

Countryside Estate Review

Community Impact Assessment

Checklist and Executive Summary



Name of Proposal: Countryside Estate Review

Project Sponsor: Janene Cox, Commissioner for Culture, Communities and Rural

Project Managers: Nicola Swinnerton, Rural Development and Access Manager;
Sarah Bentley, Environmental Advice Manager; Emma Beaman, Countryside Manager

Date: 13 November 2018

Final Checklist – Prior to submitting your Community Impact Assessment (CIA), please ensure that the actions on the checklist below have been completed, to reassure yourself/ SLT/ Cabinet that the CIA process has been undertaken appropriately.

| Checklist | Action Completed (tick) | Comments/Actions |
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| <p>The project supports the Council's Business Plan, priorities and MTFS.</p> |  | <p>The delivery of an effective countryside estate and rights of way network contributes to the delivery of the Council's vision for a connected Staffordshire where everyone has the opportunity to access more jobs and feel the benefits of economic growth; be healthier and more independent; feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their communities.</p> <p>The estate and network contribute to the Council's priorities by providing green spaces to support people's health and wellbeing, contributing to quality of life and Staffordshire's attractiveness as a place to live, work and visit. By supporting active community involvement, including through volunteering, they also contribute to community cohesion, skills development and employability. Many of the country parks are significant for their natural and cultural heritage, and the rights of way network provides safe access to local facilities, making them important assets for communities.</p> <p>The current operating model for the estate is through a countryside service based in Rural County. The wider budget for Rural County is currently £2.16 million per annum (with an additional annual capital budget of £150,000).</p> <p>Through the county council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, Rural County is currently committed to delivering further savings of £318,000 from its net operating budget from 2019/20 through to 2020/21. The delivery of this cumulative saving would represent a further reduction of 15% in the Rural County's 2018/19 net revenue budget.</p> |
| <p>It is clear what the decision is or what decision is being requested.</p> |  | <p>Cabinet approval is needed for the estate 'groupings' and appraisal process; the recommended package of</p> |

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| | | management solutions (and associated implementation plan); and the scheme of delegation to make final decisions. |
| For decisions going to Cabinet, the CIA findings are reflected in the Cabinet Report and potential impacts are clearly identified and mitigated for (where possible). | ✓ | Findings are covered in full Community Impact Assessment, which is an appendix to the main report. Also see the full Options Appraisal document. |
| The aims, objectives and outcomes of the policy, service or project have been clearly identified. | ✓ | The aim, objectives and outcome of the countryside estate review; the critical success factors and the appraisal measures (including weightings) are detailed in the main report and its appendices. |
| The groups who will be affected by the policy, service or project have been clearly identified. | ✓ | The main groups affected by the countryside estate review are the users of the estate and the rights of way network; and the staff employed to manage and maintain the estate and network. |
| The communities that are likely to be more adversely impacted than others have been clearly identified. | ✓ | Further details are set out in the full Community Impact Assessment. The main PSED groups that may be affected by the countryside estate review are people with physical disabilities, mental health issues, and staff. The measures to mitigate against this have been outlined. Other groups that may see an impact are rural communities and people using the sites to participate in leisure and recreational activities. |
| Engagement / consultation has been undertaken and is representative of the residents most likely to be affected. | ✓ | A full public consultation exercise ended in early 2016. There has also been a range of engagement and consultation with customers, and with a wide range of stakeholders and potential partners during the review. Staff have been engaged via team meetings, 1-2-1s, email updates, and via Rural County Review meetings. |
| A range of people with the appropriate knowledge and expertise have contributed to the CIA. | ✓ | Rural County Managers (OMT) and Senior Leaders from Families & Communities have had the opportunity to contribute to the Community Impact Assessment. |
| Appropriate evidence has been provided and used to inform the development and design of the policy, service or project. This includes data, research, engagement/consultation, case studies and local knowledge. | ✓ | Research has been referenced to support the findings in the Community Impact Assessment. This research has steered the countryside estate review. |
| The CIA evidences how the Council has considered its statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 and how it has considered the impacts of any change on people with protected characteristics. | ✓ | Further details are set out in the full Community Impact Assessment. The main PSED groups that may be affected are people with physical disabilities and mental health issues, and staff. The measures to mitigate against this impact have been outlined. Access to the countryside estate and rights of way network will be unaffected by the countryside estate review. |

The next steps to deliver the project have been identified.



If Cabinet approve the recommendation on the suggested delivery model/s for the countryside estate and rights of way maintenance, the next steps are found in the Implementation Plan.

Executive Summary – The Executive Summary is intended to be a collation of the **key issues and findings** from the CIA and other research undertaken. This should be completed **after** the CIA and research has been completed. Please structure the summary using the headings on the left that relate to the sections in the **CIA template**. Where no major impacts have been identified, please state N/A.

| | Which groups will be affected? | Benefits | Risks | Mitigations / Recommendations |
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| <p>PSED – What are the impacts on residents with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010? <i>Highlight any concerns that have emerged as a result of the equality analysis on any of the protected groups and how these will be mitigated. It is important that Elected Members are fully aware of the equality duties so that they can make an informed decision and this can be supported with robust evidence.</i></p> | People with physical disabilities | <p>Facilities that support access by people with disabilities (e.g. mobility scooters, accessible toilets and designated parking bays) are provided on larger sites. There are no proposals to reduce this offer going forwards. In the long-term, a more sustainable delivery model for the countryside estate may give the opportunity to improve facilities.</p> <p>Legislation requires that rights of way provision for disabled people is considered equally with that of other users.</p> | <p>Given budget reductions, there is a risk that service standards may reduce, which could impact upon disabled users.</p> <p>There may also be a perception that a different provider may not be able to retain current service standards and people may feel that their access and enjoyment may be affected if services are transferred to an external provider; they may feel the overall condition of the countryside estate and rights of way network (e.g. paths and furniture) may deteriorate if they are maintained by an external provider.</p> | <p>We will attempt to ensure quality of access and provision remains to at least existing standards and will engage with relevant stakeholder groups with regards to this in future, as appropriate. This will ensure that this group are not significantly or disproportionately affected by the Review.</p> |
| | All staff involved directly and indirectly with the management of the countryside estate and rights of way maintenance. | <p>On completion of the Review, staff should have greater job security and career progression opportunities.</p> <p>Whilst organisational change will be necessary, this is unlikely to have a significant effect the workforce profile. Some changes may be seen</p> | <p>Staff currently face uncertainty as proposals are still being developed. There is the potential that some staff will be made redundant or transferred to other organisations via the TUPE process.</p> | <p>A clear and transparent consultation process will be taken with staff and trade unions.</p> <p>Managers will continue to brief, engage and consult staff and their trade union representatives as the detailed proposals are developed.</p> |
| | No matter which delivery model is chosen, a staffing re-organisation across the whole of | <p>in the gender profile as more men work in managing the</p> | | |

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| | <p>Rural County is required to deliver its MTFS commitments. Therefore, this CIA includes all Rural County staff.</p> | <p>countryside estate and carrying out rights of way maintenance.</p> | | |
| <p>Health and Care – How will the proposal impact on residents’ health? How will the proposal impact on demand for or access to social care or health services?</p> | <p>Everyone, but especially those prone to, or suffering with, poor mental health.</p> | <p>The countryside estate and rights of way network will continue to have a positive effect on mental health - raising self-esteem, improving people’s mood, and reducing isolation.</p> <p>Volunteering opportunities for people who suffer poor mental health are available across the countryside estate and this is likely to continue after the Review.</p> | <p>There is a risk that the process of change through the Review and the public perception of this may impact upon the mental and physical health of Staffordshire’s population. If sites are transferred it is possible that a new provider will introduce changes that some people will view negatively and therefore vote with their feet, therefore there is a risk that mental and physical health might decline as a result of fewer visits being made.</p> | <p>People will be kept informed with local information to confirm that the sites will still continue to operate for the benefit of Staffordshire’s residents and visitors.</p> <p>Stakeholder engagement with organisations representing these groups will take place as detailed proposals for each site are developed. This will ensure that these groups are not significantly or disproportionately affected by the Review.</p> <p>Reassurance needs to be given to the public that no matter the outcome of the Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All sites will remain open and available to the public. • Any changes regarding how sites are operated are designed to help them become financially sustainable. • Unless there is evidence of added value, sites will continue to be managed by the Council. |
| | <p>Everyone using the countryside estate and rights of way network to participate in leisure and recreational activities.</p> | <p>By their nature, green spaces promote physical activity by offering a safe, accessible and attractive place for exercise, such as walking, running, or cycling.</p> <p>The countryside estate hosts numerous events that promote healthy lifestyles e.g. Ironman and Walking for Health. These activities of this type will continue after the Review.</p> | | |

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| <p>Economy – How will the proposal impact on the economy of Staffordshire or impact on the income of Staffordshire’s residents?</p> | <p>Businesses seeking to move within or relocate to Staffordshire; and businesses who operate on the countryside estate and who sell goods and services to the Council.</p> | <p>If, as a result of the Review, countryside sites have an enhanced offer, this will make the local area more attractive to inward investors. It may also create new opportunities for businesses who want to sell goods and services on the estate.</p> <p>Wherever possible, the Council will continue to secure developer contributions to mitigate against the adverse impact of development on the countryside estate.</p> | <p>There may be a perception that the Council is seeking to use some of its countryside sites for development (or even restrict development).</p> | <p>There needs to be a clear message that the countryside estate will be protected for future generations.</p> <p>There will be ongoing discussions with the Stoke and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, as well as local planning authorities, to ensure opportunities for the countryside estate to support economic growth and inward investment are taken responsibly.</p> |
| | <p>People directly and indirectly employed to manage the countryside estate and maintain the rights of way network.</p> | <p>If, as a result of the Review, some activities are transferred to other providers, there may be opportunities to safeguard staff by transferring them under the TUPE process. There may also be new jobs created and improved career progression opportunities within these organisations.</p> <p>It is likely that new job roles will be created within Rural County to oversee the management of the estate and rights of way maintenance. Where possible, jobs will be advertised externally.</p> <p>Countryside volunteering can develop people’s confidence and skills, improving their employability.</p> | <p>Staff currently face uncertainty as proposals are still being developed. There is the potential that some staff will be made redundant or transferred to other organisations via the TUPE process.</p> | <p>Managers will continue to brief, engage and consult staff and their trade union representatives as the detailed proposals are developed.</p> |

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| <p>Environment – How will the proposal impact on the physical environment of Staffordshire?</p> | <p>Users of the countryside estate and public rights of way network.</p> <p>People living on the estate or who have public rights of way crossing their land.</p> | <p>Most of the countryside estate is within rural Staffordshire and is protected by environmental legislation due to its fauna and flora.</p> <p>Following the Review, sites and rights of way will remain open for public use.</p> <p>Rights of way provide a convenient means of travelling, particularly for short journeys, in both rural and urban areas. They will continue to be a means of travelling, irrelevant of the Review's outcome.</p> | <p>The public may feel that another provider will place less importance on the natural environment and their designations; the public may feel that the focus of another provider will be on efficiencies and making money.</p> <p>The public may view the Council as unsympathetic to the protection and preservation of Staffordshire's natural environment.</p> | <p>Site management plans will be produced as part of lease agreements or contract management processes and these will be regularly monitored and reviewed by the Council.</p> <p>There needs to be a clear message to the public that unless there is evidence of added value, sites will remain in the management of the Council.</p> <p>Ongoing stakeholder engagement with organisations representing rural and environmental bodies will continue as the Review progresses.</p> |
| <p>Localities / Communities – How will the proposal impact on Staffordshire's communities?</p> | <p>Individual volunteers.</p> <p>Stakeholder and user groups.</p> <p>Parish and town councils.</p> | <p>No matter the outcome of the Review, greater community involvement in the management of the countryside estate and maintenance of public rights of way is required.</p> <p>Fortunately, countryside sites are often seen as part of local identity and heritage, with accessible spaces providing community places that are inclusive and free to use.</p> <p>Many of Staffordshire's countryside sites are small and scattered throughout the county, making them difficult to maintain economically. However, these small sites are highly valued by the</p> | <p>An Expression of Interest exercise undertaken in 2017 identified a great deal of interest in countryside sites from local communities, however many of the groups did not feel able to take on the full management of sites without considerable professional support and with the county council retaining the more complex on-site liabilities.</p> | <p>Ongoing stakeholder engagement with organisations representing local community groups and the voluntary sector will continue as proposals develop.</p> |

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| | | people who live nearby. | | |
| | Everyone, but especially vulnerable members of society. | Getting community groups involved in the management of the countryside estate and maintenance of public rights of way can bring about a safer and more welcoming local environment. | There may be a perception that a countryside estate that is not managed by the Council is less safe. The public may feel that the priority of a new provider will be making money rather than community safety. | <p>Site management plans will be produced as part of lease agreements or contract management processes and these will be regularly monitored and reviewed by the Council.</p> <p>The role the countryside estate and rights of way network can play in place-making will be promoted and people/groups encouraged to participate.</p> <p>Conversations with community groups will continue to promote and retain community involvement in the management and maintenance of countryside sites and rights of way.</p> |
| | Students and adult learners. | <p>Countryside sites offer inspirational spaces that can unlock children's learning potential.</p> <p>If some of the sites are managed by another provider, there is the potential that they will widen the educational offer.</p> <p>The rights of way network provides safe access to many schools and colleges.</p> <p>Apprenticeships and work</p> | <p>If some of the sites are managed by a community or commercial organisation, there is a risk that their educational offer will be weaker than the in-house offer.</p> <p>There will always be the risk that any 'educational offer' will not be seen as a priority, no matter the final delivery model.</p> | <p>Conversations with educational and training providers will take place to ensure that opportunities, such as work placements and apprenticeships, are developed.</p> |

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| | | <p>placement opportunities are available from time-to-time within the Ranger Service.</p> <p>The Apprenticeship Levy offers great potential that will need to be explored further.</p> | | |
| | <p>Participants in outdoor leisure activities e.g. fishing, bird watching, trail running, etc.</p> <p>Visitors with an interest in culture and heritage.</p> | <p>There is the potential that leisure and culture assets could be enhanced if countryside sites are transferred; Environmental bodies, community groups and commercial organisations may be best placed to utilise these assets.</p> | <p>The public may fear that opportunities to participate in leisure and cultural pursuits may be reduced if the countryside estate is transferred to an external provider. They may also perceive that the condition of these assets may deteriorate or become a commercial commodity.</p> | <p>Stakeholder engagement with organisations representing these groups will take place as detailed proposals for each site are developed. This will ensure that this group is not significantly or disproportionately affected by the Review.</p> |
| | <p>Individual volunteers.</p> <p>Stakeholder and user groups.</p> <p>Parish and town councils.</p> | <p>No matter the outcome of the Review, greater community involvement in the management of the countryside estate and maintenance of public rights of way is required.</p> <p>A menu of countryside volunteering opportunities is being developed as well as a comprehensive offer across the Ranger Service, Works Unit and Visitor Centres. The volunteering offer will be high-quality and standardised across the county.</p> <p>Arguably, environmental bodies and local community groups are better suited to managing certain assets; they can attract volunteers, access funding opportunities and are</p> | <p>There is a risk that the number of volunteers needed to help manage the countryside estate and maintain rights of way does not come forward, meaning that there is a risk that the Council fails to meet its statutory duties and legal responsibilities.</p> | <p>A clear and considered volunteer recruitment campaign is required, together with measures to retain existing volunteers.</p> |

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| | | less bureaucratic than the Council. | | |
| | Rural Communities: People living in rural areas. | Most of the countryside estate and rights of way network is within rural Staffordshire. These assets support the rural economy and are valued as key local amenities. | Some rural communities might view the Council as withdrawing services from rural areas. It may raise criticism regarding the lack of public money being spent in rural areas. | <p>Ongoing engagement with community organisations (e.g. parish councils, friends of groups, etc.) will continue as proposals develop.</p> <p>Reassurance needs to be given to the public that no matter the outcome of the Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All sites will remain open and available to the public. • Any changes regarding how sites are operated are designed to help them become financially sustainable. • Unless there is evidence of added value, sites will continue to be managed by the Council. |