

Pre-Scrutiny Questions and Answers – Cabinet Agenda 15 May 2024

Report Title: Newbold Comyn Cycle Trails

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Councillor R Dickson:

Thank you for this useful report and the three options for the way forward for this resolving the problems with this project that have been inherited from the previous administration.

The report usefully identifies the risk facing local taxpayers of not finding an operator and having to revisit bringing the trails in-house. Is there a timetable for this process? More strategically, what's been learned about alternative operating models where other cycle trails exist in the UK?

Response:

Is there a timetable for this process?

There is a provisional timetable for the procurement exercise and commission of operations. The trails are currently managed in house and in order to deliver the full requirement of the grant funding extra staff would be required. We would begin these recruitment processes immediately if no operator was identified as suitable through the procurement process.

More strategically, what's been learned about alternative operating models where other cycle trails exist in the UK?

Officers have been in discussion with a number of other local authorities where cycle trails exist. There are many models which reflect the individual facilities. Some are part of a much bigger facility, and the operation of the trails has been bolted onto a visitor centre or outdoor activity centre. Three examples below demonstrate that the model is largely driven by the facility.

Officers have spoken to Leeds Urban Cycle Park which was one of the first Sport England funded projects which is now operated by a CIC but this facility has been running for some 7 years and it hasn't been straightforward. The current model relies heavily on a large cafe to generate income for the facility and the local authority retain some maintenance funding for the trails.

West Northants Council negotiated for Northants Sport Charitable Trust to run their trails which they do with significant input from local volunteers. There is no cafe or shop on this site so only trails.

The trails at Hartlepool are part of the wider Country Park and operated by the Council, but the cafe and cycle repair shop are operated by a private operator.

Specialists who work nationwide have been advising WDC on the operating models and the successes and failures of certain models. Newbold Comyn is an urban cycle trail and cannot be compared with large destination cycle centres. The procurement model recommended is the best suited to this site.

Officers have carried out site visits of cycle trails including Snibston Colliery Park, Thetford Forest and Haldon Forest Park. These sites are destination sites and rely on income from other sources to fund the trails. Cafes, Go Ape, Cycle Hire/cycle shop and car park day rates.