# Appendix Report on Initial Engagement and Options

## 1. Introduction

The Countryside Estate Review seeks to identify the most sustainable way to manage the Staffordshire County Council's countryside estate and maximise its contribution to the economic and social wellbeing of the residents of Staffordshire and beyond.

Early stakeholder engagement was initiated from May 2015. The purpose of this initial phase of work was to test the draft options and identify those which have the greatest potential to deliver sustainable future management.

Conversations were held with a wide range of critical stakeholders between May and September 2015. Discussions were also held with other local authorities to identify any lessons learned and best practice from similar reviews elsewhere. This report summarises the results from this initial engagement.

## 2. Background

Ten options for the future management of the countryside estate were identified by the project team and are set out in the table below. These were in no way definitive and were simply provided to stimulate debate. These formed the basis of the stakeholder engagement, with comments received on the pros and cons of the options and which might be suitable for the different sites.

| Option 1:Status Quo | Status Quo: Continue to manage countryside estate in-house |
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| **Option 2: Status Quo with enhanced development strategy** | Maintain the status quo in terms of ownership and management but develop a strategy with the aim of extracting more income from the individual sites and reducing costs e.g. land rental for industrial development i.e. wind turbines, carefully managed commercial developments or timber operation expansion. Whilst it is currently a high priority to extract maximum value out of countryside sites, the management of public open spaces in particular also requires consideration of a wide variety of factors including ecological, public health and education benefits. This option could require some upfront investment. |
| **Option 3: Transfer freehold ownership of the estate to a single agency** | Transfer the freehold of one or more sites to a single provider. Many sites have a negative land value and the county council should therefore not |

| | expect capital gain but should instead expect to provide a 'dowry' as a necessary incentive. Legal restrictions and liabilities on many sites will impact on the amount of dowry required. |
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| **Option 4: Transfer management of the estate to a single provider** | Transfer management responsibility of all or part of the countryside estate to another public sector or charitable body. The management partner would be responsible for running and developing the estate via contract arrangements while the County Council would retain ownership. The county council could reduce its financial input over a period of time by placing an expectation on the provider organisation to source its own funding. |
| **Option 5: Transfer ownership and/ or management on a site by site basis to more than one provider** | Partnership arrangements with local community, voluntary sector or public sector bodies. For example Friends Groups, Parish Councils or other bodies could acquire the freehold or take over the management of one or more sites via community asset transfer (where appropriate) or long-term leases. The process would involve the production of a 'prospectus' including detail on every site designed to attract potential partners into 'expressing an interest' in the future ownership or management of a particular site or a number of sites. |
| **Option 6: Multi-Agency Partnership** | Establish a multi-agency partnership of landowners to actively manage all green space sites in a specific area. This could include pooling of resources and skills to generate economies of scale. |
| **Option 7: Private Sector Partnership** | A partnership with a private sector company based on a contract e g. AMEY. The maintenance of the countryside estate is currently in scope of the Infrastructure+ Project. The scope could be extended to include the management of the countryside estate. |
| **Option 8: Delivery of on-site services or management activities via contract-based agreements with multiple agencies** | This is a "hybrid model" whereby the county council would retain ownership and overall strategic management of the countryside estate but would implement partnership arrangements with other local authorities, agencies, companies and voluntary or wildlife groups to deliver certain services or site management activities, e.g. woodland management, events, education or implementation of HLS schemes. |
| **Option 9: Establish a trading company, trust, social enterprise or community interest company** | The body would be responsible for running and developing part / all of the estate but the County Council could retain ownership. |

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| **Option 10: Disposal of sites on the open market** | Selling a site would be most suitable for those sites with limited potential for public access |

## 3. Methodology

The initial engagement phase of the project comprised two elements:

    (i)        benchmarking with other local authorities involved in similar reviews of countryside sites to identify lessons learned and best practice.

    (ii)       engaging a range of critical stakeholders in the options for Staffordshire;

### 3.1 Benchmarking

As part of the benchmarking and best practice exercise, 16 local authorities were approached which have reviewed or are in the process of reviewing their countryside estates and landholdings. All are exploring alternative delivery options as either part of a formal review or as an ongoing cost saving exercise. Other related bodies with expertise in site management were also contacted.

### 3.2 Stakeholder Engagement

The purpose of this engagement was to test the viability of the original ten options, to identify those most likely to deliver on the critical success factors and to gauge potential interest for partnership working in the future. The table below sets out the groups of stakeholders contacted and the engagement method used.

| Stakeholder sector | Scope | Method Used |
|---|---|---|
| Landowning bodies | This was specifically targeted to those partners who already held similar land holdings in the county and consequently face the same challenges and as a result may be more willing to work collaboratively. This included  RSPB, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Land Trust, Forestry Commission  (Forest Enterprise), Groundwork, National Trust, Entrust, District and Borough Councils and Stoke on Trent City Council. | An event was held on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2015 led by an independent facilitator.<br><br>Follow up meetings were held with various partners including Natural England, RSPB, Forest Enterprise, etc. |
| Parish Councils | SPCA and Parish Councils with a site situated wholly or partly within their administrative area. | An initial briefing was held as part of the annual SPCA meeting on 14 April 2015.<br>An engagement session with Parish Councils was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2015.<br>Numerous follow up meetings have been held particularly through attendance at Parish Council meetings. |
| Staff | This included speaking with the | Briefings were held with the |

| | teams directly involved in running the service (Rangers and Works Unit). In addition other teams were included who have direct dealings with the parks including the Environmental Specialists, Spatial Data and Rights of Way. | teams and feedback collated. |
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| Tenants | There are a wide range of tenancies on the Countryside Estate such as Heritage Railways, Business Unit holders at Chasewater, food concessions, fishing licences graziers etc. | Views on the draft options were requested by correspondence |
| User Groups / other bodies | This included bodies representing use sectors such as the Ramblers association, British Horse Society, etc. and bodies such as the Joint Local Access Forum and Cannock Chase AONB Partnership | Views on the draft options were requested by correspondence. Additional follow up meetings were held where requested. The project was also presented to the Joint Local Action Forum which has a statutory responsibility to oversee access issues in Staffordshire. Engagement sessions were held as part of AONB meetings regarding options for Cannock Chase. |
| Elected members | In addition to their scrutiny function Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee have also provided recommendations for consideration of Cabinet. | Site visits were held for members in August and a presentation given to PSSC in early September. |

Data gathered from the stakeholder engagement exercise was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The analysis is described in section 4 of this report.

## 4. Results

The following sections outline the results of this initial engagement phase of the project.

### 4.1 Benchmarking

Discussions with 16 other local authorities show that various approaches are being taken to the management of countryside sites. In some cases, e.g. the Isle of Wight, where the overall number of sites is relatively small they are strongly in favour of keeping the majority of the estate together so are looking for one organisation to take this on. However, the majority of authorities contacted acknowledged that there is no one solution and are opting for a multi-faceted approach (in many cases not dissimilar to the long list of options being considered by SCC). Most are reviewing on a site by site basis, with some sites falling into general categories which include, e.g. those that are suitable for development/investment to maximise income, those that may be suitable for community asset transfer, those suitable for transfer to a not-for-profit trust – either national or local.

The success rate is variable depending on many factors and there seems to be no one model that can be lifted from the shelf and applied across the board; there will be some variables and adaptations to be made in each case. There are however some good examples of how the different models are working. For example, Northamptonshire report that through development / income generation and an investment strategy in play areas their parks are now 95% self-financing. Similarly Shropshire also reports that it expects the two major parks to be cost neutral this year (2015/16) and that some of their sites are also in negotiation for community asset transfer.  Buckinghamshire also report that some key parks are now self-funding, though they gain significant income from filming contracts due to proximity to a major film studio.  Leicestershire are trialling multi-agency contracts for grounds maintenance and site security as a wider organisational initiative.

There is a good example of a local authority spin out, the Chiltern Rangers Community Interest Company (CIC), which was formed in 2013 and is performing well. It is the first woodland management service to have arisen from a local authority spin out process and until this point Wycombe District Council had run the service in-house.

In Sheffield, the City Council are working in partnership with the National Trust exploring the potential of an endowment model for all its public parks and green spaces. The four areas for raising investment that the project is exploring are: health and wellbeing, ecosystems services, public giving and 21st century philanthropy.

However, the benchmarking exercise has also highlighted some risks associated with different models; for example, one council is working with a Friends of Group (FOG) to formalise its status to take on a more formal management role on a 43 hectare site. Although it is too early to say if this model will work in the long-term,

there have been some initial capacity issues which will need to be resolved. In another example where a local authority has transferred sites to a trust, ongoing continued reduction in local authority funds is now causing some concerns within this partnership. Benchmarking and best practice examples have also been explored with local, national and third sector organisations that are developing and piloting alternative delivery models for 21st century parks.  One such organisation is Nesta, an innovative charity which created a £1m grant scheme in 2014 with Heritage and Big Lottery Funds, to support a small number of pioneering innovators with a focus on finding new business models to help parks to thrive for the next century. Eleven teams were selected to try out their business models which include; endowment models, community asset transfer, development of community interest companies, sponsorship, donations and philanthropy.   Nesta and partners will publish the findings at the end of this year.

Discussions have also taken place with The National Trust, The Land Trust, The Parks Trust in Milton Keynes, and Shared Assets (a not-for-profit organisation) all of which are leading or involved in implementing alternative delivery models.

The benchmarking exercise has highlighted some interesting additional theories and options being considered elsewhere. Whilst this may be deemed as outside of the scope of this particular SCC countryside estate review, they are worthy of consideration when horizon scanning across the wider picture. These include

- Public sector shared management models across neighbouring local authorities – e.g. devolution (potential economies of scale through shared resources)

- Greater focus on shared outcomes and re-allocation of financial resources across the organisation. For example one authority has brought in funding from its public health and sustainable transport departments to support delivery of joint outcomes through its countryside service.

- The Parks Trust in Milton Keynes was set up in 1992 with a £20m endowment by the new town development corporation. The social enterprise now manages 5,000 acres of greenspace and employs 47 staff. Land owned by the Trust is classified into three categories.

  - Parkland, floodplain, ancient woodland – including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and scheduled monuments.
  - Transport corridors sometimes known as parkways.
  - Income earning assets (commercial properties, some included in the initial endowment.)

  The Trust is self-financing and generates the income needed to maintain the green estate from its investments and operations, including farming, letting of paddocks, events, sale of timber and commercial leisure activities. Their

investment fund has grown from £20m to £90m. The Local Authority in Milton Keynes has resolved it would like the Trust to take on the management of its green space and the Trust and the Authority are currently exploring how this can be achieved without jeopardizing viability of the existing operation.

*Conclusions from the benchmarking*

The broad options being considered by SCC are more or less in line with options being considered or implemented by other local authorities. There is a general understanding that whilst benchmarking is difficult on a like for like basis across authorities due to the nature and size of landholdings, there is a need to share best practice and learning experiences and most authorities who responded to the benchmarking request asked to be kept informed as to the outcome of SCC service review.

Reportedly there has been varying success with alternative delivery models and for most authorities it is an ongoing process taking a site by site approach. It is probably too early to evaluate the longer term effects of all the models as most are in early stages of discussions, development or implementation, but there are some early success stories and good examples of best practice to benchmark against. The models that have met with most success elsewhere relate to options 2, 5 and 9 in this review.

## 4.2 Results of stakeholder engagement

The extent of feedback was quite variable between different groups of stakeholders. Landowning bodies and staff provided detailed feedback with a high response rate, reflecting their strong interest in the review. There was a moderate response rate from parish councils, focusing mainly on the sites(s) of particular interest rather than more generic responses. The response rate from user groups and tenants was very low, with a few key exceptions. However, this was an initial phase of engagement to test options and some stakeholders may have chosen to wait for the consultation phase to see clearer proposals.

### 4.2.1 Generic Options Appraisal

This exercise was undertaken by the project team, landowning bodies and key staff, and the results have been merged in the table below. Input on the options from parish councils, user groups, members and other bodies has also been incorporated. The general pros and cons of each option are identified, without reference to any particular site.

| Option 1 – Do nothing | |
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| **Pros:** | **Cons:** |
| • Retains current familiar arrangements for users which have high public confidence | • Current delivery model is not affordable due to SCC budget pressures. |
| • Reduces risks associated with introducing alternative delivery models | • Management of estate is still largely reliant on SCC funding and at risk from |

| | competing council priorities. |
|---|---|
| • Retains access to a wide range of in-house expertise<br>• Able to manage and deliver SCC outcomes | • Difficult to maintain or improve existing services and facilities, also could be slow decline in service quality.<br>• Difficulty in managing and responding to growing public demand and expectation.<br>• Not financially viable or sustainable long-term<br>• Increases longer-term risk for the estate as not core SCC business<br>• Lack of access to capital and expertise/innovation<br>• No new economies of scale<br>• High risk that sites would deteriorate<br>• Reputational risks associated with deterioration<br>• H&S risks associated with reduced resource<br>• Staff morale deteriorates with loss of performance and could affect staff retention |

**Option 2 – Maximise income**

| Pros: | Cons: |
|---|---|
| • No impact on existing public access arrangements so retains familiarity for users<br>• SCC branding generates trust.<br>• Development strategy could support management of sites, ensuring they remain in good condition<br>• Staff and volunteers are professional and experienced and capable of dealing with all aspects of land management including anti-social behaviour, emergency and unforeseen circumstances.<br>• High level statutory, legal and compliance requirements will be maintained and met through support from Environmental Specialist team and other technical/specialist staff.<br>• Existing HLS funding streams would be secure.<br>• Existing volunteer offer and associated benefits will be maintained.<br>• No loss in influence/control over the management of the estate and its ability to contribute to SCC wider outcomes.<br>• Could be positive for wildlife | • Management of estate could still be largely reliant on SCC funding and other competing council priorities if sufficient investment/income is not realised.<br>• Could be difficult to maintain or improve existing services and facilities, also could be some loss in service quality if income is not realised.<br>• Income generated could be limited by need to balance ecological/ social value of land.<br>• May impact on SCC reputation<br>• Some development activities could be detrimental to wildlife, amenities and the landscape<br>• Potentially socially exclusive – some sites in low income areas, may impact on accessibility and wider outcomes<br>• Potentially to become too commercial and lose sight of the vision<br>• Funding access maybe restricted if continues in local authority ownership<br>• Income dependant – may affect sustainability<br>• Lack of capacity/capability<br>• Limited opportunities and competing in |

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| • Provides some financial sustainability<br>• Activities/events for local people – more engagement and a wider audience<br>• CIL income potential<br>• Provides security for employees<br>• Generation of income would help to reduce some financial pressure on SCC. | an increasingly competitive market<br>• Expectation management -People expect it to be free<br>• Some investment is likely to be required before any gain is realised<br>• Reality given site constraints – is there scope to generate required income to be resilient and sustainable long-term<br>• Potential conflicts with users for some income-generating activities<br>• Commercial drift – tendency to chase money rather than focus on site priorities<br>• Cafes are income generators but current arrangements with Entrust means income not directly attributed to sites ? |

**Option 3 – Transfer ownership to a single agency**

| **Pros**: | **Cons**: |
|---|---|
| • Transferring all of the estate in a single transaction to one provider is simpler to process and administer.<br>• Future financial pressure on SCC would be significantly reduced.<br>• All existing legal obligations and liabilities and responsibilities would be dissolved.<br>• Management of the estate is less reliant on SCC funding and priorities and may be better placed to access charitable or more innovative funding streams.<br>• Future long-term sustainability of the countryside estate may be more secure.<br>• Need for SCC to comply with high level statutory, legal and compliance requirements will be dissolved<br>• Consistency of approach<br>• Could be a body with access to volunteers to increase volunteer offer<br>• Existing staff would presumably transfer, retaining knowledge and expertise | • Risk to SCC reputation if new organisation lacks the ability and or capacity to deal with all aspects of land management.<br>• Changes could be made to existing public access arrangements<br>• Likely to require a significant endowment<br>• Transfer arrangements could be complex and costly to administer.<br>• Potential opposition from local communities, stakeholders and tenants.<br>• Loss of influence/control over the management of the estate and its ability to contribute to SCC wider outcomes.<br>• Ownership of estate could be via a single interest group.<br>• Could have a detrimental impact on volunteer offer.<br>• Risk to SCC reputation due to perception that the management of the estate is being "outsourced" due to financial pressures rather than being about improving the service and achieving outcomes.<br>• Organisation may not have full range of expertise / experience – though presumably staff would have to transfer so would be retained?<br>• Limited pool of potential owners – is this option realistic?<br>• If a private sector body could be commercial drift towards income- |

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| | • generation at expense of other management needs<br>• Risk of "do minimum" approach if private provider |

**Option 4 – Transfer management to a single agency (SCC retains ownership)**

| **Pros**: | **Cons**: |
|---|---|
| • Transferring the management in a single transaction to one provider is simpler to administer.<br>• Future financial pressure on SCC could be reduced.<br>• Management of the estate could be less reliant on SCC funding and priorities and better placed to access charitable or more innovative funding streams.<br>• Future long-term sustainability of the countryside estate may be more secure.<br>• SCC would retain influence over the management of the estate and its ability to contribute to SCC wider outcomes.<br>• Unlikely to be any impact on existing public access arrangements<br>• Less risk to SCC reputation<br>• Existing volunteer offer and associated benefits could be maintained.<br>• May be economies of scale if they go to a body that owns land nearby | • SCC would still be paying for the management cost<br>• Tracking the costs and benefits across another agency could be complex<br>• Risk of arrangement breaking down if budget requirements changed etc.<br>• Managing and responding to other partner expectations might prove difficult<br>• Demanding performance management regime would need to be created<br>• Ownership of estate could be via a single interest group.<br>• Risk to SCC reputation if new organisation lacks the ability and or capacity to deal with all aspects of land management.<br>• Transfer arrangements could be complex and costly to administer.<br>• Potential opposition from local communities, stakeholders and tenants<br>• Management partner may lack expertise and funds for one-off emergency repairs Would this remain SCC liability as owner?<br>• Contract needs to be watertight<br>• Is the market there that will ensure competitive process - limited pool of potential interested parties<br>• Continuity of new provider<br>• SCC retain liabilities and remain responsible overall<br>• May lose existing efficiencies of volunteers and ROW link<br>• Commercial drift as above if commercial body<br>• Costs of management of contract<br>• Potential for conflict of views on management<br>• May impact on SCC ability to deliver wider benefits, e.g. Ironman where additional management costs are involved |

**Option 5 – Transfer ownership / management on a site by site basis to more than one owner**

| Pros: | Cons: |
|---|---|
| • Management of the estate less reliant on SCC funding and priorities and better placed to access charitable or more innovative funding streams. | • Loss of strategic oversight and inability to arbitrate between competing interest groups. |
| • Alternative bodies may be better placed to focus and encourage local communities. | • Management partners may lack expertise and funds for one-off emergency repairs e.g. dams resulting in damage to SCC reputation. |
| • Staffordshire's residents are involved in shaping the delivery and management of the estate. | • Risk to SCC reputation if new organisations lack the ability and/or capacity to deal with all aspects of land management |
| • Benefits of volunteering could be maintained and enhanced. | • Loss in economies of scale by transferring on a site by site basis and reduced financial savings |
| • Encourages local community responsibility and could improve skills of local people. | • Changes could be made to existing public access arrangements, resulting in adverse reaction from public even if only perceived. |
| • Existing public access arrangements likely to be maintained. | • Tracking the costs and benefits across a range of agencies could be complex |
| • SCC passes on liability where transfer of ownership | • Managing and responding to a range of partners' expectations might prove difficult |
| • Be targeted and locally responsive | • Demanding performance management regimes would need to be created. |
| • Greater ability and flexibility to adapt to circumstance | • Could be difficult to comply with high level statutory, legal and compliance requirements. |
| • Could target sites to organisations with relevant experience | • Transfer arrangements could be complex and costly to administer. |
| • Transferring management of smaller sites to communities could deliver wider benefits – social inclusion, activity etc. | • Liability retained if only management transfer |
| | • SCC may need to provide small site dowries to individual groups |
| | • Lack of continuity in community groups may risk long term ability to manage – could become neglected if key people leave |
| | • May end up having to take sites back in future in a poor state – costs more to put right |
| | • Lack of expertise could result in spending more time advising on and monitoring these sites than we have to date. |
| | • Lack of holistic approach as provided by SCC through range of knowledge and |

| | disciplines<br>• May impact on SCC ability to deliver wider benefits, e.g. Ironman if sites owned by separate body |
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| **Option 6 – Establish multi-agency partnership** | |
| **Pros**:<br>• Management of the estate could be less reliant on SCC funding and priorities and better placed to access charitable or more innovative funding streams.<br>• No likely impact on existing public access arrangements<br>• Estate would remain in SCC ownership, generating trust.<br>• Risk to SCC reputation would be minimised<br>• Estate would continue to be managed by experienced staff and volunteers capable of dealing with all aspects of land management including anti-social behaviour, emergency and unforeseen circumstances.<br>• High level statutory, legal and compliance requirements would continue to be met.<br>• Existing Stewardship funding streams would be secure.<br>• County-wide strategic oversight of green space provision and increased ability to contribute to SCC wider outcomes.<br>• Would deliver improvements in service delivery and better outcomes for visitors.<br>• No loss in influence/control<br>• Pooled resources – expertise/numbers<br>• Best practice examples/pilots already exist<br>• Geographical and temporal flexibility<br>• Increased efficiency<br>• Retain and could build volunteer offer with better co-ordination<br>• Option has best potential for efficiencies across the suite of public / trust sites<br>• Benefit from collective experience<br>• Better use of team skills and experience<br>• More joined up approach to interpretation – makes more sense to public<br>• Better scope to manage visitor pressure<br>• Ability to rationalise infrastructure and | **Cons**:<br>• Could be time-consuming and complex to establish and run<br>• Conflicting and competing priorities between different agencies.<br>• Tracking the costs and benefits across all agencies could be complex<br>• Managing and responding to other partners' expectations might prove difficult<br>• Demanding performance management regime would need to be created<br>• Potentially Complex and confusing for customers<br>• Liabilities still with SCC<br>• Potential to be inefficient/duplication of effort<br>• Upfront legal costs<br>• Branding may cause issues |

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| • target it to most suitable locations<br>• Retains the current ethos<br>• Partnership structure to address any issues – needs good governance<br>• | |
| **Option 7 – Private sector partnership** | |
| **Pros**:<br>• Private sector investment could enhance facilities and services.<br>• Private sector acumen.<br>• Financial pressure on SCC could be reduced.<br>• Estate would continue to be managed by experienced staff and volunteers capable of dealing with all aspects of land management including anti-social behaviour, emergency and unforeseen circumstances.<br>• High level statutory, legal and compliance requirements would continue to be met.<br>• Existing Stewardship funding streams would be secure.<br>• Existing volunteer offer and associated benefits would be maintained.<br>• Estate would remain in SCC ownership, generating trust.<br>• No loss in strategic oversight and ability to arbitrate between competing interest groups.<br>• May provide development opportunities for staff<br>• May be efficiencies in maintenance if private sector partner has capability<br>• Private partner may bring expertise, better equipment etc.<br>• Big company may be able to balance losses with another part of the business<br>• May be better able to bring in corporate sponsorship and events | **Cons**:<br>• Identifying a suitable partner or creating a new organisation may be a difficult and lengthy process<br>• Risks and liabilities are likely to remain with SCC<br>• Cost remains with SCC though may be efficiencies<br>• Demanding performance management regime may need to be created<br>• Opposition from the local community, stakeholders and tenants<br>• Risk to SCC reputation due to perception that the management of the estate is being "outsourced" due to financial pressures rather than being about improving the service and achieving outcomes<br>• May be reduction in operational control<br>• Needs a good contract – upfront legal cost<br>• Complexity of governance<br>• Volunteers may be less willing to get involved<br>• Business focus as opposed to outcome focus<br>• Potential adverse effect on staff morale<br>• Reduced external funding opportunities<br>• Private sector work to programme – may lose flexibility<br>• Cost of running partnership and need to retain enough knowledge and staff capacity to commission and monitor effectively?<br>• Potential loss of control if subcontractors used<br>• Risk of financial penalties if HLS not properly delivered<br>• Potential lack of appropriate management of recreational pressure<br>• Difficult to maintain strategic work such as Cannock Chase SAC Partnership<br>• May impact on SCC ability to deliver wider benefits |

**Option 8 – delivery of different services via different contracts with different bodies (e.g. more topic-based approach)**

| Pros: | Cons: |
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| • No impact on existing public access arrangements<br>• Keeps sites in SCC ownership and SCC branding retained, generating trust.<br>• Reduced risk to SCC reputation<br>• Estate would continue to be managed by experienced staff and volunteers capable of dealing with all aspects of land management including anti-social behaviour, emergency and unforeseen circumstances.<br>• High level statutory, legal and compliance requirements will be maintained.<br>• Existing Stewardship funding streams would be secure.<br>• Existing volunteer offer and associated benefits will be maintained.<br>• No loss in strategic oversight or ability to contribute to SCC wider outcomes.<br>• Potential efficiencies and economies of scale<br>• Reduced overheads | • Contractual arrangements could be complex and costly to administer.<br>• Tracking the costs and benefits across all agencies could be complex<br>• Demanding performance management regime would need to be created<br>• Risk to SCC reputation if partners fail to deliver<br>• Complexity of managing the relationships:<br>   o Setting a strategy<br>   o Day to day relationships<br>   o Quality management<br>• May lose added value of being able to combine tasks and use contractors to best effect<br>• SCC retains all liability<br>• May be hard to manage as lots of overlaps<br>• Potential for fragmented / disjointed approach<br>• Public accountability retained by SCC |

**Option 9 – establish trading arm or not-for-profit enterprise**

| Pros: | Cons: |
|---|---|
| • Financial pressure will be reduced because management of estate will be less reliant on SCC funding and better placed to access more innovative funding streams.<br>• Estate would continue to be managed by experienced staff and volunteers capable of dealing with all aspects of land management including anti-social behaviour, emergency and unforeseen circumstances.<br>• No loss in influence/ control over the management of the estate and its ability to contribute to SCC wider outcomes.<br>• Arms-length, able to develop own future<br>• Ring fence funding<br>• Can reinvest surplus<br>• Opportunities to be more commercially focused<br>• Potential to TUPE existing staff<br>• Better potential community buy-in | • Risk to SCC reputation if new body lacks the ability and or capacity to deal with all aspects of land management.<br>• Could take a long time to establish.<br>• Demanding performance management regime would need to be created<br>• Competing with other existing bodies<br>• Could be seen as less accountable<br>• Potential loss of valued 'loss making' parts?<br>• Associated financial risks (size of reserve, cash flow, ability to respond)<br>• Isolated from authorities' expertise (ecology, archaeology, etc.)? would they be isolated or would they have support?<br>• Would have no track record in early stages to support bids for funding etc.<br>• No community reputation<br>• Trading company poor perception – profit and can be wound up – not inalienable? |

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| • Could expand service and offer – run events, education etc.<br>• CIC or social enterprise could keep public benefits as core purpose<br>• Opportunity to expand and take on other sites etc – potential to grow and achieve economies of scale.<br>• Would separate sites away from threats of SCC budget pressures | • Unclear where specialists would sit within this model – could end up playing shops?<br>• Bureaucracy in setting up and governing<br>• Risk of commercial drift<br>• May impact on SCC ability to deliver wider benefits, e.g. Ironman if sites owned by separate body |

**Option 10 – Disposal on open market**

| **Pros**: | **Cons**: |
|---|---|
| • Operational and financial pressures of managing smaller, satellite sites would be dissolved.<br>• Potential that capital receipt can be used to improve other sites.<br>• The need to comply with any high level statutory, legal and compliance requirements on the site will be dissolved.<br>• Some sites are not controversial/no issue to do this<br>• May be an opportunity to sell off bits of some sites to raise income for rest<br>• Could increase public benefits if sites go to someone who can do something positive with them | • Opposition from public and stakeholders about the sale of public open space and potential risk to SCC reputation.<br>• Disposal and legal arrangements could be costly to administer.<br>• Amount of public open space available in some areas may be reduced.<br>• Minimal capital receipt from those that are viable<br>• Lack of flexibility - once sold that is it<br>• Difficulty of enforcing covenants<br>• Loss of current and future resource<br>• Planning and remediation issues<br>• Couldn't be applied to most sites due to covenants etc.<br>• One-off income generation<br>• Would there be market interest? |

## 4.2.2 Conclusion from the Generic Options Appraisal

The generic appraisal of the options suggests that option 1 is unlikely to deliver the required outcomes – the service is not sustainable in its current model and further funding reductions could result in a decline in management of the sites and therefore the outcomes they deliver for communities. Option 10 is not a viable option for most sites but could be considered for smaller sites where public access is limited and the sites only make a limited contribution to outcomes. Option 3 also has limited potential to deliver the required outcomes. Given the range of sites, there is no obvious body that is likely to take on freehold ownership and all the associated liabilities.

## 4.3 Summary of Qualitative Feedback

The table below summarises qualitative feedback from the different stakeholder groups.

| Stakeholder group | Feedback summary |
|---|---|
| Parish Councils | 37% response rate at time of writing;<br>• Keen to take on Wimblebury local site under option 5; |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Options 1,8 or 9 for Cannock Chase and Chasewater; would support greater volunteer involvement and maximising of commercial opportunities;<br>• Sites should stay with SCC to safeguard public use and enjoyment; could maximise commercial opportunities with involvement of commercial company;<br>• Option 8 for Consall – complex site which should remain with SCC;<br>• Support option 6 for Churnet Valley sites;<br>• Would like to retain involvement in Chasewater; would not support private company transfer; would support transfer to not for profit body or partnership with other organisations including those already involved in the site. Concern about potential impacts of car parking charges.<br>• Keen to be kept informed and involved |
| User Groups | 13% response rate at time of writing.<br>• Moseley Railway Trust – re Apedale – detailed review of options which has been fed into generic options appraisal. Keen to support careful development of the park for visitors to release its potential; concerns over inappropriate commercial or industrial development of the park.<br>• Walton Chasers Orienteering Club – particular interest in Cannock Chase and Chasewater – gave detailed review of options which has been fed into generic options appraisal. Preference would be for option 1. Options 3-6 have some attractions but require more detail; option 9 needs more detail; significant reservations about options 2,7,8 and 10.<br>• The Staffordshire Area of the Ramblers Association felt that the Rangers service should be retained and that access to footpaths within the Country Parks should be protected. Any commercial development should take into account the effects of walking and leisure experience. |
| Tenants | 9% response rate at time of writing.<br>• Two responses suggest option 1 for all sites;<br>• Two suggest option 5 for Chasewater and Deep Hayes respectively;<br>• One suggests sale (option 10) of agricultural land associated with Deep Hayes to existing farm tenants. |
| Joint Local Access Forum | Initial view:<br>Cannock Chase – hybrid of options 2,8 and 9<br>Chasewater – option 4<br>Apedale – hybrid of options 5 and 7<br>Consall – option 8<br>Deep Hayes – option 1<br>Greenway Bank – option 7<br>Picnic / smaller sites – option 5<br>Low access sites – 5 (preferred) or 10 |
| AONB Partnership | Looked at the options in relation to their impacts on Cannock Chase AONB - preference for option 6; options 2, 7, 9 and 10 could pose risks to the AONB; options 3,4,5 and 8 would require more detail. |
| Select Committee | At the Prosperous Select committee meeting held on 4th September 2015 it was resolved that<br>a)      a further report be brought to the October Select Committee |

| | prior to Cabinet decision on any proposals; <br> b)      the Select Committee support consideration of Options 2, 8 and 9; <br> 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…." <br> d)      The Select Committee do not support Options 3 or 10. |
| --- | --- |

### 4.3.1 Conclusion from the qualitative feedback

A number of respondents proposed option 1, reflecting the confidence and value placed in the current service and that the current model is familiar and understood. It also reflects concerns about the sensitive nature of some of the sites and a desire to continue current uses. There is some support for the development of more commercial ventures on some sites, suggesting that option 2 may have potential. At some sites however this is not deemed as appropriate, reflecting the sensitive nature of these locations due to their high environmental quality. Option 5 is considered viable, with some respondents expressing an interest in taking on management of some sites. There is also some support for option 6 for the Churnet Valley and Cannock Chase, and for options 4, 8 and 9.

## 4.4 Analysis of Quantitative Feedback

### 4.4.1 Methodology

### Step 1 – Collation of data
Stakeholder groups that provided sufficient numerical data across the suite of sites to enable analysis were the landowning bodies and staff. Data from these stakeholders was ranked and collated into a combined ranking for the options.

### Step 2 - Grouping the sites
To make the task manageable the sites were combined into approximate groupings according to type and where similar options might apply. These groupings were as follows:

- Medium-sized northern country parks (Consall, Apedale, Greenway Bank, Deep Hayes)
- Large southern country parks (Cannock Chase and Chasewater)
- Picnic and smaller sites
- Greenways

### Step 3 – Discount outlier options
The lowest ranking options for each group of sites were discounted.

### Step 4 – Identify long list of options for each group
The four highest ranked options are given for each group as a long list to be explored further. These are presented in the table below:

| Group | 1st highest ranking | 2nd highest ranking | 3rd highest ranking | 4th highest ranking | 5th highest ranking |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Medium northern country parks** | Option 5 | Option 6 | Option 2 | Option 8 | Option 4 |
| **Large southern country parks** | Option 8 | Option 2 | Option 5 | Option 6 | Option 4 |
| **Picnic / smaller sites** | Option 5 | Option 6 | Option 10 | Option 2 | Option 8 |
| **Greenways** | Option 5 | Option 4 | Option 8 | Option 6 | Option 2 |

## Step 5 - Assess the long-list for each group against the critical success factors

The long listed options were assessed and scored out of 10 against the critical success factors. The four success factors were weighted as shown in the table below and the weighting applied to the score. This was used to refine the list to four options to be explored further.

| Critical Success Factor | Sub-factors |
|---|---|
| Increased value and prosperity for Staffordshire through a positive impact on local communities and wildlife | • Contribute to people's quality of life by realising the health, social and economic benefits associated with the countryside estate.<br>• Conserve and enhance the biodiversity, heritage and landscape value of the countryside estate.<br>• Maintain and develop the range of volunteering opportunities and number of volunteers. |
| A customer focussed service which enhances customer satisfaction and people's experience of the countryside | • Ensure an appropriate level of quality as defined by customers.<br>• Service accessible to all.<br>• Improve the quality of communication and engagement with customers. |
| Financially sustainable and resilient services | • Affordable to implement and run<br>• Sustainable and efficient going forward, able to attract investment and demonstrate value for money<br>• Ability to manage future financial pressures |
| The flexibility to meet changing future demands through innovation and development | • Provide flexibility to meet changes in visitor demand and environmental pressures.<br>• Deployment of appropriately skilled |

| | people for management and development of the sites |
|---|---|

## 4.4.2 Conclusion from the Quantitative Feedback

The results of the quantitative feedback are summarised in the table below:

| Group of sites: | Options to be explored: |
|---|---|
| Medium sized country parks (Apedale, Consall, Deep Hayes and Greenway Bank ) | Option 2 – Retain in-house with development strategy<br>Option 5 – site by site transfer<br>Option 6 – multi-agency partnership<br>Option 8 – delivery via range of topic-based contracts |
| Large country parks (Cannock Chase and Chasewater) | Option 2 – Retain in-house with development strategy<br>Option 5 – site by site transfer<br>Option 6 – multi-agency partnership<br>Option 8 – delivery via range of topic-based contracts |
| Picnic and smaller sites | Option 5 – site by site transfer<br>Option 6 – multi-agency partnership<br>Option 8 – delivery via range of topic-based contracts<br>Option 10 – disposal on open market (only for sites with limited access) |
| Greenways | Option 4 – transfer management to single provider<br>Option 5 – site by site transfer<br>Option 6 – multi-agency partnership<br>Option 8 – delivery via range of topic-based contracts |

# 5. Conclusion

5.1 The purpose of this early engagement stage was to test the ten identified options; firstly to ensure there were no additional options to consider, secondly to explore their viability and thirdly to remove at this stage any options that would be unlikely to deliver the critical success factors.

5.2 The results of the qualitative and quantitative data above can be summarised as follows.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Option 1:Status Quo** | This option has been discounted as it will not be possible to meet the fundamental commissioning question of maximising the estate's contribution to the health, economic outcomes. **Option Deleted** |
| **Option 2:** Maintain the current arrangement and enhance the development strategy | Option 2 was highly favoured and reflects the reality of the current situation. Although there was little support for a private sector company to take over the management of the estate (see below). However as is the existing situation carefully managed commercial opportunities such as catering outlets are important parts of the parks offer and attraction and an important funding source to support the wider management and maintenance of the estate. It is also proposed to merge this with the related elements of Options 7 and 8.  **Option Retained** and reworded to read:<br><br>Continue with the current management and ownership arrangement but develop a strategy with the aim of increasing income from the individual sites. This will be done by continuing to work closely with volunteers, communities and the third and private sector to look at opportunities to reduce the dependency on the public purse. |
| **Option 3: Transfer ownership of the estate to a single agency** | Option 3 There was no immediate interest in terms of single agency freehold transfer. There was also considerable concern raised regarding a lack of control from transferring ownership. **Option Deleted** |
| **Option 4: Transfer management of the estate to a single provider** | Option 4 There was no immediate interest in terms of a single provider. More local agreements could be achieved through Option 5 below. **Option Deleted** |
| **Option 5:** Transfer management, so that it is decided on a site by site basis. | Option 5 There has been considerable interest from Parish Councils and other agencies regarding taking on the management of sites on a case by case basis. In light of concerns raised regarding transferring ownership this option has been amended. Any arrangements could be undertaken through a robust lease.  **Option Retained** and reworded to read:<br><br>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. |
|---|---|
| **Option 6: Multi-Agency Partnership** | Option 6 Many partners felt this was a long term sustainable solution on a county or landscape scale and further work will be required to explore this option.  **Option Retained and reworded to read:**<br><br>Establish a multi-agency partnership of landowners to actively manage all green space sites in a specific area. This could include the merging of resources and skills to deliver suitable sites |
| **Option 7: Private Sector Partnership** | Option 7 There were concerns raised regarding a private sector taking overall management of sites. However as is the existing situation carefully managed commercial opportunities such as catering outlets are important parts of the parks offer and attraction and an important funding source to support the wider management and maintenance of the estate. **Option Deleted and merged with Option 2** |
| **Option 8: Delivery of onsite services or management activities via contract-based agreements with multiple agencies** | This option received wide support but it is considered as a mechanism that helps deliver the wider intentions of Option 2. **Option Deleted and merged with Option 2** |
| **Option 9: Establish a trading company or CIC** | Option 9 Could help support Option 6 and more likely for larger sites such as Chasewater. Equally it could be that the County Council should continue to explore this option independently as well **Option Retained and reworded to read:**<br><br> The company would be responsible for running and developing part / all of the estate but Staffordshire County Council would retain ownership. |
| **Option 10: Disposal of sites on the open market** | Option 10 There was widespread concerns regarding the sale of Countryside sites. Further to subsequent clarifications it is not the intention of selling sites that are managed as country parks. This option related to specific sites which are not managed as countryside sites and due to access have very limited amenity value. Alternative uses of these sites will be pursued but not within the remit of this review. **Option Deleted.** |