

Rother Valley Country Park and Thrybergh Country Park Levelling Up Fund

Project Development and Consultation

The Council was successful in its Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid application submitted in Autumn 2021 and proposals were presented to Cabinet in May 2022 and a RIBA stage 2 cost plan developed for June 2022 setting out how the funding would be used to deliver the two schemes at Rother Valley Country Park and Thrybergh Country Park.

Extensive customer and audience research and consultation has taken place across Rother Valley Country Park and Thrybergh Country Park. Both operations undertake a biennial survey of existing park users, building a profile of existing user habits and preferences and providing feedback and consultation on future developments. In Spring 2020, QA Research 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.

The headline findings for Rother Valley Country Park include:

- More than two thirds of its current audience visit the park for two hours or more
- The main attractions at the site are walking (84%), café (42%), play (22%), and cycling (17%)
- The main services currently accessed at the site are the café (57%), ice cream van (40%), retail (36%), activity centre (14%), and cycling (12%)
- Current satisfaction levels report 85% at average or better
- When asked what additional facilities and investment customers would prioritise, the following was recorded; new café facilities (81%), events and seasonal activities (80%), exhibition spaces (73%), additional retail (60%), and more children's activities (46%).

The headline findings for Thrybergh Country Park include:

- The majority (43%) stay at the park for two hours but there is a higher than average proportion of visitors who use the park for the full day (more than three hours – 21%)
- The main attraction at the site currently is walking (88%), followed by café (31%), and play (7%)
- Current satisfaction levels report 83% at average or better
- When asked what additional facilities and investment customers would prioritise, the following was recorded; new café (64%), events and seasonal activities (58%), and more children's activities (46%).
- The biennial surveys show a bias towards an audience of 55+ (65%) but when asked for the main areas of interest and improvement, children's activities and play was ranked highest (75%) suggesting a family market.

The Levelling Up Fund Bid June 2021

Initial proposals within the Levelling Up fund bid at Rother Valley included the development of a new café overlooking the lake, with adjacent green public space and event space. The proposal also included the refurbishment of buildings in the 'village centre' courtyard to include educational space and the restoration of the 18th century mill. Further green space and landscaping was proposed, as well as improvements to the toy railway and an extension of the existing playground into the adjacent copse.

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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.

A total of £8m was allocated from the LUF bid to support these two schemes with £5.5m for Rother Valley and £2.5m for Thrybergh. The impact of inflation and market challenges has increased the estimated costs of materials, construction and fees. This meant that initial cost projections were greater than the funding of £8m available and a need to re-look at the options for the schemes.

Autumn Engagement 2022

A process of prioritisation began and at the same time, engagement events were held at both sites between August and November 2022. Over five hundred park users were directly engaged across the two sites, with almost two hundred pieces of written feedback received.

At Rother Valley Country Park, beyond elected members, engagement took place with the following:

Stakeholder name	Internal or External	Nature of engagement: role / responsibility of Stakeholder	Outcome of engagement to date	Follow on actions
Statutory Consultee: Utilities Suppliers	External	Local infrastructure	Engagement from late 2022	Ongoing discussions as design develops. New substation required
Staff on site	Internal	Provide comment on the proposals and their impact on operation during and post development	Engagement session held in October 2022	Maintain dialogue with regular updates as plans progress
Stakeholders on site (businesses and organisations)	External	Provide comment on the proposals and their impact on operation during and post development	Engagement session held in October 2022	Regular follow up with key individuals and groups as plans develop
Park users	External	Locals / regular visitors to the park and so will be directly impacted by any proposals	Engagement sessions held in October 2022	Regular updates as plans progress

The main findings were as follows:

As at Thrybergh, consultees were welcoming of the investment in the park, which is highly prized by visitors, and of future development plans. A wide range of suggestions and interests were raised around access and facilities within the park, but in particular there were three main areas of feedback.

There was high approval for the development of a lakeside café/restaurant to replace the current under spaced café. Linked to this development, improvements to existing car parking and access were also a high priority. There was also a high degree of affection expressed for the park and a clear desire to see enhanced and increased opportunities for children and families on site, with extended play and improved trails.

In addition, statutory consultation took place as part of the Planning submissions. Planning permission was subsequently granted in March 2023. Bodies consulted are listed below:

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Bodies consulted on Rother Valley proposal		
Name	Open	Closed
Transportation Unit	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Green Spaces	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Yorkshire Water Services Ltd	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Ecologist	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Planning Policy (Forward Planning)	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Drainage Maintenance	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
CPRE	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Natural England	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Hunter Archaeological Society	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Rotherham Civic Society	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Land Contamination	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Environmental Health Services	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Historic England	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Hallamshire Historic Buildings Society	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Conservation/Listed Building Officer - M Peck	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
The Coal Authority	02-Dec-22	23-Dec-22
Landscape Design	08-Dec-22	29-Dec-22
Trees & Woodlands Team	08-Dec-22	29-Dec-22
The Environment Agency	08-Dec-22	29-Dec-22
Canal & River Trust	08-Dec-22	29-Dec-22

At Thrybergh Country Park, beyond elected members, engagement took place with the following:

Stakeholder name	Internal or External	Nature of engagement: role / responsibility of Stakeholder	Outcome of engagement to date	Follow on actions
Statutory Consultee: Utilities Suppliers	External	Local infrastructure	Contact made to understand existing supplies	Ongoing discussions as design develops. New substation required.
Community/Outreach groups	External	Advice and Consultation on Access issues Voluntary groups, Older People's Forum, Disability Action Group	None as yet – accessible bays will be taken out in Phase 1A (to be relocated in a later stage) and so this may be flagged	Will raise awareness with these groups as future plans for the area develop
Park users: - Fishing Club - Open Water Swimmers - Sea Cadets - Thrybergh Parish Council - Immediate neighbours (Mr and Mrs Green) - Bird Watchers	External	Locals / regular visitors to the park and so will be directly impacted by any proposals	All met with Park Manager during the Consultation Events in Aug 2022. Comments collected and circulated to Project Team.	Regular updates as plans progress.
2x Parish Councils: - Thrybergh Parish - Ravenfield	External	Parish boundary with Ravenfield runs right down the middle of the reservoir	Thrybergh Parish Council attended the consultation events in Aug 2022.	Update with final plans once agreed so that they can provide to the public on request.

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The main findings were as follows:

There was strong support for Thrybergh being the subject of investment amongst the public, Parish Councils and stakeholders and recognition that this would be the first step in ongoing regeneration. Proposals for the new café and seating were welcomed. Future plans for improvements to parking and access were welcomed and much feedback focussed on ensuring access from the new car parks into the park. The opportunity to extend the play offer in future was a consistent theme, as was recognition of future plans to protect and support biodiversity on site.

Statutory public consultation was undertaken with the bodies listed below as part of the planning submission which was subsequently granted in February 2023.

Bodies consulted on Thrybergh LUF proposal		
Name	Open	Closed
Ecologist	13-Oct-22	03-Nov-22
Drainage Maintenance	13-Oct-22	03-Nov-22
Planning Policy (Forward Planning)	13-Oct-22	03-Nov-22
Transportation Unit	13-Oct-22	03-Nov-22
Green Spaces	13-Oct-22	03-Nov-22
CPRE	13-Oct-22	03-Nov-22
Natural England	13-Oct-22	03-Nov-22
Yorkshire Water Services Ltd	13-Oct-22	03-Nov-22
Trees & Woodlands Team	13-Oct-22	03-Nov-22
Landscape Design	13-Oct-22	03-Nov-22
Environmental Health Services	02-Nov-22	23-Nov-22
Land Contamination	02-Nov-22	23-Nov-22

Current Proposals August 2023

As of August 2023, the current proposals are based on the following rationale:

At Rother Valley:

A consistent priority for Rother Valley Country Park has been to create a café which can better cater for the volume of park users. The current proposal will enable and increased volume of users to benefit from the new facility and from the lake views it will offer. There will be increased internal and external space to host events and community activities as well as improved landscaping to the lake. The café will also benefit from a safe and enclosed new play area to the rear.

Since reducing parking charges in 2021, paid car parking numbers have increased by 75% and are likely to increase further with the new café facility. Current car parking facilities are in need of repair and poorly located in the centre of a green area of the park, which can be overcrowded in peak periods. Longer term options include the potential to move all parking out of the park and Levelling Up funding will enable a first phase of this and increase green landscaping within the park.

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Opportunities to extend play through the park, both at the existing play area and around the main lake will be a priority for future investment and development.

At Thrybergh:

The priority for Thrybergh Country Park is to create a café which can better cater for the volume of park users and ensure that this is properly landscaped to the water's edge. This was the most popular improvement in all the consultation which took place. The current café's limited menu and capacity will be enhanced, enabling more visitors to utilise the facility and providing increased internal space for year-round use.

Within the current scheme it has not been possible to include extended accessible car-parking with views of the lake, as this is needed to extend the café area. Instead, accessible car-parking will be available within the existing carpark and the new café and landscaping will allow better access for disabled people and parents/carers with pushchairs, including a covered outdoor area, which will also accommodate the needs of people who are immune-suppressed.

With the funding available through Levelling Up it was also not possible to accommodate additional car-parking in the field adjacent to road. Improvements to car-parking and play will be considered for any future investment and development.

For clarity, the tables below provide a comparison between elements included in the original bid submission, the amended proposals as consulted on in Autumn 2022 and what is currently proposed.

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Rother Valley Country Park		
Works as per LUF bid – Autumn 2021	Works as consulted on in Autumn 2022	Current proposal August 2023
<p>External Works</p> <p>Hospitality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pavilion Café overlooking the lake • Internal events space <p>Landscaping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To the north the toy railway station will be enhanced through the replacement of the existing service yard with a new green. • Green amenity space adjacent to new café • Further green amenity space adjoining the village centre to the south <p>Courtyard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village centre to be refurbished and enhanced with glazed link to educational centre and mill to be restored 	<p>External Works</p> <p>Hospitality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pavilion Café overlooking the lake • Internal events space • Light touch refurbishment of existing cafe <p>Landscaping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not included as would reduce car parking and difficult to access. • Green amenity space adjacent to new café (current waterside car park) • Demolition of bungalow and relocation of storage yard to create further green amenity space adjoining the village centre • Landscaping to the waterfront <p>Courtyard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light touch refurbishment to the <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education centre - Mill building - Water wheel 	<p>External Works</p> <p>Hospitality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pavilion Café overlooking the lake • Internal events space <p>Landscaping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not included as would reduce car parking and difficult to access. • Green amenity space adjacent to new café (current waterside car park) • Demolition of bungalow and relocation of storage yard to create further green amenity space adjoining the village centre • Landscaping to the waterfront <p>Courtyard</p> <p>Not proposed as part of this LUF scheme but can be considered for any future development / regeneration proposals to improve facilities and develop the courtyard area.</p>

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<p>Car Parking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not detailed in bid <p>Play and Recreation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existing adventure playground will be extended with an additional play facility to the eastern side of the lake with a climbing forest <p>Improved Access and site preparation</p> <p>Not detailed in bid</p>	<p>Car Parking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car Park 1 – new car parking in former Play area • Car Park 2 – new car parking to East of the river <p>Play and Recreation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking additional funding for extension of play into the trees at current site and also on the west side of the lake • New small Play Area (to rear of new café) <p>Improved Access and site preparation</p> <p>Site preparation, roads, landscaping, wayfinding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocation of cycle centre • Relocation of boatyard • Relocation of Rangers’ compound 	<p>Car Parking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car Park 1 - (Refurbish existing car park next to Courtyard) • Car Park 2 - new car parking to East of the river • Car Park 3 – small new accessible car park next to water sports centre <p>Play and recreation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not proposed as part of this LUF scheme but can be considered for any future development / regeneration for the extension of play into the trees at current site and also on the west side of the lake • New small Play Area (to rear of new café) <p>Improved Access and site preparation</p> <p>Site preparation, roads, landscaping, wayfinding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocation of cycle centre • Relocation of boatyard • Relocation of Rangers’ compound
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Thrybergh Country Park		
Works per bid – Autumn 2021	Works as consulted on in Autumn 2022	Current proposal August 2023
<p>Café</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existing café facility will be replaced with a larger pavilion • External terrace providing additional outdoor seating <p>Car parking and access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new car park will provide an additional 152 spaces • Six additional accessible bays at the water's edge 	<p>Café</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing café will be replaced with a larger pavilion of 100-150 covers • External terrace providing additional outdoor seating and picnicking available for 100 • Soft landscaping to waterfront <p>Car parking and access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new car park will provide an additional 152 spaces • Wayfinding • Roads, paths • Facilitating works 	<p>Café</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing café will be replaced with a larger pavilion of 80 covers • External terrace providing additional outdoor seating and picnicking available for 100 • Soft landscaping reduced in terms of the design not the footprint <p>Car parking and access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible spaces will be available in the existing carpark, but without a view of the lake (however café and outdoor seating will be accessible) • Wayfinding • Roads, paths • Facilitating works