

Leighton Linlade Partnership Committee

02 December 2021

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Tiddenfoot Waterside Park

Report of: Howard Hughes – CBC Active Lifestyles Manager

Purpose of this report

This report is a follow up to a report presented to committee in April 2021 that highlighted initial feasibility work undertaken to assess options for a new visitor hub and improved car parking facilities at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Committee is asked to:

1. Note the content of the report.
2. Support the proposal to develop visitor facilities at the park and note the next steps as set out in paragraphs 29-30

Background

1. This report includes a summary of information presented to committee in April 2021 including concept design options developed as a result of the feasibility study undertaken in 2020.
2. This report also updates Members on the current S106 funding available to fund or contribute towards a new facility. In response to previous comments in connection to Tiddenfoot and the impact of Grovebury Quarry, the report provides a summary update on the works and restoration timetable.
3. Tiddenfoot Waterside Park is a well-used park that provides a tranquil setting in which to see a wide range of birds and wildlife in a lakeside environment. The park does not however currently have anywhere people are able to take shelter, obtain refreshments and use toilet or baby change facilities. A recent visitor survey undertaken as part of the 2020 feasibility study indicates that the lack of these facilities limits access for many users who would find their visit easier and more enjoyable if they were provided.
4. The work undertaken to date assesses how these facilities might be provided and the most feasible options to deliver a financially viable facility that visitors will want to use that supports both access to the park and wider countryside.

2020 Feasibility Study

5. Information in connection to the feasibility study was included in the April 2021 report but for ease of reference a reminder of the main points and findings has been included in this report.

6. The feasibility study was commissioned by Central Bedfordshire Council and produced by Foster Wilson architects, Colliers (business planners) and IKS cost consultants to assess options and viability of providing visitor facilities at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park. A copy of the Executive Summary from the consultants is included as Appendix A.
7. The report assessed various design concepts in three locations including the derelict stable block, the boundary between the car park and paddock and another location further in the park.
8. This included size, facility mix and initial viability of a visitor facility to RIBA Stage 1 (Strategic Definition and Preparation & Brief) for each of the potential locations.
9. All the options included toilet facilities, a form of catering facility (varying from a kiosk to a building with internal and or external seating) and storage. Two options included additional meeting/activity space for community use.
10. The study included an outline business plan to assess the options identified were both realistic and sustainable as well as an initial assessment of local needs, demand, catchment, and other facilities. It also included potential rental income, landlord costs and example operator models.
11. As part of the study an online survey of residents was undertaken that generated 294 responses, most being users of the park. 20 respondents said they had never visited the park, 132 said they occasionally visited the park and 142 by people who said they often visited the park. Perusal of the postcodes indicate that there were only a few instances of more than one response per household.
12. Dog walking is a main reason to visit, and a substantial number of dog owners are frequent visitors. Response suggested that the addition of a café should be dog friendly. A number of respondents also suggested that an area where dogs can roam leash-free would be helpful. Dog mess is also noted as an irritation to many visitors.
13. People otherwise mainly visit for walking, socialising and something to do. The number of visitors is not known, but the 274 people who responded to the survey and use the park (representing 0.7 % of the population within 10 minute drive) probably account for about 25,000 visits a year, so it is likely to be a quite substantial number.
14. Toilets were the facility that respondents said they were most likely to use. Tea / coffee / refreshments is not far behind, with slightly more appeal to occasional users than regular users. Substantial numbers envisaged having breakfast and lunch at the park. Substantial proportions envisaged using improved playground facilities as well as community event and exhibition space.
15. Following the April 2021 report, informal discussion has taken place with the Chair of the Friends of Tiddenfoot Waterside Park and the principle of a visitor hub that would provide much needed storage to support their activities is generally welcomed. This includes the need to provide a café option to generate revenue, making the offer more sustainable.

Initial design options

16. From the three location options considered in the study, the preferred option at this stage is Option 2, a new building adjacent to the car park with views over the field, providing a sheltered space for children's play away from the car park. It would be visible to the public with direct access to both the car park and wider park. The location on brownfield land also has relatively close access to services while minimising impact on wildlife and anglers. The location would also allow for the demolition of Black Barn

Stables, providing opportunity to increase the size of the car park to about 66 spaces, an increase of around 37 compared to current capacity. See Figure 1.

Figure 1



17. Version C and D of this design include and a café with internal seating, a community events room and public toilets that would be run by the café operator. The community space has folding doors to the cafe, so can provide additional cafe seating if required. The design would provide ability for anglers to access a toilet facility outside normal operating hours.

2020	Construction costs			Income and expenditure assessment					
Option	Sq m	Building	Café fitting	Total	Base rent	Expected rent	Landlord costs	Net rent	Return on investment
2c	132	£541K	£106K	£647K	£15K	£22K	(£3K)	£19K	2.90%
2c (modular)	132			£472K	£12K	£18K	(£3K)	£15K	3.20%
2d	158	£630K	£116K	£746K	£16K	£24K	(£4K)	£20K	2.70%
car park		£503K		£503K					

18. The above budget figures are based on 2020 cost estimate figures. There is also likely to be additional fees and a need to revise figures as a result of increased construction and material costs since the report was completed. A more detailed cost analysis would therefore need to be undertaken as part of detailed design work stages of the project (RIBA stages 2-4).

Example Case Study

19. One similar type facility is The Woodlands Café located at Leavesden Country Park in Hertfordshire. This provides an example of the type of offer that could be created at Tiddenfoot. Leavesden Country Park sits directly at the heart of the community with

residential areas on all sides, making it a true local resource. The offer at Leavesden is managed on behalf of the local authority by the YMCA with the café at the heart of their overall offering, creating a hub to host activities including events that support use of the park and wider community.

20. Working together their local Stakeholders Group, the YMCA, and the local council have sought to maximise the resources of the park for the benefit of the community. Taking the community and local voice into the heart of the process they have been able to design and deliver a variety of 'added value' activities that supports wider use of the park. More details of the Woodlands Café example can be found in the case study included as Appendix B to this report.

Planning Feedback

21. The initial options outlined in this report were submitted for initial feedback from Central Bedfordshire Planning, received in April 2020.
22. The main points were:
- (i) Any expansion on the site into greenbelt will need to demonstrate very special circumstances.
 - (ii) A planning application would need to explain (in relation to issues of sound and wildlife disturbance) the reasons that building a cafe next to the lake itself is not considered a better option.
 - (iii) Improvements to the car park, including planting and some expansion to meet anticipated demand should be considered as part of the proposals for the cafe.
 - (iv) Site clearance of the stables structure should be considered to offset the construction of the new cafe.
 - (v) A building in this setting should be of high quality design.

Section 106 Funding and Grovebury Quarry

23. In terms of funding opportunities, Tiddenfoot Waterside Park is in the vicinity of the Grovebury Rd 17a 17b site and fits the definition of those S106 agreements. There is currently circa £1m of S106 Community facility funding available, the majority of which are funds relating to 17a and 17b. The deadline to spend the majority of the funds is 2030.
24. The Council is in receipt of a planning application to extend the timescale for extracting permitted mineral reserves from Grovebury Quarry. Aggregate Industries that are undertaking the quarrying works are seeking to extend the existing deadline of 31 July 2022 until 31 July 2026 with a further year for final restoration to July 2027. At the time of writing the application is yet to be determined and can be viewed via Central Bedfordshire Council's planning application search webpage and entering the case number 21/03929.
25. While there are plans to provide a sailing facility / Yacht club as part of the quarry restoration, the current plan does not include broader visitor facilities for general public use as proposed at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park and this would require a new planning application from the developer. Grovebury Quarry will also continue to be in private ownership and therefore unlikely to be appropriate for using S106 as part of a commercial development.

Conclusion and next steps

26. There are no alternative proposals to develop facilities that meet the requirements for the south Leighton Buzzard S106 funding. The feasibility study indicates that there is a good catchment in the area, especially for a park café offer of good quality. The immediate proximity of schools is likely to provide opportunity for families local to the area. It is likely that an attractive café would become a popular social hub.
27. The response from the survey supports this. It indicates a high level of interest in a café and there was also a good level of response to a community space. This provides opportunities for further engagement with specific user groups to support an extended range of activity in the Leighton-Linslade area.
28. There does not seem to be an attractive option for locating a new café close to the water. The north and east banks are the only possibilities. The north would be far from the car park, making access for supplies etc difficult and creating security problems. It would have the advantage of being south facing, but the view is not exceptional because of the impact of the power lines. The east would have a better view and perhaps could have access from Mentmore Road, but there is only a narrow band of space in that area. There would be disadvantage of disturbance to wildlife and anglers and possibly greater risk of vandalism. A location by the car park, looking over the paddock, seems better on balance.
29. The designs developed to date are concept drawings and as the proposal develops it is expected that the final design could change significantly. This will include further public consultation, including a planning application. Recent increase in construction costs will also likely necessitate an update of the feasibility study together with more detailed design work and a review of the business case to give confidence that such a development would be financially viable.
30. Following this meeting and subject to further consultation with the Council's Executive Member, it is intended to submit an 'In Principle' request to commit the S106 funding to the project. To progress the project further will then require completion of a commissioning form to the council's Assets team to agree the project management resources.

Additional Information

Report to Leighton Linslade Partnership Committee held on [15 April 2021](#)

Appendix A – TWP Feasibility Study Executive Summary

Appendix B – YMCA Woodland Café Overview Case Study