

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CABINET MEMBER MEETING FOR
COUNCIL SERVICES

11 July 2016

Report of the Strategic Director Corporate Resources

Elvaston Castle Country Park, Castle Toilets Improvements

1. Purpose of the Report

Approval is sought to seek funding from the 2016/17 Corporate Maintenance Budget Planned Maintenance Programme to undertake a Toilets Improvement Project at Elvaston Castle.

2. Information and Analysis

The toilets within the castle are the main central toilet facilities in the park and as well as used by park visitors generally, these are used by café users and by other groups using the Gothic Hall, which, previously included people attending weddings which were run for a time at the Castle from 1994.

These facilities have never been upgraded or refurbished since they were installed in 1970, although repairs have been carried out and decorations were carried out in 1994 following the introduction of a wedding offer in the castle.

The toilets have been the primary source of complaints to park staff (and the café operator) for many years and proposals to upgrade the tired facilities, in parallel with the planned re-introduction of weddings and the re-letting of a new café operation in 2016 are seen as an essential and integral part of both the short and longer term regeneration proposals for the Estate.

On 17 June 2014 Cabinet approved the final Vision and Plan for Elvaston Castle and Estate. The Plan recommended a phased approach to the estate's regeneration over a ten year period, with the object of achieving financial sustainability, via a diversity of income generation streams, available for re-investment in the long-term care and management of the Estate.

During the first three years the Plan recommends an emphasis on creating the infrastructure – physically, financially and in terms of governance – that would provide a solid foundation on which to deliver the long-term aspirations of the

Vision. As well as the creation of a single management body to eventually assume control of the governance of the estate, the Plan proposes interim improvements to the catering, retail and other core visitor facilities within the Estate, to maximise their commercial viability in the short term, whilst overall business plan aspirations are explored and developed.

Further to advice received from the National Trust, who have been working in partnership with the Council on the Elvaston Project since 2014, the following actions have been proposed to progress these aims, all of which will require the use of the castle toilet facilities:

1. A review and improvement of the existing catering offer (now completed with a new tenant identified to take over following re-tendering on the open market).
2. The trialling of a ceremonies and celebration offer – the setting up, following market testing, of a franchise with a local specialist in weddings and other celebrations to trial the provision of ceremonies and celebrations at various locations on the estate including (further to the rejection of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid) within the Gothic Hall. A specification has now been prepared and licence obtained; with tenders due back shortly for the franchise.
3. To review all other hire charges etc. for buildings, spaces and other facilities across the Estate – benchmarking hire charges for flexible, bookable space such as the Classroom and other facilities (including areas on the Ground Floor of the Castle following the HLF bid rejection) and raising rates as appropriate.

With regard to the existing café, seven tenders were received. The successful bidder, CQ Leisure, Trading as Marmalade and Tea from Borrowash, demonstrated a clear commitment to the Council's long term objectives for the estate within the 10 year vision and plan, producing a high quality offer with clear plans for optimising capacity and providing the sort of offer the Council was looking for.

It is also understood that CQ Leisure will be fitting out a new kitchen and renewing finishes and furnishings to the dining area and exterior seating areas, all at their own expense, and investment that will not, therefore have to be found by the Council. It is hoped that the combination of refreshed catering and toilet facilities will encourage ongoing investment by the café tenant and offer the prospect of increased rental levels after the first rent review in 2018, which will be on the basis of turnover. This has not previously been possible until now, given that tenants are now obliged to open their accounts to the Council as a condition of the new lease. It is hoped that the new café offer will

also lead to increased footfall with knock on benefits of increasing shop turnover and car parking income at the site.

Planned wedding income is projected at up to £1,700 per wedding in the summer and £500 in the winter for the first two years of the planned wedding franchise. It is hoped that up to 40 weddings a year can be accommodated once the process is up and running, although figures for the first year are unlikely to reach such levels whilst planning of the operation and initial investment are in progress. Numbers of weddings could rise further, however after the two year trial period, but this will depend on how well the operation runs in the first two years. Higher numbers of weddings were accommodated in the past at Elvaston.

The refurbishment of the toilets has a clear business rationale for investment with regard to weddings as it is considered that, without the upgrade, substantial revenue could be lost through customers deciding to look elsewhere when confronted with current facilities. This view has been confirmed by several wedding providers viewing the estate as part of NT market testing sessions in 2014, their comments both informing and assisting the park manager in preparing tender documentation for a wedding operator, which are about to be sent out at the time of writing. The historic setting of the castle also means that the use of alternative portable toilet facilities will not be an option on any long term basis.

It should also be noted that the Council intend to look into letting out the remaining three large rooms on the ground floor of the castle for conferencing, events and wedding receptions (thereby improving on the currently planned offer of using the Gothic Hall just for ceremonies). These potential revenue earning initiatives will also be compromised if suitable toilet facilities are not provided.

3. Financial Considerations

A quotation in the sum of £92,501 has been received from Corporate Property for the required works. This work includes new cubicles, sanitary ware and fittings throughout, new drainage and floor construction and new finishes and decoration along with building regulation fees. It is proposed that the work be financed from the Council's 2016/17 Corporate Maintenance Budget Planned Maintenance Programme.

An allocation of £1,600,000 for the 2016/17 Planned Maintenance Programme was approved at Cabinet on 24 May 2016. The remaining £1,507,499 will be allocated from selected projects indicated within that report.

4. Other Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered; legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, environmental, health and transport considerations.

5. Background Papers

The Corporate Maintenance Budget 2016/17 was approved by Cabinet on 24 May 2016, minute number 154/16.

6. Key Decision

NO

7. Call-in

Is it required that call-in be waived for any decision on this report? **NO**

8. Officer Recommendation

That approval be given to fund the Elvaston Castle Toilets Improvement Works from the 2016/17 Corporate Maintenance Budget Planned Maintenance Programme.

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