

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 07 August 2023

Report Title

Rother Valley Country Park and Thrybergh Country Park Levelling Up Fund

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

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Paul Woodcock, Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment

Report Author(s)

Neil Best, Head of Commercial Development, Culture Sport and Tourism
01709 822468

Lorna Vertigan, Strategic Regeneration Manager, Rotherham Investment & Development Office

Ward(s) Affected

Dalton and Thrybergh, Bramley and Ravenfield, Wales, Aston and Woodsetts

Report Summary

This report provides details on the development of the regeneration projects for Thrybergh Country Park and Rother Valley Country Park (both Council facilities and assets), which have been awarded funding via the Leisure Economy Levelling Up Fund (LUF). The report contains details of the progress for each scheme to date against what was in the original LUF bid and details of the proposed funding arrangements.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the implementation of the Levelling Up project at Rother Valley Country Park as shown at Appendix 1, 2 and 3.
2. Approves the implementation of the Levelling Up project at Thrybergh Country Park as shown at Appendix 1,2 and 4.
3. Approves the proposals to mitigate the funding gap as set out in Appendix 1.

4. Requests that a further report on the regeneration plans for both sites be presented within 12 months.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Projects Costs and funding. Exempt
- Appendix 2 Project Development and consultation
- Appendix 3 Rother Valley Country Park. architect impressions
- Appendix 4 Thrybergh Country Park. architect impressions
- Appendix 5 Equalities Impact Assessment Parts A and B Rother Valley
- Appendix 6 Equalities Impact Assessment Parts A and B Thrybergh
- Appendix 7 Carbon impact assessment

Background Papers

[Leisure Economy – Levelling Up Application](#)

[Cabinet report 16th May 2022 – Town Deal and Levelling Up Fund](#)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

An exemption is sought for Appendix 1 under Paragraph 3 (Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)) of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 is requested, as this report contains sensitive commercial information with regards to commercial agreements which could disadvantage the Council in any negotiations if the information were to be made public.

It is considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption would outweigh the public interest in disclosing the information, as the parties' commercial interests could be prejudiced by disclosure of commercial information.

Rother Valley Country Park and Thrybergh Country Park Levelling Up Fund

1. Background

- 1.1 At May 2022 Cabinet, the Levelling Up Programme was approved, which included the Country Parks projects as part of the wider Leisure Economy package of £19.9m.
- 1.2 Having secured Levelling Up Funding (LUF) to invest in Thrybergh and Rother Valley Country Parks, the Council is in a position to improve these highly valued local facilities and ensure that these assets are available for local people and visitors for years to come.
- 1.3 The overall LUF investment of £19.9m will contribute to the development of the burgeoning leisure, visitor, heritage and hospitality industry and enable Rotherham to benefit from a cross-regional and northern visitor and tourism economy.
- 1.4 The LUF investment in the Country Parks will contribute to the delivery of the Council's Year Ahead Plan, support the delivery of the Cultural Strategy and will deliver many benefits including:
- Encouraging more people to get active and enjoy the outdoors
 - Supporting the development of the leisure and culture offer across the borough and strengthening Rotherham as a destination
 - Supporting access to jobs in the leisure industry
 - Sustaining an important revenue stream for the Council, aiding the Borough's economic recovery and resilience
 - Enabling the generation of an increase in visitor numbers and revenue, so that Rother Valley and Thrybergh Country Parks can grow their offer and be sustainable for future generations
- 1.5 The long-term benefits of the investment will contribute to improved health and wellbeing outcomes for the Borough.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The Levelling Up Fund bid application was approved by Government in October 2021 and accepted into the Capital Programme through Cabinet in May 2022.
- 2.2 Since then, the project scope was refined to ensure the project delivered the right outcomes in line with public feedback as well as budgetary considerations. This development of design and related cost implications is provided in more detail at Appendix 1 and 2 and summarised below.

Rother Valley Country Park Proposals

- 2.3 Early proposals for Rother Valley included the development of a new café overlooking the lake, with green public and event space. Ideas included the refurbishment of the 'village centre' to include educational space and the restoration of the 18th century mill. Further green space was proposed, as well as improvements to the railway and existing playground including climbing facilities.
- 2.4 Subsequent post-bid refinement of this proposal was necessary due to cost constraints, inflation and market challenges with the amended proposal also taking account of feedback from the public engagement exercise and stakeholder consultation. This has resulted in the removal of development works in the 'village centre' and the extension of the existing play area, both of which can be considered for any future regeneration plans.
- 2.5 The current proposals look to prioritise the following:
- New waterfront building featuring a large café for up to 150 people and a first-floor function space with views across the lake
 - New play space in the café garden
 - A new, landscaped events space
 - A new riverside walk between the events space and the existing car park
 - Improved carparking to support the new café development:
 - Improvements to the existing car park adjacent to the central courtyard and mill
 - New car-parking to the East of the river
 - Accessible car-parking adjacent to the water sports centre.
 - Improvements to roads, footpaths and signage to improve wayfinding
 - Relocation and rationalisation of some existing facilities in the park, to enable the above improvements, including:
 - Site preparation and demolition
 - Relocation of the boat storage area
 - Relocation of the cycle centre to a more prominent position
- 2.6 Appendix 3 - Rother Valley Country Park Architect Impressions provides visual indications of the proposed works at this stage of the programme.

Thrybergh Country Park Proposals

- 2.7 Early proposals at Thrybergh included the development of a new destination waterside café, outside seating and picnic space between the café and the water's edge, with expansive views across the reservoir and landscaping/public realm improvements. It also included a new car park that would provide an additional 152 spaces supplemented by 6 additional accessible bays at the water's edge.

- 2.8 Subsequent, post-bid refinement of this proposal was necessary due to cost constraints, inflation and market challenges resulting in the loss of car park improvements, which can be considered in any future regeneration plans.
- 2.9 The following items have been prioritised:
- Deliver a new contemporary café with indoor seating for 60 - 80 people.
 - Provide seating and picnic space for up to 100 people between the café and the water's edge
 - Create new landscaping to improve the public realm
- 2.10 Appendix 4 – Thrybergh Country Park Architect Impressions provides visual indications of projected works
- 2.11 Both schemes share a consistent design ethos, look and feel. They will improve access and enhance the public realm. This will significantly improve the overall experience for visitors.
- 2.12 Public feedback and consultation indicated strong support for the proposed developments as well as alignment with the LUF criteria.

Costs and Funding

- 2.13 During the development of the project scope and design, the volatile national and international construction market and the impact of inflation has increased the estimated costs of materials, construction, fees and the availability of contractors.
- 2.14 The design has been prudent in ensuring adequate value engineering whilst meeting the aims of the Levelling Up Fund, public feedback and the Council's objectives for the leisure economy.
- 2.15 There remains a requirement to factor in additional contingency and risk costs in recognition of the stage of design and the continuing high inflation across the market. The resultant cost implications are summarised in Appendix 1. There is a requirement for additional capital which is proposed to be provided through the Council's Capital Contingency Fund.

Revenue Planning

- 2.16 Outline projection models for revenue have been developed by the Business Development Service within RIDO and early business planning for both venues undertaken. Initial work on a new café proposal for Rother Valley was undertaken with Planning Solutions Consulting in 2019. This will be updated to reflect inflation and the current market. A detailed business plan for each venue will be produced for October 2023 and tested with the support of finance officers and RIDO.

Government Variation

- 2.17 The proposed design changes have been discussed with the Department for Levelling Up Housing & Communities representatives and will be captured through the Government's Project Adjustment Request process.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1
- A. Implement the scheme as originally proposed in the bid to Government. Due to challenging market conditions, this would incur further additional costs, beyond the budget available through the Levelling Up Fund, as shown in Appendix 1.
 - B. Proceed with the amended schemes proposed in light of public feedback and budgetary constraints, as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 along with the proposals to mitigate current funding gaps, utilising additional capital resource.
 - C. Request further changes to the scheme to fall fully within the LUF budget. This will require further value engineering, incur associated fees and delay delivery, thus jeopardising the delivery of the scheme.
 - D. Do not progress the scheme

- 3.2 The recommended option is B as this will enable the delivery of the project benefits as set out in this report and ensure the project meets the timetable in 5.1 below.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 In Spring 2020, QaResearch was commissioned to undertake detailed visitor surveys with a focus on both regular visitors and those who do not currently frequent either park, with more than 400 in depth consultations completed. When asked what additional facilities visitors would like to see at either site, the highest percentages (81% at Rother Valley and 64% at Thrybergh) recommended new café facilities. (Appendix 2).
- 4.2 Between August and October 2022, plans were shared with key stakeholders, including Councillors, Ward members, staff, local businesses and the general public. Across the two sites, over five hundred park users were directly engaged, with almost two hundred pieces of written feedback received.
- 4.3 Planning approval was granted for both projects during February 2023, which included statutory public consultation with bodies including the Environment Agency; a full list of consultees is attached in Appendix 2.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Following completion of RIBA Stage 2 design and cost plan the Council has completed a procurement exercise to undertake:

- Completion of RIBA stage 3 and 4 designs including relevant surveys and investigations
- Associated cost plans; and
- The discharge of planning conditions as appropriate for pre-commencement of the development.

5.2 Subject to the satisfactory completion of these works, the Council will then proceed to stage 2 contract works.

5.3 Current projected delivery timescales are as follows.

Rother Valley Country Park	
Completion of Design	November 2023
Completion of Full Business case	November 2023
Main Contract award	November 2023
Construction Programme	December 2023 – March 2025
Handover / Opening	March 2025
Thrybergh Country Park	
Completion of Design	September 2023
Main Contract Award	October 2023
Construction Programme	November 2023 – August 2024
Handover/ Opening	August 2024

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 Due to challenging market conditions as a result of high inflation and as designs have been developed, both projects have funding gaps at present, as identified in Appendix 1 along with proposals for how the funding gaps can be mitigated. Approval of Recommendation 3 will resolve these funding gaps through use of the Capital Contingency Fund.

6.2 These large capital investments at the country parks will provide a significantly enhanced visitor offer and experience. This is expected to lead to increased income generation as the sites move towards a more sustainable long term financial position. The investments at Rother Valley are also expected to strengthen the income generation potential of the neighbouring Waleswood Caravan Park.

6.3 Contractors have been appointed to undertake the contract Stage 1 designs via a procurement route compliant with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended) and the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules. The contracts are established so that, subject to the approval of the contract Stage 1 designs, the Council can

move to contract Stage 2 Construction without the need to undertake a further competitive process.

- 6.5 Outline projection models for revenue have been developed by the Business Development Service within RIDO and early business planning for both venues undertaken. Initial work on a new café proposal for Rother Valley was undertaken with Planning Solutions Consulting in 2019. This will be updated to reflect inflation and the current market. A detailed business plan for each venue is in production and will be tested with the support of finance officers and RIDO.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 The procurement process which has been undertaken as stated above is compliant with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended). The framework Terms and Conditions will apply to the main contract and an appropriate NEC construction contract will be put in place in relation to the works, which will ensure successful delivery of the project and protect the Council's interests.

- 7.2 Section 9D of the Local Government Act 2000 requires that all functions of a local authority are the responsibility of the Executive unless otherwise specified in regulations. The discharge of functions in relation to the project set out in the report are not specified within regulations as to not be functions of the Executive. Therefore, this is an executive power to be exercised by the Cabinet.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct human resources implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 The recent evaluation report 'Children's Capital of Culture 2025: Starting the Conversation' found that almost a quarter of children and young people surveyed wanted to see programmes of activity that celebrate and encourage engagement with Rotherham's existing Green Spaces.
- 9.2 The Young Inspectors visited Rother Valley Country Park in 2021 and Thrybergh Country Park in 2022. Their reports for both included requests for 'a larger café, with open views to the lake'. The project at Rother Valley includes an additional small play area.
- 9.3 Further consultation is ongoing to ensure that both projects deliver appropriate benefits for young people and vulnerable adults.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Screening and full Equality Analysis has been completed for both sites to ensure that positive outcomes on Protected Characteristic Groups are

maximised, and any negative impacts are mitigated appropriately (Appendices 5-6).

10.2 The main considerations are:

- Providing modern cafés with safe and secure facilities that comply with the Disability Discrimination Act
- Creating a positive impact on the parks as a whole, safeguarding their status as key community assets
- Ensuring the impacts on Protected Characteristic Groups of the construction works are fully considered so that the main contractors can act responsibly.

10.3 These will be further reviewed once the projects progress, and further considerations will be taken account in the scheme designs, construction and management of the sites, especially:

- Accessibility (physical accessibility, access to information, accessible design)
- Safety and security (particularly during construction where there may be diversions in place)
- Environment (impact of construction and operation on noise, air quality and overall feel of the local environment)
- Severance (between communities and as a result of construction routes).

10.4 It is recommended that the Equality Analysis process is reviewed and updated at appropriate stages throughout the projects to determine any likely further impacts, including from updated 2021 census information.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 Through the appointment of the Contractor, the Council will be working closely with them to look for opportunities to reduce the carbon footprint. In the decision to appoint, this has been done so far by exploring opportunities to select locally-sourced materials, minimising wastage and building in compliance with Building Regulations Approved Document L – Conservation of Fuel and Power.

11.2 Opportunities for carbon reduction initiatives and energy efficiency are core requirements and will be continuously monitored a part of the project.

11.3 Substantial planting/soft landscaping schemes will support carbon reduction. Transport emissions will be offset by provision for electric vehicle charging. Minimising food waste will be a prime operational concern.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The planned location of the new lakeside café at Rother Valley is currently used as boat storage by lake users and by Firbeck Yacht Club. During the construction phase, a temporary solution will be provided. Post-construction storage will be relocated adjacent to the Water Sports Centre. Meeting facilities for the yacht club will be located in the centre.
- 12.2 Construction at both sites is likely to cause some disruption to routine activities for partners on site. Management teams have input into delivery plans and scheduling to minimise impact and ongoing consultation with onsite stakeholders to address any concerns
- 12.3 The proposed developments will increase dwell time and secondary spend on site and create new opportunities to work positively with partners. The proposals will improve both sites contribution to the Council's strategic objectives, particularly connected to *Health and Well-being* and *Clean and Green*.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The global economic environment has caused significant fluctuations in material costs and in labour and materials availability. Contingencies have been factored into budget planning for the project and these will be reviewed before commencement.
- 13.2 Building works will cause disruption to normal site operations, potentially jeopardising some revenue and the customer experience. Contractors will work closely with on-site management and Asset Management to minimise impact and ensure a clear and regular communications on progress and timescales.
- 13.3 Works are due to be completed in 2024/25. Project management will seek to identify opportunities to shorten build times and minimise operational disruption.
- 13.4 At Rother Valley, where the hospitality offer is in addition to, rather than replacing, the current offer, there will be increased revenue costs for staffing, operational costs and marketing. Well evidenced models referencing previous consultancy work and exemplars, along with prudent forecasting, will be used to manage revenue risks. Pre and post marketing activity will be focussed on awareness and on driving footfall.
- 13.5 Risk registers have been developed and will be updated as part of construction planning.

14. Accountable Officers

Neil Best, Head of Commercial Development and Visitor Experience,
Culture, Sport and Tourism

Lorna Vertigan, Strategic Regeneration Manager, RIDO

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	24/07/23
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	20/07/23
Assistant Director, Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	20/07/23

Report Author: Neil Best, Head of Commercial Development and Visitor Experience, Culture, Sport and Tourism

This report is published on the Council's [website](#).