

LEISURE, PARKS AND WASTE MANAGEMENT (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

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Agenda Item 4

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SUBMISSION BY CABINET MEMBER FOR LEISURE & PARKS

THE RESTORATION OF STOWE POOL AND FIELDS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To describe to the Committee the encouragement of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the council to prepare and submit a Funding Enquiry Form, as an initial step towards submitting a full application for grant to meet the costs of restoring Stowe Pool and Fields in Lichfield.
- 1.2 To describe the current use and condition of Stowe Pool and Fields, the importance of investment and to outline the anticipated process for preparing an application.
- 1.3 To seek the views of the Committee regarding improvements required, the desirability of submitting an application, and of proposed project management.

2. Stowe Pool and Fields

Background

- 2.1 Stowe Pool and Fields (Stowe) is an integral part of the city's Historic Parks. Stretching from Cross Keys on the northern edge of the city centre to St Chad's Church, the 19th century reservoir provides a natural and attractive backdrop to the Cathedral and The Close.
- 2.2 Nearest the city centre is Stowe Fields which is largely laid to grass, and hosts a modest play area and outdoor gym.
- 2.3 Stowe Pool is a raised reservoir, which because of its volume above the natural ground level, is a registered reservoir in accordance with the 2010 Floods and Water Management Act, and because of its historic population of white clawed crayfish, is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 2.4 The reservoir is popular with anglers because of its population of carp.
- 2.5 On the banks of the reservoir is a circular footpath with benches, bins and 'Johnson's Willow', a tree of some historical note because it was said to be a regular resting spot for Samuel Johnson.
- 2.6 Next to the reservoir is a pleasant looking Victorian wooden boat house – which is now used for storage. In recent years there has been little boating activity on the pool. However, when Chasewater was drained for repairs, the Outdoor Education Centre relocated its sailing

sessions to the pool and many people commented that it was good to see the boats on the water.

- 2.7 Stowe Pool is connected to Minster Pool by a 200-year old culvert which runs deep under Stowe Field and the properties of Dam Street.
- 2.8 Whilst this area was included within the original, unsuccessful, bid for funding to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the historic parks, Stowe was removed from the subsequent, successful application because of budgetary pressures.
- 2.9 In consequence, whilst Beacon Park, the Museum Gardens, the Garden of Remembrance, and Minster Pool and Walk have been restored to a very high level and are extremely popular and valued, Stowe, in contrast, looks unloved, less popular and in need of investment.
- 2.10 Whilst there have been various repairs completed over the years and the occasional investment from organisations like the Lichfield Rotary Club who paid for the outdoor gym, the condition of the site, furniture and infrastructure remains dated, and areas are generally in an unsatisfactory state of repair.
- 2.11 But this area could be so much more and should be making a more significant contribution to the city's and district's visitor and leisure offer.
- 2.12 The area is full of history. At the southern end is the Cathedral dedicated to St Chad, at the northern end, the St Chad's Church and St Chad's Well. The remains of a Saxon Village were unearthed when the new car park was built at Cross Keys. The natural lake was used to provide fish for the monks of the Cathedral and water to power a mill. The area was a popular walking spot for Dr Johnson before the Moggs, a term unique to Lichfield to describe an area of bog and water, was dammed to construct the reservoir in the 1800s by South Staffordshire Water to provide clean water to the Black Country. It is also said to have been used as a waymarker by German pilots during the Second World War.
- 2.13 In recognition of this, officers have met, on-site, with representatives of the Heritage Lottery Fund to discuss the prospect of a bid for funding for Stowe and have been encouraged by them to prepare proposals.
- 2.14 Officers have been advised that HLF would welcome an application for a project costing up to £1m with at least 5% of the costs being met by the council and other sources. The HLF advisors recognised the historic value and the potential of Stowe and acknowledge that it would build upon the very real success exhibited by the original Historic Parks project.
- 2.15 In considering an application, the HLF will be assessing the impact that the project will have in delivering positive outcomes for heritage, people and communities.

What Might Be Done

- 2.16 Initial enquiries of users and the Friends of the Historic Parks have begun to shape some of the works that might be undertaken to restore Stowe. These suggestions include:
 - A better play area
 - Restoration and reuse of the boathouse – perhaps as an educational facility
 - Resurfaced footpaths
 - New benches, picnic tables, bins and signs
 - Tree planting
 - Accessibility improvements
 - Softening of the reservoir banks to provide greater wildlife habitats

- The re-introduction of boating and other water sports with associated on shore facilities
- Interpretation boards
- Improved lighting
- Removal of pedestrian bridge
- Wildlife habitat improvements.

Progress so far

- 2.17 A project working group, comprising officers from Parks, Finance and Implementation has been established who have met with representatives of the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Working Group is ensuring that:
- The obligations placed upon the Council by the S106 awards relating to the play site are met.
 - A timely grant bid to Heritage Lottery Fund is developed.
 - The play area at Stowe is designed and implemented in accordance with the wishes of the district council bearing in mind ongoing maintenance obligations and costs, and health and safety.
 - Clear procedures are developed and met for the implementation of any project initiated from any monies awarded.
 - Proper and effective involvement of, and consultation with, Members, partners, residents and other stakeholders is undertaken.
- 2.18 The project was described in the directorate's service plan approved by Committee and a Project Initiation Document has been drafted.
- 2.19 Modest funding has been secured from s106 and from the council's own capital programme to progress these works and to use as matched funding.
- 2.20 The Friends of the Historic Parks have been kept advised of progress and have expressed a desire to be consulted and to act as an independent champion of the project.
- 2.21 Next steps include establishing more robust project governance and ensuring that what we learned from the historic parks project is incorporated within our approach.

Timescales

- 2.18 After submitting the Project Enquiry Form, Officers of HLF will advise of the proposed applications viability and subsequently guide on the process for the first round application.
- 2.19 First Round applications have two submission dates; 31st August for a December decisions and 28th February for a June decision. In the first instance, we will be scoping the work required to determine whether we can meet the February deadline.
- 2.20 If successful at the First Round stage, you are then required to develop the proposals further, going into a 'development phase', before making the final Second Application.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The views of the Committee are sought.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 This HLF application is proposed to apply for funding up to the value of £1,000,000. The Match funding has already been secured.

Source of funding	Amount
S106 Capital LDC	£45,000
LDC Capital Fund	£5,000
Total	£50,000

5. Risk Management

- 5.1 A full project risk log is being prepared but the initial possible high-level risks have been identified as follows:

Risk Description	Likelihood / Impact	Countermeasures
HLF not supportive	Medium/ High	Officers are continuing to discuss the proposals with the HLF.
Insufficient capacity of officers	Medium / High	If the Committee endorses the proposal to submit a bid then the project will be prioritised.
Poor project governance and management hampers effective delivery.	Medium / High	One of the first tasks will be to ensure that appropriate governance and management systems are agreed and are in place.