

**Agenda Item No. 7(i)**

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**26 January 2016**

Report of the Strategic Director - Economy, Transport and Environment

**COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE RESTRUCTURE (HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE)**

(1) **Purpose of Report** To inform Cabinet of further proposed changes to the Countryside Service and to seek approval to explore alternative delivery mechanisms, maximise commercial opportunities and consult the public where necessary.

(2) **Information and Analysis**

**Context**

The Comprehensive Spending Review and associated Local Government Finance Settlement, announced in December 2015, provide clear indications of likely levels of Government support up to 2019-20.

The ability of the Council to fund services is influenced by a number of factors, one of the most significant of which is the availability of support from Government in the form of Revenue Support Grant (RSG). Throughout the current period of cuts in public sector spending, since the global financial crisis in 2008, the Government has consistently reduced its support to local authorities and by 2019-20 it is forecast by the Department for Communities and Local Government that the Council's support through RSG will have fallen to around £13m and the Council is expecting this support to end in totality in the following year (2020-21). By way of comparison the Council received £98.050m of RSG in 2015-16.

This will bring to an end decades of support to local authorities through the allocation of a large non-ringfenced Government grant; other, less significant, grant streams are also expected to reduce and some to end over the forthcoming five years. By 2021-22 it is envisaged the vast majority of the Council's funding will come from Council Tax and Business Rates, topped up by direct charges for services where appropriate.

The reduction in Government grants is only part of the problem faced by the Council; there are significant pressures, particularly in Adult Care which require the Council to allocate approximately £20m to that service alone in each of the next five years and probably around £15m a year thereafter. The pressures in Adult Care are a combination of additional cost arising from the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement about the introduction of a National Living Wage and increasing numbers of clients requiring support and the increasingly complex needs of those clients.

In mitigation, the Government have announced that councils will be able to increase their Council Tax by an additional 2% per annum in each of the next four years and there is provision for further payments to be received from the Better Care Fund, potentially reaching £25m per annum by 2019-20. However, neither of these measures will offset the pressures in Adult Care on an annual basis and are not available to help prevent savings being required in other service areas.

Overall, the Council's revised Five Year Financial Plan which is also on the agenda for approval at this Cabinet Meeting indicates significant cuts are still required from 2016-17 until 2020-21. This is in addition to cuts identified in the period 2010-11 to 2015-16.

## **Background Information**

Members will recall that the Countryside Service is working towards an overall cut in its budget of £1 million by 2018 to support the Council to achieve its overall cuts.

The Service has already undertaken reviews of its management structure and the Public Rights of Way Team. The outcome of the review of the Public Rights of Way Team is subject to a separate report on this Cabinet agenda. Coupled with vehicle and other revenue savings, they will deliver £448,000 by June 2016. The next stage is to complete the implementation of the new structure introduced in the management review, which resulted in the Countryside Service now being split into three teams:

- A central function, including Public Rights of Way and the Access Team, based at Matlock. It deals with all issues relating to the management of public rights of way, development of greenways and improvements for access to the Countryside Service.
- The Destination Sites Team is based around the three principal visitor attractions, Shipley Country Park, Elvaston Castle Country Park and Middleton Top/High Peak Junction. This Team will develop and promote these sites to generate new income, working towards a cost neutral state in

the future. It will actively engage with the Council's emerging Development Company to maximise the commercial and entrepreneurial opportunities available, seeking to ensure that income arising from such opportunities would be reinvested in these sites and support staff.

- Finally, the Wider Sites Team will focus on asset management and development of the remaining portfolio of sites, greenways, canals and other assets and discharge the remaining statutory responsibilities around Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), highways tree inspection, statutory reservoir checks, management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and landowner/occupier responsibilities for some 130+ sites. Seeking external funding to support work would continue where appropriate.

The Countryside Service provides a customer facing service. In order to achieve the targeted level of savings, staffing reductions are proposed. There will, as a result, be a potential impact upon the service to Derbyshire residents and visitors, the effects of which are outlined in this report. The detail of potential staff reductions, which are, however, subject to the consultations set out in this report, are dealt with in a separate exempt report to Cabinet.

It is proposed that alternative delivery mechanisms and development opportunities would be explored at two visitor information centres and associated public toilets at Hayfield and Tapton Lock, working with the Council's emerging Development Company. Future income would be reinvested in wider Countryside site management. Challenge funding will be explored where appropriate to pump prime income generation projects. In comparison to the Destination Sites, there is currently limited scope or capacity to develop the income streams at Hayfield and Tapton Lock in support of staffing or wider service costs; however, there may be potential for alternative organisations or third party groups to operate out of these centres. This would need further investigation. It is proposed that the County Council would retain the freehold of these buildings for the future to protect its long term interests. Public access to the countryside sites associated with these locations would not be affected.

Should an alternative operator or development opportunity not be secured, potential closure of these visitor information centres may be a possibility, in such circumstances, it would mean that tramper mobility scooters would no longer be available in those areas. If continued provision cannot be maintained through negotiation with third parties, then they would be redeployed to other locations in Derbyshire, such as the Destination Sites.

Across the Destination Sites, it is proposed to carry out a review of the opening hours of visitor centres and cycle hire to realign daily and seasonal opening hours to meet customer demand. Further closures may be required if

income cannot be significantly increased, however, every effort will be made to ensure that commercial opportunities are explored to mitigate this possibility.

The proposed reduction in staffing at Destination Sites, should further income not be secured, will mean that staff will concentrate on maintaining high standards in the vicinity of the visitor facility with regard to litter, maintenance, inspection of play areas, etc. There could be a reduction in frequency of litter picking and maintenance may take longer in outlying areas of the Destination Sites. There may also be a reduction in events and volunteering activities that staff can support on sites.

Where staff are successful in generating new and additional income in line with principles established at Elvaston Castle, it should be retained to support existing staff and improve services. The potential for a trading company is being investigated. Such a body, set up with social objectives to ensure wider access and affordable prices, could have the potential to deliver significant income. This proposal requires further work and will be the subject of a future report to Cabinet and will be informed by discussions with partners.

The Wider Sites Team will manage the remaining portfolio of sites, necessarily through a prioritisation approach. Staff and resources will be deployed according to a prioritisation hierarchy of sites with, for example, conservation designations or stewardship, public access or significant visitor numbers a priority. The list of prioritised sites is presented in Appendix 1. Despite this, with the potential of fewer staffing and budgetary resources, some sites may no longer be able to receive their current level of monitoring and grounds maintenance. It could take longer for teams to respond to requests for maintenance, although urgent health and safety issues will take a priority. Environmental quality may reduce, as could capacity to repair infrastructure, such as trail surfacing, which may impact on ease of access to sites.

The continued development of countryside assets through external partnerships will be difficult to maintain, should partners withdraw or reduce funding, which could lead to a reduction in the ability to deliver new greenways or canal projects. However, every effort will be made to secure external income and funding to support such work where appropriate.

The potential reductions in staff may mean a reduction in the annual events programme and it may take longer to respond to general enquiries from the public on specialist issues, for example, trees, conservation. Participation in the Green Flag quality standard, which the Council has achieved at Elvaston, Shipley and Tapton Lock Visitor Centres for a number of years, will be reviewed.

The proposals outlined above would generate £451,000 of further savings towards the total cut of £1 million. The remaining £101,000 will be found from revenue cost centre savings, such as equipment, materials, fuel, events and activities.

It is important to highlight that the figures presented here are the worst case scenario. There are a number of contracts and income generation opportunities in the process of agreement or development that may deliver a significant level of income that has the potential to reduce the saving required in staffing and reduce the number of staff at risk of redundancy.

Subject to Cabinet approval, it is proposed that localised public consultation will take place either around potential changes to the operations of Hayfield and Tapton Lock Visitor Information Centres, or possible closure should negotiations with alternative providers or development opportunities via the Council's emerging Development Company prove unsuccessful. This consultation would give service users the opportunity to comment on the proposals before any decisions are made.

Consultation would take place over an eight week period. The consultation will be promoted widely, including to the general public, Derbyshire County Council staff, young people, schools, colleges, local parish/town councils and district/borough councils, the 50+ and Youth Forums and hard to reach groups, such as looked after children and disabled young people.

A variety of media will be used to ensure people have the opportunity to comment on the proposals. This included press releases through a variety of public publications, social media, promotion through the Council's own website and targeted consultation with specific interest and action groups local to the sites. Questionnaires will be available in printed form through libraries and also online on the Council's website.

**(3) Financial Considerations** The Countryside Service, including Public Rights of Way which is the subject of a separate report on this Cabinet agenda, will have achieved savings of £448,000 to date. The projected savings which are predominantly from proposed staffing reorganisation in the Countryside Service would derive a saving of £451,000 per annum, including on-costs. The remaining £101,000 will be found from further revenue cost centre savings, such as equipment, materials, fuel, events and activities, and operating costs of Hayfield and Tapton Lock visitor centres. If it is not possible to successfully appoint or redeploy staff, then redundancy and pension costs will be met from general reserves. Every effort will be made to maximise sustainable commercial and income generation opportunities to mitigate budget cuts.

(4) **Legal Considerations** The Council has a legal obligation to consult with those people and organisations likely to be significantly affected by the proposals and to take all responses into consideration prior to any decisions being made. In these particular circumstances, it is proposed that consultation takes place in relation to any proposed development or closure of centres on the basis that there will be a degree of impact on regular users of the centres depending on the proposal.

In addition, the Equality Act 2010 provides that the Council should give 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality and diversity, and foster good relations, in the exercising of its functions. This need for 'due regard' specifically applies to all nine protected characteristics set out in the Act, including age and disability. An Equality Analysis will form part of any subsequent report to Cabinet given in particular the possible relocation of the tramper mobility scooters.

(5) **Human Resources Considerations** The Human Resources considerations are subject to a separate report on this Cabinet agenda.

(6) **Equality and Diversity Considerations** Under this Act, local authorities are under a legal duty to pay "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality with regard to race, disability and gender, including gender reassignment, age, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, religion and beliefs.

### **Other Considerations**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

(7) **Key Decision** No.

(8) **Call-In** Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No.

(9) **Background Papers** Held on file within the Economy, Transport and Environment Department. Officer contact details – Allison Thomas, extension 33000.

(10) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATIONS** That Cabinet approves:

10.1 Consultation on the proposed reconfiguration of the Countryside Service as set out in the report.

- 10.2 Officers undertaking dialogue with external parties around alternative delivery models and commercial opportunities at Hayfield and Tapton Lock Visitor Centres in liaison with the Council's emerging Development Company.
- 10.3 A further report be made to Cabinet prior to any final decision being made as to the future of these centres.
- 10.4 A review of opening hours, income generation potential and viability of visitor centres and cycle hire, and to report the conclusions of this review to a future meeting of the Cabinet Member – Highways, Transport and Infrastructure.
- 10.5 An exploration, with the Director of Legal Services and through the emerging Development Company, of the establishment of a trading company for catering, shops and other potential commercial activities at countryside destination sites with a further report being presented to a future Cabinet meeting.

**Mike Ashworth**  
**Strategic Director - Economy, Transport and Environment**

## Appendix 1

### Countryside Sites - relative prioritisation (draft)

The full portfolio of Countryside Sites is extensive. For simplicity, listed below are the principal and publicly access sites. These have been assessed against a number of criteria, including value public profile and visitor facilities, size and level of input required, value for conservation and environmental designations, value for recreation, risks for health and safety and other liabilities.

In turn these have generated a hierarchy of priorities for management input and for formal inspection - rated High, Medium, Low and Minimum intervention. This will help determine, amongst other considerations, the relative frequency of routine monitoring and maintenance (staff time) that will be able to be assigned, dependent on resources within the Wider Sites function.

Countryside Sites that are not listed here are likely to fall into the Minimum intervention priority. It is likely that such a priority of site may not be able to be visited more than once or twice per annum.

Destination sites are a specific category in themselves, with dedicated resources and therefore are excluded from this prioritisation.

PRIORITY	SITE	DISTRICT	WARD
High	Cromford Canal	AVBC	Alport and Derwent
	Chesterfield Canal	CBC and NEDDC	Spire, Staveley North and Whittington, Brimington
	Sett Valley Trail	HPBC	New Mills
	Five Pits Trail	BDC and NEDDC	Sutton, South Normanton East, Tibshelf, North Wingfield, Tupton, Stonebroom, Pilsley
	Archaeological Way (Langwith branch-line)	BDC	Bolsover South
	High Peak Trail Hopton Top -Daisy Bank	DDDC	Wirksworth
	Trans-Pennine Trail (Arkwright to County Boundary)	BDC, NEDDC and CBC	Arkwright, Staveley, Renishaw and Killamarsh (at least)

AVBC – Amber Valley Borough Council, BDC – Bolsover District Council, CBC – Chesterfield Borough Council, DDDC – Derbyshire Dales District Council, EBC - Erewash Borough Council, HPBC – High Peak Borough Council, NEDDC – North East Derbyshire District Council, SDDC - South Derbyshire District Council



	Mickleover (Great Northern) Greenway	SDDC	Etwall and Repton
	Nutbrook trail	EBC	Breadsall, West Hallam
	Silverhill Trail	BDC	South Normanton East, Tibshelf
	Teversal Trail	BDC	South Normanton East, Tibshelf
	Breadsall (Great Northern) Greenway	EBC	Breadsall
	Skegby Trail	BDC	South Normanton East, Tibshelf, Shirebrook, Pilsley
	Grin Low LNR	HPBC	Buxton West
	Williamthorpe Local Nature Reserve	NEDDC	Sutton
	Pleasley Pit	BDC	Shirebrook, Pleasley
	Tibshelf Ponds	BDC	Tibshelf
	Peter Fidler Reserve	BDC	Sutton, Bolsover South West, Scarcliffe
	Grassmoor Country Park	NEDDC	Grassmoor
	Poulter Country Park	BDC	Bolsover South West, Scarcliffe
	Gamesley Woodlands	HPBC	Glossop North and Rural, Glossop South, Etherow
	Holmewood Woodlands	NEDDC	Sutton
	Mousley Bottom LNR	HPBC	New Mills
	Glapwell/Stockley ponds	BDC	South Normanton East, Tibshelf
	Willington Picnic site	SDDC	Repton and Willington
	Kirk Hallam Lake and Meadows	EBC	Breadsall, West Hallam, ilkeston, Kirk Hallam
	Breadsall SSSI	EBC	Breadsall, West Hallam
<b>Medium</b>	Stockley Trail	BDC	South Normanton East, Tibshelf
	Rowthorne Trail	BDC	South Normanton East, Tibshelf
	Blackwell Trail and Hilcote including Westhouses	BDC	South Normanton East, Tibshelf
	Melandra Link	HPBC	Etherow
	Ripley Greenway	AVBC	Ripley
	Ironville Greenway	AVBC	Ironville

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	Dinting Railway	HPBC	Etherow
	Trent Valley Greenway	EBC	Long Eaton
	The Fabrick	NEDDC	Clay Cross
	Victory Quarry	HPBC	Buxton North, Buxton East
	Millennium Walkway	HPBC	New Mills
	Highoredish	NEDDC	Clay Cross
	Wolfie Ponds	NEDDC	Sutton
	Besthill Quarry	HPBC	Glossop North and Rural
	Poulter park east	BDC	Bolsover South
	Hardstoft Road car park	NEDDC	Clay Cross South
	Eddlestow Lot	NEDDC	Clay Cross
	Pewit Carr LNR	EBC	Breadsall, West Hallam
	Staveley Basin	CBC	Staveley
	Dinting Wood	HPBC	Etherow
	Doe Lea Nature Reserve	BDC	South Normanton East, Tibshelf
	Timber Lane car park	BDC	Tibshelf
<b>Low</b>	Newton Link	BDC	South Normanton East, Tibshelf
	Shardlow Greenway	SDDC	Shardlow
	Dowlow High Peak Trail	HPBC	Hurdlow
	Longedge Lane	NEDDC	Wingerworth and Shirland
	Holmewood Bridleway	NEDDC	Holmewood
	Hopwell Dale Greenway	EBC	Sandiacre
	Eckington Greenway	NEDDC	Eckington and Killamarsh
	Aston Brickyards	SDDC	Aston, Melbourne
	Frith Wood	NEDDC	Dronfield North
	Unstone Line	NEDDC	Dronfield North
	Westthorpe Hills	NEDDC	Killamarsh, Barlborough, Clowne
	Wollen Meadow (Creswell car park)	BDC	Bolsover North West, Elmtun, Whitwell
	Pinxton Wharf	BDC	Pinxton, South Normanton West
	Morton Colliery	NEDDC	Stonebroom, Pilsley
	Manners link	EBC	Ilkeston West
	Locko Plantation	NEDDC	Clay Cross South
	Hepthorne Lane incline	NEDDC	North Wingfield, Tupton
	Rowthorne nature	BDC	South Normanton

	reserve		East, Tibshelf
	Shaw Wood	AVBC	Alport, Derwent
	Renishaw Canal tow Path	NEDDC	Renishaw
	Pleasley nature reserve grasslands	BDC	Pleasley
	Riddings and Highfields Woods	AVBC	Somercotes
	Outgang Lane car park and Area	BDC	Shirebrook, Pleasley
<b>Minimum</b>	Nobriggs Cutting	CBC	Staveley
	Killamarsh Greenway	NEDDC	Eckington and Killamarsh
	Setts Path Wingerworth	NEDDC	Wingerworth and Shirland
	Darklands Lane Swadlincote	SDDC	Swadlincote
	Seanor Triangle	NEDDC	Clay Cross South
	Far Tupton Wood	NEDDC	Clay Cross
	Broad Meadows	BDC	Pinxton, South Normanton West
	Mill Lane, Dronfield	NEDDC	Dronfield South
	Halfmoon Plantation	NEDDC	Eckington
	Seldom Seen Engine House	NEDDC	Eckington
	Sleetmoor Wood-Colliery Plantation	AVBC	Somercotes
	Britton Wood	NEDDC	Clay Cross
	Oxcroft	BDC	Bolsover North West, Elmtun, Whitwell
	Darley Bridge	DDDC	Derwent Valley
	Bek Wood	BDC	Shirebrook, Pleasley
	Whistling Meadow	NEDDC	Holmewood
	Hilcote associated sites	BDC	Hilcote
	Stockley Trail Woodland	BDC	Sutton, Bolsover West, Scarcliffe
	Moorwood Moor Plantation	AVBC	Alport, Derwent
	Barbers Row, Renishaw	BDC	Barlborough, Clowne
	Apperknowle Plantation	NEDDC	Dronfield North
	Syday Lane (Barlborough Railway)	BDC	Barlborough, Clowne
	Stanley Morley Former Railway	EBC	Stanley and Morley
	Little Eaton Branch line	EBC	Little Eaton