
PROJECT SUMMARY- July '11

PROPOSED COUNTNESS OF CHESTER COUNTRY PARK

AIMS, OBJECTIVES, OUTCOMES AND ADDED VALUE

1.1 Project Aim

The aim is to create a new 29ha 'Country Park', on brownfield and under-utilised land, adjacent to the Countess of Chester Health Park and close to communities within the wards of Blacon, Upton, Newton and Garden Lane / Canal Basin. The Country Park would act as a setting for a range of health and wellbeing initiatives, community volunteering, education and training, environmental improvements and would provide public and multi user access to green space in an area of north Chester where it is currently lacking.

1.2 Key Objectives

- I. To deliver a range of initiatives, events and recreational activities contributing to strategic public health outcomes and reducing health inequalities
- II. To create a financially sustainable Country Park resource on 29ha of Brownfield and underused land in a strategically beneficial, north Chester, location
- III. To engage the community living and working around the Country Park, providing multi user access, volunteering opportunities and community groups
- IV. To create education, training and employment opportunities by working collaboratively with partner organisations
- V. To create a new multifunctional Country Park resource and accessible public open green space
- VI. To create a sustainably managed parkland, enhancing and adding to the biodiversity and conservation value of the site
- VII. To manage an important catchment (Finchetts Gutter) to improve water quality, hydromorphology, biodiversity and reduce flood risk within Chester
- VIII. To develop a strong accountable research, evaluation and monitoring procedure so we can capture the health, recreation and environmental outcomes from the site and ensure continued buy in from partners, funders and community.

1.3 Objectives, outcomes and opportunities to add value

Objective 1 : To deliver a range of initiatives, events and activities contributing to strategic public health outcomes and reducing health inequalities

- Contribution to key health outcome areas e.g. NHS Western Cheshire goals:
 - Enabling people to stay healthier for longer
 - Minimising the impact of cardiovascular disease
 - Influencing lifestyle choices
 - Reducing the burden of mental illness
 - Promoting a healthy start for children, young people and their families
- Provision of a setting to support a range of health and wellbeing initiatives , promoting active lives and improving quality of life e.g. Green Gym, guided walks and rides, trim trails
- Reduced health inequalities particularly for those living in adjoining deprived communities (Blacon falls within the 10% most deprived) and for hospital patients
- Increased scope for rehabilitation and health improvement for patients at the Countess of Chester hospital including those with mental health issues
- Creating inclusive opportunities and activities to challenge discrimination that arises from negative stereotypes associated with the symptoms or diagnosis of mental health, learning disability or drug and alcohol problems.

Added Value – e.g. BTCV Green Gym promotes healthy activity to promote social confidence, reduce likelihood of ill health and support individual rehabilitation both physically and mentally.

Green Gym groups meet at least once a week and do between 1 and 4 hours practical conservation or gardening work. It's a great way to get your heart and muscles working, and is a great alternative to a conventional gym or sports centre. The group usually meets at the project site. Sessions include a refreshment break and a chance to socialise. Activities are led by a qualified leader, and always include warm up and cool down exercises to prepare the body for activity, training in tools and equipment use, and an explanation of how the project will benefit the local environment.

Added Value – e.g. British Heart Foundation (BHF) - Heart Town Initiative.

Chester is now one of the 50 locations being promoted as a Heart City. Heart Towns and Cities will benefit from a wide range of BHF resources and education programmes so that everybody can take practical steps to improve their heart health. Heart Towns and Cities also host a wide range of events and activities throughout the year, such as special Heart Town rides, walks or runs - uniting the community for one day to fundraise for the Mending Broken Hearts Appeal. Whilst Chester has a lower national average incidence of obesity and diabetes, the prevalence of Cardiovascular Disease in Chester (coronary heart disease, heart failure, arterial fibrillation, hypertension, and stroke) are high in a national context. Anticipated wider outcomes of this project include increased community levels of civic pride and identity, further enhancement and promotion of the city externally, increased the health and wellbeing of the community and ultimately a reduction in health and welfare costs.

Added Value – e.g. Challenging Stigma Campaign.

CWP launched a Challenging Stigma Campaign in 2004 which has been developed each subsequent year through new initiatives to raise awareness and promote positive attitudes to mental health, learning disabilities, and drug and alcohol problems. The Country Park could provide an ideal location to host a 'Get Moving' themed family fun day to challenge stigma on annual World Mental Health Day.

Objective 2: To create a financially sustainable Country Park resource on 29ha of Brownfield and underused land in a strategically beneficial, north Chester, location

- Develop opportunities to link with other green spaces to mutually promote recreation, conservation, volunteering opportunities and health benefits e.g. Chester Zoo proposed public open green space, Shropshire Union Canal, National Cycle Network Routes
- Explore whether the Community Woodland model would be beneficial for coordinating and promoting North Chester Greenspace
- Support a “Friends of” group to act as advocates for the site, develop activities, events and participate in practical conservation
- Identify opportunities to increase project profile, maintain project momentum and raise an endowment for land asset transfer (landfill and wet meadow areas) to the Land Trust, if possible. Thus ensuring security of the bulk of the Country Park asset, including maintenance and management, in perpetuity.
- Develop business case and planning application for the Country Park car park, revenue from which will contribute to site maintenance and the services of a ranger (CWAC)
- Generate additional funding streams by providing match, hosting events and activities or creating other opportunities to add value using the Country Park as a venue or base

Added Value – e.g. The Project team are exploring opportunities to work in partnership with Chester Zoo through sharing resources (e.g. ranger, Green Gym) and joint promotion (e.g. As part of a North Chester Community Woodland, website, way markers). Chester Zoo is in the process of creating an 8ha area of public open space adjacent to the Zoo complex. Both sites are linked by the Shropshire Union Canal and existing National Cycle Network routes along the towpath

Objective 3: To create education, training and employment opportunities by working collaboratively with partner organisations

- Training and education opportunities through practical conservation tasks and other environmental education initiatives on site e.g. Forest Schools, BTCV Green Gym
- More local young people and children involved in positive / diversionary activities leading to increased education and reduced anti-social behaviour
- Chester University collaboration (education resources, media, health research, sciences, arts and media, volunteers and recreation)
- Identify opportunities for shared resources e.g. Green Gym and Blue Sky sharing a base to meet and store equipment

Added Value – e.g. Blue Sky is a not-for-profit company set up to give paid work to people coming out of prison, to enable them to move successfully into long-term employment.

Within the last 5 years, Blue Sky has employed nearly 300 ex-offenders and of these, less than 15% have re-offended - a quarter of the national average. Blue Sky's mission is to help break the cycle of re-offending and achieve long-term benefits for society. Blue Sky employs solely ex-offenders in the grounds maintenance and recycling sectors working in small teams of 4-6 people with a supervisor who also acts as a mentor and leads by example. A proportion of ex-offenders, that have been motivated to better their prospects through Blue Sky, tackle mental health, drug or alcohol related issues. A base near the hospital and close to specialist services could be beneficial to Blue Sky success and supportive environment

Added Value – e.g. Forest Schools A Forest School is an innovative educational approach to outdoor play and learning. The philosophy of Forest Schools is to encourage and inspire individuals of any age through positive outdoor experiences. Forest Schools has demonstrated success with children of all ages who visit the same local woodlands on a regular basis and through play, who have the opportunity to learn about the natural environment, how to handle risks and most importantly to use their own initiative to solve problems and co-operate with others. Forest School programmes run throughout the year, for about 36 weeks, going to the woods in almost all weathers. Forest Schools aim to develop self awareness, self regulation, learn boundaries of behaviour, motivation, empathy, good social and communication skills, independence and a positive mental attitude, self-esteem and confidence. Forest Schools encourage individuals (young and old), community groups and larger organisations to utilise their local open space for interactive play, health, recreation and personal development uses.

Objective 4 : To engage the community living and working around the Country Park, providing multi user access, volunteering opportunities and community groups

- Support community cohesion improved access to services, inclusive events and activities
- Increased opportunities for involvement of older people and inter-generational schemes and interactions including promotion of "ageing well", Vintage Blacon and the Green Gym concepts.
- Creation of Friends of Group with focussed agenda e.g. community events, practical conservation skills, ecological monitoring, multi generational activities
- Engaging with existing voluntary and community groups and local parish council e.g. established University bank of volunteers, British Waterways volunteers, Blacon Community Forum, Upton Parish Council, Garden Quarter Residents and Traders Association etc
- Provision of a new accessible green space in an area of Chester where large scale public open space is limited

Added Value – e.g. Friends of the Countess of Chester Country Park

A friends group consists of motivated people in the community of all ages, who volunteer their time, services and support to enhance who understand the value and benefits of the park and share a common goal to work together and in partnerships. A Friends of the COCCP would become an important source of support, fundraising, volunteer time and public comment; a community group with a common plan and focus working cooperatively.

Objective 5: To create a sustainably managed parkland, enhancing and creating additional biodiversity and conservation value of the site

- Herbicide treatment of invasive, non-native and hazardous weed species (Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed).
- Wetland meadow and river habitat enhancement, including partial diversion of watercourse to re-wet floodplain meadow and enhance river habitat for wildlife.
- Reed bed and localised wet woodland coppice area to be created (Reed beds are

- used to treat and improve river water quality)
- Repair fencing areas to be grazed with livestock that have less environmental impact e.g. reduced numbers and alternative breeds more suited to the floodplain grazing marsh habitat.
- Manage and maintain existing woodland and hedges
- Wildflower meadow, tree and orchard planting. Opportunity for some funds via Forestry Commission woodland creation grants and links with the NHS Forest.
- Work with volunteers and conservation groups to monitor ecological status and improvement e.g. ReCORD
- Green waste collection point for recycling
- Contribution to Ellesmere Port and Chester Green Infrastructure Action Plan 2011

Added Value – e.g. Green Infrastructure Valuation Toolkit - Building natural value for sustainable economic development. Available at www.greeninfrastructurenw.co.uk

The green infrastructure valuation toolkit prototype will be tested to determine the natural value of the COCCP. The Toolkit has been developed in response to these challenges to help local stakeholders make good decisions about the value of different options for change:

- It provides a simple framework that can help identify and broadly assess the benefits of proposed green investments and existing green assets whether those benefits directly contribute to a local economy, or provide wider non-market returns for society and the environment.
- It provides insight in key evidence and concepts from a wide range of sectors, including economic development and regeneration, public health, nature conservation – providing a strong platform for improved mutual understanding and cooperation.

Added Value - The report below concludes that health benefits of merely living close to a green space are worth up to £300 per person per year.

For decades, the emphasis has been on producing more food and other goods - but this has harmed other parts of nature that generate hidden wealth. Ministers who commissioned the NEA will use it to re-shape planning policy. *"The natural world is vital to our existence, providing us with essentials such as food, water and clean air - but also cultural and health benefits not always fully appreciated because we get them for free,"* said Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman' <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-13616543>

Based on this information the health benefit calculation for the COCCP is as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| £300 x 13240 - Blacon Population 2006 | = £3,972,000 |
| £300 x 12700 - Upton Population 2006 | = £3,810,000 |
| £300 x 3000 - staff | = £900,000 |

Health benefits of living and working close to the COCCP = £8,682,000 per annum (£299,380/ha per annum)

Our proposed investment (£800k + £700k endowment) to create and sustain a park is equivalent to just a single £51,700/ha initial capital investment that will then allow the COCCP to generate its own ongoing maintenance and management funds.

Objective 6: To create a Country Park that provides a multifunctional resource and accessible public open green space

- Creation of new large area of accessible green space in an area of Chester currently lacking.
- Allow local residents and hospital staff and patients access to green space and increased opportunities for outdoor exercise on their door-step
- Improved accessible and sustainable transport links for health services, work and leisure, particularly for currently disparate communities by improved access for their

residents with the main hospital and Chester University

- Access to volunteering opportunities, guided activity and fostering a sense of community ownership and pride in the area
- Provision of a resource and venue to relax, work, play and rehabilitate
- Coordinated promotion of green space, points of interest, footpaths and cycleway, volunteer and 'friends' groups, events and activities within and linking to the Country Park. – e.g. Website, notice boards, newsletter

Added Value– e.g. An alternative, well progressed Country Park in an area of Chester lacking in large accessible green space

Opportunity to divert commuted sums from S106 to provide greenspace for benefit of hospital staff, visitors and patients and the wider communities of Blacon, Upton, Canal Basin / Garden Quarter and Newton communities.

Objective 7 : To manage an important catchment (Finchetts Gutter) to improve water quality, biodiversity and strategic flood alleviation

- Improved water quality and biodiversity through more sustainable agricultural practices, creation of a reed bed and wetland scrapes, and enhancing river habitat
- Formal paths will not be included through the length of the site to encourage fewer disturbances of wetland birds in particular.
- Improved water flow rates and dispersion by re-profiling and improving habitat within Finchetts Gutter channel, partially diverting flow to create an extended area of wet floodplain meadow, dredging of silted channels, management of invasive plants
- Contribution to the Strategic Flood Risk Strategy for Chester within the Dee Catchment
- Providing public information on likelihood of flood events and flood warnings

Added Value – Collaboration with Environment Agency within the Dee River Basin Management Plan

Immediately upstream of the section of Finchetts Gutter that runs through the site is a flood storage area and spillway which in times of extreme flooding would create a storage area before flowing through the wet meadow within the Country Park area. The Environment Agency is keen to manage this section of Finchetts Gutter by dredging the channels and managing invasive, non-native and hazardous weeds along its length. In addition, in accordance with the EU Water Framework Directive the watercourse is currently failing in terms of biodiversity and water quality. The Environment Agency is keen to enhance the area by re-profiling channels, dispersing water flow through an extended wetland area which would include scrapes and new reed bed as improved habitat, in particular, for wetland birds.

European Water Framework Directive (Dee River Basin Management Plan): <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/wfd>

Making Space for Nature: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2010/09/24/nature-news/>

Objective 8: To develop a strong accountable research, evaluation and monitoring procedure so we can capture the health, recreation and environmental outcomes from the site and ensure continued buy in from partners, funders and community.

- To identify base line data on current use of site through user surveys and consultation
- To identify environmental base through existing surveys and natural asset/green infrastructure valuation
- To identify health outcomes relevant to Chester through NHS reports and policy

documents

- Collaborate with research partners including Chester University to provide opportunities for student placements and research projects to support the project and add to the evidence of successful outcome delivery and lessons learnt

Added Value – Contribution to NHS Health outcomes and policy delivery E.g. NHS

Western Cheshire goals:

- Enabling people to stay healthier for longer
- Reducing premature deaths from cancer
- Minimising the impact of cardiovascular disease
- Influencing Lifestyle choices
- Reducing the burden of mental illness
- Promoting a healthy start for children, young people and their families*

*<http://www.wcheshirepct.nhs.uk/viewer.asp?docname=../data/publications/vision/VisionandGoals.PDF>

1.4 Scope

The site scope of the current project includes the creation of a Country Park resource based on collaboration of multiple landowners sharing a commitment to providing a venue and resource for recreation, community cohesion, social inclusion, health and well being and environmental benefits.

The project will require a commitment to phased funding applications to deliver the capital works required. The focus of the project is led by the primary requirement to create basic infrastructure to promote multi user access and facilitate site use to the wider community. Whilst opportunities may arise for adding interest to the park offering, these should add, rather than divert resources, away from the main focus.

Based on the assumption that funding is successfully sourced and all landowners agree to sign an access and maintenance agreement, as a minimum, the project will support Green Gym activities and, in parallel, create a support Friends of Group or coordinated community/volunteer group.

Whilst the Country Park, at this stage, aims to provide parking facilities, the provision of other facilities e.g. Cafe, visitor centre and toilet facilities are not within the current scope.

1.5 Partner support and management

A multi-disciplinary Project Steering Group has been established to take the project forward and see if the country park can become a reality through collaboration between the various landowners, by securing funding, and by negotiating access and maintenance agreements. Special Interest/Task Groups will be set up to take forward specific aspects of the project as required e.g. maintenance, consultation, publicity and marketing, ecology.

The project currently receives much appreciated advice, funding support and steer from the following organisations:

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- CWaC (Funding £70k i.e. £30k REVIVE Funding 2008-2011, £40 CWAC Ellesmere Port Special Projects Jan – Mar 11, plus in kind contribution – Michelle Talgam, project facilitation)
 - Chester Area Partnership Board (£9.93k – Project management/development funding)
 - NHS Western Cheshire (£20k plus in kind contribution)
 - Chester and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (in kind contribution, £20k - funding approval pending)
 - Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (significant in kind contribution plus additional funding request pending)
 - British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (in kind contribution)
 - Environment Agency (in kind funding – survey work, internal funding application)
 - Groundwork Cheshire
 - Mint Green Environment
 - The Land Trust
 - British Waterways
 - Chester Zoo
 - Chester University
 - Mersey Forest
 - Blacon Community Trust/Sustainable Blacon
 - Local Members *
 - Blue Sky

* Note relevant wards: Upton, Newton, Blacon, Garden Quarter and Mollington; four of which are in the Chester Area Partnership Board's area.

1.6 Timescale

- Complete Public consultation – 2011
- Signed landowner access and maintenance agreements - 2011
- Secure planning approval for change of use to recreation and car park development - 2011
- Application of Green Infrastructure toolkit to monetise value of new green space – 2011
- Identify relevant health outcomes to be monitored as project develops - 2011
- Secure streams and funding for long term maintenance and management - 2012
- A minimum of 3 health and well-being related initiatives and user groups actively utilising the Country Park - 2012
- A minimum of 3 university placements - 2012
- Car park development - 2012
- Development of a coordinated community volunteer group e.g. Friends of COCCP – 2012
- Complete initial phase of drainage improvement works in Finchetts Gutter within Flood risk zone - 2012
- Creation of a Country Park resource developed in phases and completed - 2013