

Local Members' Interest
N/A

## **Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee – 12 October 2015**

### **Countryside Estate Review**

#### **Recommendation/s**

1. That the Select Committee reviews the proposals for formal public consultation regarding the future management of the county council's countryside estate and makes formal representations as appropriate.

#### **Report of the Cabinet Member for Economy, Environment and Transport**

### **Summary**

#### **What is the Select Committee being asked to do and why?**

2. The Select Committee has previously been involved in and influenced the Review into the future management of the countryside estate. At its last meeting on 4 September 2015, the Committee considered and made recommendations on the ten potential options identified for managing the estate as part of an initial engagement process with critical stakeholders. The results of this initial engagement process and a benchmarking exercise have now been analysed and some of the options have been discounted.
3. In accordance with their decision on 4 September, the Select Committee is now being given an opportunity to consider the results and feedback from the initial engagement process and to comment further on the proposals for managing the countryside estate before Cabinet decides whether to proceed to formal public consultation.
4. The comments of the Select Committee will be reported to the Cabinet at their meeting on 21 October 2015 for them to take into account in their consideration of this matter.

### **Report**

#### **Background**

5. The Select Committee initially considered the strategy for the Review at its meeting on 18th December 2014 and agreed its critical success factors:
6. At its last meeting on 4 September 2015, the Select Committee, having visited some countryside sites, considered and commented on the ten potential options identified for managing the estate as part of an initial phase of engagement with critical stakeholders. The engagement process was also conducted with landowning organisations, parish

councils with a site in their area, tenants, user groups and bodies with a key interest. The Select Committee resolved that:

- a) a further report be brought to the October Select Committee prior to Cabinet decision on any proposals;
- b) the Select Committee support consideration of Options 2 (status quo with enhanced development strategy), 8 (delivery of on-site services or management activities via contract-based agreements with multiple agencies) and 9 (establish a trading company, trust, social enterprise or community interest company);
- c) the Select Committee support consideration of Option 5 if the wording is changed to “Transfer the management but retain the ownership of individual sites....”
- d) the Select Committee do not support Options 3 (transfer ownership of the estate to a single agency) or 10 (disposal of sites on the open market).

- 7. In addition to the initial engagement process, a comprehensive benchmarking exercise had also been undertaken with sixteen other local authorities undertaking similar reviews.
- 8. The results and feedback from these initial engagement and benchmarking processes have now been analysed and a number of options have been discounted. Also, some elements of the original options have been merged or rephrased for sake of clarity. Details of the analysis can be found in the Appendix attached to this report
- 9. Cabinet will be asked to consider taking the following four proposed options forward to public consultation at their meeting on 21 October: These options are in line with the Select Committee’s recommendations on 4 September.

Option A: Maintain the current arrangement and enhance the development strategy	Continue with the current management and ownership arrangement but develop strategies with the aim of increasing income from individual sites and boosting community involvement	This option is most suitable for Chasewater, Cannock Chase and the other country parks with visitor centres.
Option B: Transfer management, so that it is decided on a site by site basis to more than one provider	Seek partnership arrangements with local community or voluntary sector groups e.g. ‘Friends of’ Groups’ or Parish Councils whereby they could acquire leasehold or take over the management of one or more sites via appropriate leasing arrangements.	This option is more suitable for the smaller country parks and picnic sites and greenways.
Option C: Multi-Agency Partnership	Establish a multi-agency partnership of landowners to actively manage all green space sites in a specific	This option is equally applicable across the estate

	area. This could include pooling of resources and skills to generate economies of scale.	
Option D: Establish a not for profit trading company or Community Interest Company	The body would be responsible for running and developing part / all of the estate but Staffordshire County Council would retain ownership.	This option is equally applicable across the estate

10. It should be emphasised that none of these options are mutually exclusive and a combination of options could be considered where appropriate.
11. In accordance with their decision on 4 September, the Select Committee is now being given the opportunity to review the proposals for the management of the estate and to comment further before Cabinet considers the proposals at their meeting on 21 October 2015.
12. Subject to Cabinet approval, a full public consultation exercise will commence for 12 weeks with a wide range of service users, staff, partners and stakeholders.
13. It is anticipated that a follow up report will be considered by Cabinet in April 2016 which will include a full consultation report. This report will also feed into the Community Impact Assessment to ensure the council has a full understanding of the potential impacts and how they can be addressed.
14. A further report will be submitted to the Select Committee prior to Cabinet's consideration in April 2016.

**Link to Strategic Plan – Great Place to Live**

**Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity –**

**Community Impact** – A full CIA will be drafted following the formal public consultation. In the interim, a scoping CIA has been completed and is included in the background papers.

**Contact Officer**

Name and Job Title: Ian Wykes: Commissioner for the Rural County

Telephone No.: 01785 277295

Address/e-mail: [ian.wykes@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:ian.wykes@staffordshire.gov.uk)

**Appendix –**

Report on Initial Engagement and Options.

**Background papers**

Reports of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee – 18 December 2014 and 4 September 2015