



CABINET REPORT

Report Title	CHANGE OF SCENE PROJECT
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AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:	9 June 2010
Key Decision:	YES
Listed on Forwarded Plan:	NO
Within Policy:	YES
Policy Document:	NO
Directorate	Environment and Culture
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Councillor Paul Varnserry
Wards	Eastfield, Lumbertubs, Ecton Brook and Billing

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet about the Change of Scene project, a three-year youth work project giving young people encouragement and opportunities to engage with the natural environment. The project will benefit teenagers from Bellinge, Blackthorn, Eastfield and Rectory Farm estates and will be principally funded by the National Lottery.
- 1.2 To inform Cabinet of the decisions of the Chief Executive, using delegated powers and following consultation with all four Group Leaders, to accept an offer from the Access to Nature programme of the Big Lottery Fund (managed by Natural England) of £229,338 over three calendar years for the project and to authorise the immediate commencement of project implementation. The project will attract a minimum of £60,000 of match funding (£30,000 in kind), with the Council being the accountable body for all of these funds.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the decisions of the Chief Executive and to take account of the project's aims and objectives.
- 2.2 To note that the Council will be accountable to Natural England (on behalf of the Big Lottery Fund) for the successful execution of this project, including securing the required level of match funding and employing the Project Co-ordinator.
- 2.3 To note the nomination of the Northampton East Area Partnership Co-ordinator as the Council's Lead Officer for the project, with full access to advice from Finance, HR, Legal, Procurement and other professional staff as required.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 *Report Background*

- 3.1.1 The development of the Change of Scene project has been led by the Northampton East Area Partnership Co-ordinator, with the approval and active support of the Northampton East Neighbourhood Management Board. It responds to the widely expressed need for more activities for young people on the estates of East Northampton by creating opportunities and encouragement for teenagers from four estates (Bellinge, Blackthorn, Eastfield and Rectory Farm) to engage with the natural environment, initially through the medium of participation in outdoor sporting pursuits such as cycling, climbing, walking and canoeing. This initial "hook" will then lead to other opportunities to learn more about the natural environment through arts and photography, conservation work and other channels. At the same time, the teenagers will have the opportunity to acquire qualifications in outdoor pursuits, leadership and conservation and to participate directly in the running of the project, both of which would be expected to enhance their eventual employability.
- 3.1.2 The project will run over three years and be funded by £229,338 of Lottery money, matched by £34,500 of in kind contributions and at least £30,000 of cash match funding. This offer of funding has already been accepted by the Chief Executive, with the support of all four Group Leaders, using delegated urgency powers. As the project is focused on the natural environment it was considered important to make immediate progress towards delivery of a full programme of activities during the 2010 season for outdoor activities. Furthermore, the fact that publicity for the grant award was embargoed under election "purdah" rules meant that it was not appropriate to take it through Cabinet as this might very well have led to media interest.
- 3.1.3 The bulk of the in kind match will take the form of staff time. This will principally be contributed by Grendon Hall, where the Manager will oversee the project and make available the Centre's expertise in outdoor pursuits and risk management. Other organisations will also need to contribute; these will include the Council, which will need to make available officer time to oversee the project and fulfil the accountability function.

3.1.4 The majority of the cash match has already been secured too. This includes:

County Councillors' Empowering Councillors allocations	£4,500
Northamptonshire Police Problem Solving Fund	£2,000
Safer Stronger Northampton Partnership	£10,000
The Rotary Clubs of Northampton	£10,000

SSNP's Business Support Group have also agreed in principle to recommend renewal of this level of funding for each of years two and three of the project. Three Northamptonshire Councillors have also made in principle commitments to continue their funding into the second and third years of the project, subject to the continuation of the Empowering Councillors scheme. The Rotary Club's commitment also includes a willingness to provide volunteer input to events and management. Many other sources exist that could be approached over the next three years if sufficient match funding cannot be secured from these sources. Match funding beyond the required £30,000 will be sought to expand the project to further estates and to extend its lifetime beyond the period of Lottery funding.

3.1.5 The project has been developed with the strong and active support of a variety of Neighbourhood Management partners including the Police, Grendon Hall, the County Youth and Rangers Services and the Resident Associations on the four estates. It has also been informed and supported by a group of sixteen young people (two girls and two boys from each estate) who have met at key stages of the project's development.

3.1.6 The project is being overseen by a Project Management Group, to which the Project Co-ordinator will be accountable. The Group is chaired by the Council's Lead Officer and also includes the manager of Grendon Hall and representatives of the Police, NCC's Youth Services (to be replaced by the successful youth services contractor), the four Resident Associations and the Rotary Clubs of Northampton. Other co-optees may be nominated in due course.

3.1.7 A public launch is being planned to take place at Grendon Hall on 1 June. A coach shuttle will convey young people and their families between Grendon and the four project estates. This event will be followed up by a series of drop-in events on the four estates later in half-term week. These will enable young people who cannot get to Grendon to learn about the project and sign up for participate in it.

3.1.8 In parallel, the process has started to recruit a Project Co-ordinator with interviews now scheduled for 22 June.

3.2 Issues

3.2.1 The principal role for the Council is a co-ordinating one, overseeing the project and ensuring that the accountability function on behalf of the Neighbourhood Management partnership is fulfilled.

- 3.2.2 Discharging this responsibility will require the attention of a Lead Officer and a finance support officer and ongoing access to support from other Council staff such as Finance, HR, Legal and Procurement professionals. The Director for Finance and Support has already identified a suitable finance officer who is now supporting the project.
- 3.2.3 The Project Co-ordinator will be based at Grendon Hall and line managed by the Manager there, making available that Centre's enormous experience and expertise in outdoor education and the risk management of such activities.
- 3.2.4 The Co-ordinator will be an NBC employee. This strengthens our ability to discharge the accountability function but does, of course, carry certain potential responsibilities in the event of needing to provide cover for long-term illness or maternity. Redundancy costs are not an issue. Even if the original appointee remains in post until the end of the project, and should neither the project nor NBC more widely be in a position to offer them ongoing employment beyond December 2012, then the fact that the post is known by the employee to be externally funded on a fixed term basis means that redundancy is not payable.
- 3.2.5 At the moment, all but £3,500 of the cash match funding has actually been secured and the rest has been offered in principle (see para 3.1.4 above). This is not a difficult project for which to raise funding, being immediate in its impact, local in its delivery and very human in its appeal. A wide variety of potential funders are available, should current approaches not cover the full requirement. Nevertheless, successful attainment of the match-funding target is a condition of acceptance of this grant offer and as the accountable body the Council will be expected to underwrite the external fundraising efforts.

3.3 Choices (Options)

- 3.3.1 As the decision to accept this funding and commence implementation of the project has already been taken by the Chief Executive with the support of all four Group leaders, Cabinet are only asked to note these decisions.
- 3.3.2 The money on offer must be spent as set out in our grant application and confirmed in the grant offer letter from Natural England. There are therefore no decisions to be taken about how to spend the money, assuming that Cabinet decide to accept it.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

- 4.1.1 The decisions do not set policy or have implications for existing policies.

4.2 Resources and Risk

- 4.2.1 The project will be fully funded from external sources, other than the designation of staff time (managerial and financial) to oversee the project and ensure the successful discharge of the accountability function.
- 4.2.2 The call on staff resources will not be large, given that the operational management of the project will be undertaken by a dedicated Project Co-ordinator under the supervision of the manager at Grendon Hall. Financial claims will be submitted by the County Council on the basis of spend undertaken and payment would be subject to:
- a) verification of the claim
 - b) satisfactory completion of activity monitoring returns
 - c) receipt of adequate funds from Natural England

These arrangements will be formalised in a written Partnership Agreement signed by all parties, including Natural England. In short, if the County Council do not enable the Borough Council to fulfil the accountability role satisfactorily, then payment may be withheld.

- 4.2.3 The Council will be accountable for the successful discharge of the project and could be rendered liable to a risk of grant clawback should any of these be significantly breached. This is a small risk so long as suitable staff are nominated to supervise, manage and support the project.
- 4.2.4 The accountability function will also require the Council to ensure that appropriate action is taken to respond to project delivery risks such as staff discontinuity and, less likely, poor take-up. These will be addressed through the Project Management Group, chaired by the Council's Lead Officer.
- 4.2.5 The inherent risks involved in adventure activities will be appropriately mitigated through the use of fully qualified instructors and activity leaders and drawing upon the risk management expertise of Grendon Hall. Public liability will be covered by Grendon Hall's insurance cover.
- 4.2.6 The project budget includes a small element for the insurance of equipment.
- 4.2.7 As Lead Organisation, the Council will in effect be underwriting the match-funding requirement for the project. The in kind contribution to the project is integral to its delivery but the cash match of £30,000 over three years will need to be guaranteed as a condition of accepting the grant. The majority of this is already secured and given the ease of fundraising for such a project the risk of failing to secure the four figure sum remaining over the next three years is considered to be very small.

4.3 Legal

- 4.3.1 Acceptance of the grant offer constitutes a legally binding contract with Natural England to deliver the project as specified in the offer letter and to adhere to the Terms and Conditions appended to it.

4.4 Equality

- 4.4.1 The project specifically addresses the needs of young people and people from deprived neighbourhoods. The use of established community partners suggests, on the basis of early experience, that the project appeals across a variety of ethnic groups and equally to girls and to boys.
- 4.4.2 Provision will be made to ensure that young people with disabilities are able to engage as far as possible with project activities. Evidence suggests that engagement with the natural environment can be positively beneficial to people with mental health issues and learning disabilities.

4.5 Consultees (*Internal and External*)

- 4.5.1 The project has been developed under the aegis of the Northampton East Neighbourhood Management Board. Two presentations have been delivered to the Board and a wide variety of supportive feedback has been given and incorporated into the project design.
- 4.5.2 Elected Ward Members have been highly supportive and the County Councillors have part funded the consultation activities through their Empowering Councillors budgets and have all contributed to the match funding target from their Empowering Councillors funds.
- 4.5.3 Grendon Hall, the Police, the County Youth Service and Rangers Service and Resident Associations on the four estates have been especially actively involved and have been strongly supportive of the development of this project.
- 4.5.4 Young people were initially consulted by means of a questionnaire delivered through youth groups on the four estates. 67 questionnaires were returned and these indicated very widespread support for the project. Following on from this, an advisory group consisting of two girls and two boys from each of the four estates has been convened and has met twice to make an input to the project design. A number of these young people also made a presentation to a meeting for potential partners and funders to say why they wanted to project to be a success.

4.6 *How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes*

- 4.6.1 The project responds to the widely perceived need for more things for young people to do on the estates of Northampton East. As such, it is a key priority in the Area Action Plan adopted by the Neighbourhood Management Board.
- 4.6.2 The project will benefit young people by increasing their confidence and social skills, contributing to healthy lifestyles, enabling them to acquire qualifications that will enhance their eventual employability and by raising their aspirations and widening their horizons, so reducing their vulnerability to undesirable life-choices such as drug abuse, anti-social behaviour and teenage pregnancy.

4.6.3 There are also benefits to the wider community in the form of reduced ASB and improved inter-generational relations. These are the reasons why the project is so strongly supported by the Residents' Associations and Northamptonshire Police.

4.7 Other Implications

4.7.1 The project is considered highly likely to create a major ongoing "good news" story for the Council and the wider implementing partnership. A publicity launch took place on 18 May, following the publicity embargo due to the General Election. By the time of this meeting, further publicity will have been generated by the project launch event at Grendon Hall on 1 June.

5. Background Papers

Change of Scene project information sheet

Change of Scene Business Plan

Project Costings template (project budget spreadsheet)

Grant offer letter from Natural England and Terms and Conditions

All of the above background papers are available by contacting Peter Strachan, details below:

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Julie Seddon, Director of Environment & Culture, ext 7379

Report Title:	Change of Scene project
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Cabinet Member:

I declare no conflict of interest applies ☐

I agree the report's recommendations ☐

I do not agree the report's recommendations ☐

I agree the report's recommendations subject to the following amendments:

The reason for the decision are as follows:

Cabinet Member For: []

Signature: _____

Date: _____