

BUCHAN AREA COMMITTEE – 20th FEBRUARY 2018

**ADEN COUNTRY PARK:
HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND DELIVERY STAGE 2 APPLICATION**

1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:-

- 1. Commend the work that has been done in bringing these proposals forward and in particular recognise the work done by the Project & Funding Officer, Friends of Aden, Buchan Development Partnership and Council officers; and**
- 2. Agree the Aden Masterplan, Design Report, Activity Plan, the Management & Maintenance Plan and the Conservation Management Plan as providing a sound basis for the future development of Aden Country Park and for the submission of the Round 2 funding application to HLF and other funding bodies.**

2 Background/Discussion

- 2.1 Members will recall that a bid was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for funding support for the Restoration and Development of Aden Country Park. Disappointingly the bid was unsuccessful, following further meetings and discussions with HLF to seek guidance and advice it was agreed to re-work and resubmit a revised bid. This was the subject of a report to Committee on 10th November 2015 (Item 7).**
- 2.2 Following significant work to the documentation the natural heritage aspects of the application such as the biodiversity were as advised strengthened, ensuring that the correct balance was found between the built, natural and cultural heritage of the park, there was also general agreement that the Aden story needed to be more focussed and interpreted around the Park, in addition to those items already mentioned above.**
- 2.3 In February 2016 the revised application and supporting documentation was submitted. In June 2016 we received notification from HLF that the Aden Country Park Restoration & Redevelopment Project funding stage 1 (delivery stage) application had been successful.**

- 2.4 During 2016-17, a number of significant improvements and upgrades have been completed within the Park. These include the Park Café, the Coach House toilets, the Museum entrance and toilets. In addition to this, the new Mintlaw Landscape Services operational depot, which houses office accommodation, welfare facilities, garages and a workshop for the Willowbank Day Services woodwork project, was completed and is now fully operational. Visitor numbers have steadily increased over the past 10 years with an all-time high in 2016-17 of around 352,000.
- 2.5 As indicated previously, a Stage 2 application requires fully detailed and costed proposals with designs at “ready to tender stage” as well as other supporting documentation and evidence. Two critical elements to the success of the Stage 2 bid are, firstly, evidence of effective cross service working between the three main Services, and secondly, demonstrative community engagement in both the project development and the ongoing management of the Park.
- 2.6 The Aden Country Park Working Group provides the principal mechanism for partnership activity. The Working Group comprises the main Council services based in the park, local Community Councils, Book of Deer, Buchan Development Partnership (who run a number of major events in the Park), The Friends of Aden Country Park, and Willowbank Day Services. This group meets on a regular basis and is leading the submission of the Round 2 application and working towards delivering a single “Aden Experience” through a common and shared approach to management, customer service, promotional activity and events.
- 2.7 In regard to community engagement, the Friends of Aden group was set up in 2011 and is seen by HLF as critical to the project and the group continues to have a significant role to play. In addition to supporting and contributing to the development of the project, the Friends in partnership with Willowbank Day Services operate the craft shop and are organising events and activities for their membership
- 2.8 A critical element has been the appointment of a Project & Funding Officer who provides the link between the partners and park users and ensures that the proposals contained in the Round 2 application reflect the aspirations of users as well as maximising educational and recreational opportunities through an extended and widened events programme. This appointment was seen as fundamental by HLF and the work done by the Project & Funding Officer has been particularly beneficial in developing these proposals.
- 2.9 The Project & Funding Officer essentially serves the wider partnership, therefore, it was thought appropriate that they be employed by the Buchan Development Partnership rather than an individual partner (thus reinforcing the essential community partnership approach).

- 2.10 The application for Round 2 funding is due to be submitted by 28th February. A significant amount of work has been done to refine and develop the initial proposals both in respect of the range of works to be undertaken and the associated activities, event and audience development proposals. (See Appendix 1 – Aden Project Summary for main project details.)
- 2.11 Alongside this work the Service has reviewed the management plan for the park with the emphasis on collaborative working between all stakeholders based at Aden and recognising the role of the community and notably the Friends organisation in contributing to the overall management and maintenance of the Park. This work culminates in five documents that form the principal elements of the funding submission:
1. Aden Masterplan (map pertaining to the planned capital works)
 2. Aden Design Report (summary of capital work design elements)
 3. Aden Activity Plan (dealing with the educational, audience development, community engagement and volunteering elements)
 4. Aden Management and Maintenance Plan
 5. Aden Conservation Management Plan (dealing with the regeneration of the Designed Landscape and associated works)

In addition to these plans there is ongoing work in the development of a Business Plan for the park activities. This requires further development and detailed conversation is underway between Council services, the HLF advisors and Jura Consultants, who have been developing the plan. This requires to be completed by the submission date to ensure that the content is satisfactory for grant seeking purposes. This work will have the objectives of showing how ongoing revenue contributions and potential to generate income can help to match existing revenue commitments. Clearly this is a challenge in the current financial climate, but the best case will be developed to give the application the sustainability and confidence HLF will require to protect their investment.

Due to the volume of these draft documents they have been made available to Members via Ward Pages and have been made available to the general public via the Council's website. The principal elements and components will be highlighted at the meeting.

- 2.12 These plans have all been developed through public consultation and in close consultation with the Aden Working Group throughout its progress. The full package of proposals has been shared with each of the Partners and their comments have been included in the preparation of submission.

3. Scheme of Governance

- 3.1 The Committee is able to consider this matter under Part 2A – Section B – paragraph 1.1 of the Scheme of Governance as this is a matter specific to the Area not otherwise properly delegated to any other Committee.

4 Implications and Risk

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment is not required because the content of this report does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.
- 4.2 A Town Centre Impact Assessment is not required because there will be no significant impact as a result of this Report on Town Centres.
- 4.3 The capital elements of the project will be undertaken during the first two years of the project with the other elements committed over a five year period.
- 4.4 The Council's contributions to the project will be funded from Infrastructure Services and Education and Children's Services Budgets. The increase in revenue expenditure associated with the project will be generally met through the HLF contribution and from within the partners and Service's ongoing revenue budgets during the project. All maintenance requirements following completion of the project will be met from the service's revenue budget and increased income opportunities.
- 4.5 Development funding to be matched with a contribution of the Council's own resources was awarded by HLF to develop the Stage 2 application. Provision for the Council's contribution of £45,000 to this and the subsequent implementation phase of £180,000 will be met from Infrastructure Services budget (Landscape Services, Economic Development, Archaeological Services) and Education and Children's Services budget (Cultural Services). The total project delivery cost is in the order of £2 million and the overall funding package involves, the Gordon and Ena Baxter Foundation, Historic Environment Scotland, Scottish Landfill Communities Fund (Suez, Wren, Viridor Credits, EB Scotland), Developer Obligation funding and community in-kind contributions. THE HLF component at around 70% of the total is the most significant of these.
- 4.6 An ongoing task will be to secure external and sustainable funding streams to enable the objectives of the project to continue beyond the five-year period covered by the project and supported by HLF, in a climate of ongoing financial constraints. This will involve both seeking and developing new areas of income (e.g, events fee charging framework) and an increasing emphasis on partnership working with other members of the Group.
- 4.7 The following risks have been identified at a Council Priority level

Regeneration: The promotion of tourism and community involvement is essential to how effectively the Development Partnerships engage with the local communities and are able to deliver their vision for each area. This project will secure funding to conserve the natural and historic environment by protecting and enhancing landscape, biodiversity and historic assets. It is recognised that there is a heightened risk of the natural environment being damaged or lost.

4.8 The Head of Finance has been consulted and is satisfied that the financial implications are as outlined in this report. The Monitoring Officer within Corporate Services has been consulted and agrees with the terms of the report.

Ritchie Johnson
Director of Business Services

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Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



Aden Country Park Restoration & Redevelopment Project Summary HLF Parks for People Programme

Background

In February 2016 Aberdeenshire Council applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Parks for People programme for an ambitious £1.8 million restoration and redevelopment project for Aden Country Park in Mintlaw, Aberdeenshire.

The project was assessed and approved by the HLF and in June 2016 Aberdeenshire Council were awarded a grant of £149,500 towards the project development phase. With funding support from Landscape, Cultural and Archaeology Services of Aberdeenshire Council, as well as non-cash contributions and voluntary commitment of the Friends of Aden and other voluntary groups, the development phase project totals £212,500.

Development Phase

During this important development phase, we will ensure that our project proposals match the needs and views of the local community and visitors to Aden.

Ironside Farrar Ltd and Jura Consultants have been appointed as the project consultants focussing on the capital and activity work aspects of the project. Community consultation elements are being developed in partnership with Buchan Development Partnership (BDP). Once finalised the consultation opportunities will be circulated widely to ensure that everyone has a chance to have their say.

The project development phase also supports the development of detailed design and planning documents, survey work, match funding applications, and the development of a detailed second-round funding application, with our delivery grant request to the HLF Parks for People programme, to be submitted in February 2018.

Vision

The vision of the Aden project is to enhance, promote, and conserve Aden's rich cultural, architectural, archaeological and natural heritage, creating a sustainable, high quality visitor destination in rural Aberdeenshire for present and future generations to enjoy.

Our project will tell the story of farming from the North East of Scotland within the Aden landscape, providing visitors with an opportunity to actively engage with Aden's heritage, and the relationship between communities and the landscape over thousands of years.

The Project

The main strands of the project include:

- The development of a wide range of interpretation methods to enable visitors to engage with Aden's natural, built, cultural and archaeological heritage. Including the development of a new interpretation centre, smartphone app, films, website, leaflets and interpretation panels.
- Improvements to the biodiversity of habitats for plants and wildlife. Including compartment and companion planting, introduction of marginal, floating leaved and submerged aquatic plants, wildflower meadows, willow plantation, and removal of invasive plant species.
- The development of environmental, archaeological and heritage related volunteer and staff learning opportunities. Including traditional skills workshops, practical archaeology training, woodland and grounds maintenance training, and opportunities related to biodiversity and the understanding of the local environment.
- The introduction of a new adventure play area aimed at children and young people of all ages and abilities.
- A new pond dipping platform, wildlife shelter, nature and heritage trails and outdoor learning classrooms.
- The uncovering, recording, and interpretation of a series of significant archaeological sites including a Bronze Age structure, lost Keith Tower, stone circle and WWI practise trenches.
- A range of improvements to visitor facilities such as a new interpretation centre.
- Enhanced access to park facilities through path, courtyard, and parking improvements.
- The development of formal learning programmes and educational pack resources to complement the curriculum for excellence.
- The renovation, restoration and refurbishment of the Forester's and Gardener's Cottages which will create new enterprises to help sustain the park into the future.
- The conservation of Aden's designed landscape including the restoration and reinstatement of structures, features and planting along with the stabilisation of at risk buildings.
- The delivery of a wide range of heritage related events and activities aimed at all types of audiences. Including heritage fairs, archaeological digs, guided walks and tours, talks, fun days, family events, traditional music, and environmental education activities.

