

Scrutiny Review of the Future of Countryside Sites

	Recommendation	Link officer	Anticipated completion date / completion date	Evidence of Progress Presented to Committee 13 June 2016	Assessment of progress Categories 1 - 4	Evidence of Progress Presented to Committee 12 December 2016	Assessment of progress Categories 1 - 4
1	An overall strategic plan and updated site management plans for countryside sites should be prepared, reflecting the Council's broad strategic objectives and should aim to target capital and revenue resources effectively in light of revenue restrictions.	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Draft strategic plan by 31 July 2016 <i>(original date: 31 Dec 2015)</i>	Workshop / site visits held to familiarise officers from across the council with the sites and identify future option. Work on-going to develop strategic plan. <i>Delayed until after completion of 'expressions of interest' process (see Recommendation 3).</i>	3	Work is on-going to develop plan. A revised target date of April 2017 will ensure the plan is informed by a new Open Space Assessment (currently being carried out as part of the evidence base review for the Local Plan), and enable proposals to be fully integrated with the revised Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan.	3
		Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Initial site/habitat management plans prepared by 31 March 2016	Habitat management framework developed covering all main habitats across Council-owned countryside sites, e.g. meadows (53 compartments), woodlands (151 compartments), and ponds (80no.). The plan quantifies total areas of habitat and identifies management works to be implemented each year, depending on available resources. This allows management operations to be scheduled across all sites, making the most effective use of internal work teams, volunteers, external contractors and graziers.	1	Implementation on-going.	1

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2	External funding for physical improvements to countryside sites should be sought where these are in line with the Council's strategic objectives and taking into account implications for future revenue funding.	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	On-going – March 2018	<p>Forestry Commission funding secured for woodland management works at Wynyard Woodland Park (2014-15).</p> <p>Environment Agency funding secured for feasibility studies for habitat creation projects at Wynyard Woodland Park and Billingham Beck Valley Country Park (2015-16).</p> <p>Additional external funding may be sought for any projects identified in the proposed strategic plan (see Recommendation 1).</p>	2	<p>Environment Agency-funded plans for creation of wet woodland at Wynyard Woodland Park have been implemented (summer 2016), following on from previous works to remove and thin areas of coniferous woodland.</p> <p>Environment Agency funding also earmarked for works at Six Fields, to create areas of water-dependant habitat (subject to local consultation and any necessary approvals).</p>	2 (on-going)
3	The Council should continue to explore opportunities for external partners to carry out management functions and deliver associated services at countryside sites.	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Partners to be finalised by 31 May 2016 <i>(original date: 31 March 2016)</i>	<p>Expressions of interest have been submitted by a number of organisations and individuals for use of the buildings in the Borough's three country parks. Interviews have been held with potential partners (2 to 6 May) with a view to identifying preferred partners (by 31 May). Activities or services will need to add to the overall visitor offer, and contribute towards the sustainable management of the parks. <i>Progress has slipped due to complicated nature of 'expression of interest' process.</i></p> <p>Outline terms agreed for Tees Valley</p>	3	<p>Having invited expressions of interest in the various country park buildings two proposals are now being taken forward:</p> <p><i>Wynyard Woodland Park:</i> an arts collective will utilise the railway carriage and part of the former station house, with the aim of delivering community arts activities and operating a small-scale cinema.</p> <p><i>Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park:</i> Billingham Environmental Link Project</p>	3

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				<p>Wildlife Trust to adopt responsibility for habitat management works and community engagement at Bassleton Wood & the Holmes Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Black Bobbies Field LNR. The Trust would utilise an existing project officer (funded through River Tees Rediscovered) who is currently undertaking a similar role on nearby Wildlife Trust sites at Preston Farm and Bowesfield.</p> <p>In addition Tees Valley Wildlife Trust is exploring opportunities for delivering environmental education packages at other Council-owned countryside sites.</p>		<p>and the Friends of Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park will work together to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manage the visitor centre; • promote community participation in projects; • deliver events and activities. <p>Work on-going to develop a partnership agreement with Tees Valley Wildlife Trust in respect to Black Bobbies Field and Bassleton Wood & the Holmes (both Local Nature Reserves).</p>	
		Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	On-going – March 2018	Expected that projects / activities will commence during summer 2016.	2	Subject to the necessary agreement projects / activities would commence in 2017/18.	3
4	Where resources allow, the Council and its partners should continue to encourage community and volunteer involvement in countryside sites, helping to support the positive management and development of these assets and	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	On-going – March 2018	<p>Weekly Council-led volunteer sessions continue to be held at the three main country parks and in the River Tees corridor. Normally between 6 and 12 volunteers per session.</p> <p>Other groups include a weekly Tees health group at Wynyard Woodland Park.</p>	2	On-going	2 (on-going)

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	benefiting the individuals involved.	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	On-going - March 2018	<p>Existing groups continue to be active on selected sites, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends of Stillington Forest Park • Friends of Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park • Billingham Angling Club: involved in management of Charlton's Pond • Part-time environmental youth officer for Harrington's Pond appointed by Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, in partnership with Billingham Town Council. <p>The recent development of the Stockton-on-Tees Volunteering Strategy (developed by Catalyst Stockton, Tees Valley Community Foundation and Stockton Borough Council) and the new Stockton Borough Environment Forum will both help to encourage and support local community action for countryside sites and wildlife in general.</p>	2	<p>Groups continue to be active on several sites. In addition to those previously listed various groups are involved in projects on SBC sites under the Wild Green Places programme, coordinated by Tees Valley Wildlife Trust.</p> <p>To ensure the future roles and responsibilities of community groups are clearly defined the Council's Events and Business Support team are developing a generic 'contract' or 'partnership agreement' for groups organising projects or activities on SBC sites.</p>	2 (on-going)
5	All the council's countryside sites be promoted and, where possible, used to host a range of recreational,	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	Draft signage concepts / designs by 30 Sept 2015	Design templates for signs have been produced, although no signs have yet been fabricated.	2	Proposals for new and improved signage at Wynyard Woodland Park have been developed. To be implemented in 2017/18 subject to funding.	2

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	cultural and educational activities, maximising economic, social, health and environmental benefits.	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	On-going – March 2018	No progress to date.	2		
		Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	On-going – March 2018	No new events, but continuation of Trail Races at country parks (organised by SBC and Billingham Marsh House Harriers).	2	Additional events and activities to be delivered linked to Recommendation 3	2 (on-going)
6	Explore the possible use of modern technology to enhance visitor experience at, or about, the various countryside sites e.g. QR codes on information boards and signs that allow mobile devices (phones, tablets) to deliver additional information.	Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	30 June 2016	No progress to date	2	No progress to date	3
		Greenspace Strategy & Partnership Manager	On-going-March 2018	No progress to date	2	No progress to date	2

Assessment of progress:

1	Achieved (Fully)
2	On Track but not yet due for completion
3	Slipped
4	Not Achieved