sites: Under the Highways Act 1980, public rights of way must be maintained (at public expense) so that they are safe and open for public use.

Key objective:

- Ensure rights of way are maintained to provide safe and usable routes across the county.

Measure	Weighting	Option 1	Option 1 score	Option 2a	Option 2a score	Option 2b	Option 2b score	Option 2c	Option 2c score	Option 3	Option 3 score	Option 4	Option 4 score
Efficient operating model that is achievable, flexible and resilient to future change	30	6	180	0	0	7	210	3	90	0	0	2	60
Ability to generate income & secure additional funding to enhance the visitor experience	10	5	50	2	20	4	40	6	60	2	20	4	40
Ability to attract and retain volunteers and engage communities	25	6	150	5	125	5	125	7	175	5	125	5	125
Ability to meet legal and environmental requirements	35	6	210	5	175	6	210	4	140	5	175	6	210
Total	100%		590		320		585		465		320		435

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Rationale

Weighting: The council has a statutory duty to manage and maintain the county's rights of way network, including keeping it open and safe for people to use. For this reason, measure 4 is most heavily weighted; the ability to achieve a flexible and resilient operating model is also considered a major factor as the county has a large and expansive network, spanning 4,400km. There is also scope to increase volunteer input into its maintenance, but in reality this will always be supporting a staff-based model. Rights of way offer little opportunity to generate an income.

Option 1: Retain in-house: The maintenance of public rights of way could be retained in-house, but under the revised model which will see all parts of the service - staff, processes and procedures - change in order to be deliverable within available resources. The council has ultimate accountability for ensuring that the network remains open and safe for users; it is well placed to manage such a large, expansive network; it can deploy its staff to meet business need anywhere across the county at short notice; and the council has a good track record of volunteering and community involvement, and this can be developed further. It is recognised however, that the long-term viability of Option 1 will always be subject to pressures on council budgets.

Option 2a: Transfer to environmental body: While environmental bodies could maintain the rights of way network, they are unlikely to be interested as their focus is on the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. Environmental bodies offer no benefits beyond option 1 (default option) and scores joint lowest with the partnership option.

Option 2b: Transfer to commercial body: Securing a commercial provider to maintain public rights of way is an option for some or all of the necessary activities required to maintain the network. While a commercial provider should be able to offer private sector efficiency and dynamism, it may not be flexible in situations that require an immediate response and it may be less resilient to future changes. Meeting all legal requirements would be included within the contract, but the council would have to retain accountability.

Option 2c: Transfer to community body: While public rights of way could be managed by community groups, this is likely to always be as part of a staff-based model (i.e. option 1). Community groups may struggle to carry out large-scale works but could assist greatly with general maintenance of their local routes. Many of the liabilities attached to rights of way are manageable at a local level (with the exception of large span bridges), with many community groups requiring minimal training and guidance.

Appendix B – Countryside Estate Review – Options Appraisal

Option 3: Partnership: The partnership option could offer many benefits but scores low on feasibility as a stand-alone option due to the likely complexity of setting it up; the rights of way network is likely to be less attractive to a partnership than all other countryside assets. The rights of way network would have to be explored as part of a package of measures.

Option 4: Trust: Rights of way maintenance could be included in a portfolio of other countryside sites (e.g. country parks and local sites) and form part of a bespoke trust model. However, rights of way maintenance would only work as part of a wider portfolio - this option would not stand alone; it would also not be attractive to a trust since it offers little opportunity to generate income or add value.

Conclusion: Retaining rights of way maintenance in-house (option 1) is the highest scoring option, closely followed by commercial body (option 2b). The size and spread of the rights of way network lends itself to both of these models. A combination of these two options may offer even greater benefits, with the council ensuring that any commercial body delivers to an improved service specification. Environmental bodies, community involvement, trust and partnership models have all scored low.