

Public Report
Officer Delegated Decision

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Report Title

Hope Fields COVID-19 Memorial Garden

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Paul Woodcock, Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment

Report Author(s)

Leanne Buchan, Head of Creative Programming & Engagement
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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

A key aim of the Rotherham Together programme is in providing lasting memorials to both those who have lost their lives during the pandemic and those who gave so much to the emergency response, relief efforts and recovery support, either as key workers, volunteers, businesses or residents supporting their community.

The proposal is to designate a small field to the west of the main route around the lake and create a natural landscaped area which will provide:

- A memorial to those who lost their lives
- A memorial to the key workers, volunteers and communities who supported the emergency response
- A quiet place for contemplation and healing
- A welcoming space for children and families that encourages exploration and play.

Detailed designs and material specification can be found at Appendix 1

Recommendations

1. That the Strategic Director for Regeneration & Environment approve the proposed designs and associated spend for Hope Fields.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Concept Designs for Hope Fields COVID-19 Memorial Garden

Background Papers

Report for Tactical and Gold – February 2021

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

N/A

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

HOPE FIELDS COVID-19 MEMORIAL GARDEN

1.	Background
1.1	On Monday 10 June 2019, Cabinet endorsed the new Cultural Strategy for the borough with an overarching goal to <i>‘get more people active, creative and outdoors, more often’</i> . The Cultural Strategy also sets out seven game-changing strands including a focus on <i>Amazing Events</i> .
1.2	The Health and Wellbeing Board, the Building Stronger Communities Board and the Business Growth Board all recognise the importance of events, culture and leisure in delivering their aims to improve health and wellbeing, strengthen community cohesion and support economic growth.
1.3	<p>The Rotherham Together programme was commissioned in July 2020 aiming to develop a creative programme that could respond to and support recovery from COVID-19 across Rotherham’s communities. The aims of the programme were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate the contribution of key workers and volunteers • Create memorials for those who have lost their lives, both private and public • Support health and wellbeing, enabling people to manage their grief, extending clinical support and building on 5 Ways to Wellbeing • Bring communities back together safely, to reconnect and strengthen community cohesion • Support economic recovery, enabling people to re-engage with town centres across the borough
1.4	<p>The programme launched in September 2020 and will run until March 2021 and is built around three core themes that reference the above aims:</p> <p>JOY - The ability to make people smile, to lift our collective spirits, this strand of the programme focuses on rebuilding confidence across our communities. It aims to: reduce isolation encouraging our residents to safely venture out again; stay connected with those who continue to shield; celebrate the diversity and creativity of our every day; reintroduce people to their local community with fresh perspectives.</p> <p>GRATITUDE - We owe a debt of thanks to so many who worked behind the scenes to keep Rotherham going. From our dedicated NHS staff to the tireless community volunteers, key workers from supermarket cashiers and park rangers to refuse collectors, petrol attendants and cleaners who put their world on hold so ours could carry on through lockdown. Not forgetting our outstanding Rotherham Heroes who put themselves at risk to deliver food parcels, medicines and provide a voice many of our most vulnerable communities needed to hear.</p> <p>HOPE - To date Rotherham has lost more than 700 residents to COVID-19. Fathers, Mothers, Sisters, Brothers, Aunties, Uncles, Friends, Neighbours</p>

	and Co-workers who were a part of what makes Rotherham special. Contributing to their own corners of the town, our world is a poorer place without them. In speaking to those living with grief, some wanted a place of contemplation to help manage their pain, whereas others wanted an opportunity to remember and celebrate their loved ones. Some people continue to live with COVID-19 and its after-effects and want a place to rest and recover.
1.5	Consultation took place with residents and elected members in July 2020 and the programme was designed to allow a flexible and scalable response to changes in government guidance and regulation. To date five months of the programme have been delivered with each month creating a 'headline' activity or event that has significant impact but can be delivered, even under original lockdown conditions e.g., September's headline was a large-scale land art mural with mazes and trails that people explored, socially distanced at their leisure as they had been exploring parks throughout the first lockdown. Sitting behind the 'headline' is a series of scalable and flexible activities that are either online or self-led or could be easily adapted if regulations changes.
1.6	To date the programme has reached an estimated audience in excess of 200,000 people from across Rotherham's communities and beyond.
2.	Key Issues
2.1	A key aim of the Rotherham Together programme is in providing lasting memorials to both those who have lost their lives during the pandemic and those who gave so much to the emergency response, relief efforts and recovery support, either as key workers, volunteers, businesses or residents supporting their community.
2.2	After early consultation with a wide range of stakeholders it was proposed that rather than a public art commission in a high profile, high traffic area, residents wanted a place to contemplate and heal. A proposal was developed by the Creative Programming & Engagement service to dedicate an area of Thrybergh Country Park as a memorial space, which would be in keeping with the natural beauty of the site, align with the emerging vision and masterplan for the site and offer a space that balances conflicting emotions of those who are experiencing grief and anxiety and those who want to look forward to a happier time.
2.3	The proposal is to designate a small field to the west of the main route around the lake and create a natural landscaped area which will provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A memorial to those who lost their lives • A memorial to the key workers, volunteers and communities who supported the emergency response • A quiet place for contemplation and healing • A welcoming space for children and families that encourages exploration and play.

	Detailed designs and material specification can be found at Appendix 1
3.	Options considered and recommended proposal
3.1	<p>Through initial consultations in July 2020 a number of options were discussed for appropriate memorials ranging from a Town Centre commissioned public artwork to the Hope Fields proposal. Consultation was overwhelmingly in favour of the Hope Fields proposal for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering a quieter, more relaxed space for recovery from grief, anxiety and mental health issues • Providing a larger area to encourage dwell time and enable larger groups of people to come together when it is safe to do so • Ability to adapt over time and respond to the changing and unforeseen circumstances of the pandemic
4.	Consultation on proposal
4.1	<p>The service is currently delivering a six-week consultation programme consulting with members of the public, ward members, MPs and community groups on the proposed designs which are attached as an appendix to this report. To date consultation has taken place with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ward members in Silverwood, Swinton and Valley wards • Thrybergh & Dalton Parish Council and Ravenfield Parish Council • Faith groups • Bereavement services • John Healey, MP for Wentworth & Dearne • Key Cabinet Members including The Leader, Cabinet Member for Cleaner, Greener Communities and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Health • Local residents, park users and members of the public through publicly advertised open Teams consultation workshops <p>Environmental Groups including Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust, Ramblers, Bird watchers.</p>
4.2	<p>The main areas of feedback included in the consultation to date have been:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A request from several discussions that the COVID-19 Memorial itself does not feature the names of the deceased. Some families found this proposal distressing and others argued that while the registered cause of death may not have been COVID-19 they felt that it had certainly contributed and as such this would be difficult to administer fairly. • A request for a smaller area to be made available at Herringthorpe Crematorium and Clifton Park for those who cannot travel to Thrybergh Country Park. • How we would manage personal tributes and ashes on the site. To help mitigate the risk of such tributes, we can look to have open days to allow people to sew wildflowers on the site, make yellow heart bird feeders linking into the Love for the Lost campaign, as well as clear communications that Hope Fields is a hive for nature and the environment, for no harmful things to be placed on the site.

	Requests have been made from local schools, a local disability charity (Artworks) and residents to look at volunteer opportunities to help maintain the site after it has been built.																												
5.	Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision																												
5.1	Over the next five weeks larger construction elements of the site will take shape including the installation of footpaths and large trees, artists' installations, benches and fencing.																												
5.2	Hope Fields is scheduled to launch 27 th March 2021 marking one year from lockdown first being introduced in the UK.																												
5.3	It is anticipated that the UK will still be in Lockdown 3 at this point and as such the launch programme will be managed over a longer period time. The programme is still being developed but it could include a mix of virtual and physical activities ranging from a live streamed dawn chorus to self-guiding trails throughout the memorial itself linked to the play features.																												
6.	Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)																												
6.1	<p>The project has been supported through the Council's Capital Programme at an estimated cost of £55,000. The labour costs of the project have been assisted with work from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Yorkshire Community Rehabilitation Company • Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust • Ramblers • Thrybergh Country Park Fly Fishing Club • Other site users including bird watchers and visitors • Culture, Sport & Tourism services 																												
6.2	<p>The budget for the project is broken down below:</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: 40px;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Item</th> <th>Estimated Cost</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Ground repair and clearances</td> <td>£1,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Materials e.g., Seed, bulbs, trees, timbers</td> <td>£13,500</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gates, fencing and hedgerows</td> <td>£3,500</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Footpaths and landscaping</td> <td>£15,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Labour costs including PPE</td> <td>£2,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Artists Commissions:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td> • Welcome signage & interpretation</td> <td>£2,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td> • COVID-19 Memorial</td> <td>£4,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td> • Benches and seating</td> <td>£5,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td> • Play features</td> <td>£3,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td> • Replacement bird hide</td> <td>£2,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td> • Focal point</td> <td>£4,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>£55,000</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Item	Estimated Cost	Ground repair and clearances	£1,000	Materials e.g., Seed, bulbs, trees, timbers	£13,500	Gates, fencing and hedgerows	£3,500	Footpaths and landscaping	£15,000	Labour costs including PPE	£2,000	Artists Commissions:		• Welcome signage & interpretation	£2,000	• COVID-19 Memorial	£4,000	• Benches and seating	£5,000	• Play features	£3,000	• Replacement bird hide	£2,000	• Focal point	£4,000	Total	£55,000
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6.3	There will be small revenue implications for the upkeep and maintenance of the site which will be absorbed into the Thrybergh Country Park revenue budget and the design is such that it requires minimal intervention. Any capital maintenance can be supported from the Green Spaces capital maintenance capital investment proposal published in the Council's Budget for meeting being held on 3 rd March 2021.
7.	Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)
7.1	There are no direct Legal implications arising from this report.
8.	Human Resources Advice and Implications
8.1	There are no direct Legal implications arising from this report.
9.	Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults
9.1	The design for Hope Fields has been created for a wide variety audience but pays particular attention to children and families offering play activities from den making to mud kitchens and encouraging children and families to reconnect with nature.
9.2	The site paths have been made accessible and work has taken place with Artworks, a Rotherham-based charity who supports adults with learning disabilities to undertake art and cultural projects. The group will work with its membership of artists with learning disabilities to design and build a replacement bird hide for the project.
10.	Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications
10.1	Research shows that BAME groups have been more adversely affected by loss throughout the pandemic and the consultation has paid particular attention to this group through open workshops and discussions and consultation with faith leaders to ensure that it provides and appropriate spaces for all communities and cultures. Country Parks can also sometimes be difficult to access for users with physical disabilities due to the nature of the landscape but Thrybergh Country Park is relatively flat with easy access from the car park to the main site and wide paths to accommodate wheelchair users. Additional paths and landscaping within the garden itself have been increased to allow greater access.
10.2	The emotive nature of the site and its purpose has drawn great interest from a number of community groups including those with protected characteristics. Following the launch of the site at the end of March 2021 the service will work with the Council's Volunteer Coordinators to ensure specific and tailored opportunities for ongoing engagement with the project.
10.3	The service will undertake:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular volunteer activities for both specific and mixed groups. Hope Fields has a focus on mental health and restoration and as such it may be more appropriate for volunteer days to be focused around a specific group alongside a programme of open volunteering days. • An annual accessibility survey will be undertaken by the Ramblers Group who offer a bespoke service assessing the physical access of different sites. Hope Fields is designed as a living garden and as such will change with time and seasons so an annual survey will the team to make any adjustments as the garden settles.
11.	Implications for Ward Priorities
11.1	<p>Hope Fields is an asset for the whole borough, however the Silverwood Ward is located closets to the site at Thrybergh Country Park. The Silverwood Ward Priorities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents • Expanding range of activities of young people • Developing and supporting education projects • Supporting initiatives that improve the look of the area <p>Delivering activities that encourage community engagement and involvement</p>
11.2	<p>Hope Fields contributes to each of these priorities working to reduce loneliness and isolation through volunteer and engagement programmes and supporting education through outdoor learning with children and families.</p>
12.	Implications for Partners
12.1	<p>Hope Fields has been designed and delivered with a number of partners including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Yorkshire Community Rehabilitation Company • Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust • Ramblers • Thrybergh Country Park Fly Fishing Club • Other site users including bird watchers and visitors • Council partners including Engie and Mears Group <p>Culture, Sport & Tourism services</p>
12.2	<p>A number of groups have also expressed in interest in volunteering for ongoing maintenance of the project and discussions are taking place with the Council's Volunteer Coordinators to facilitate this.</p>
13.	Risks and Mitigation
13.1.	<p>Acts of vandalism: Hope Fields is within the Thrybergh Country Park development and visible from the main lake. While the site does experience some anti-social behaviour, these are rare and the level of engagement with the project and the local community has been very high which mitigates against this risk.</p>

13.2	Revenue implications: The site will largely be cared for by supervised volunteer groups and added to the schedule of maintenance works for the overall site. The design has been created to encourage and support wildlife and natural habitats and as such maintenance is minimal focusing on mowing paths and replanting wildflowers each season which has minimal revenue impact on the service budget.
14.	Accountable Officers
	Leanne Buchan, Head of Creative Programming & Engagement

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers:-

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	05/02/21
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	05/02/21
Head of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Stuart Fletcher	05/02/21

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