



Report of Director of Communities and Environment

Report to Executive Board

Date: 18th October 2017

Subject: Potential Government Grant Bid for Lotherton Wildlife World

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s): Harewood	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. The Rural Payments Agency has announced a grant to be administered via Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEPs) with the aim to support projects that create jobs and growth in rural areas by increasing the number of visitors, length of stay and amount spent.
2. A report to executive board in October 2016 outlined ambitious plans to further develop Lotherton Bird Garden with the creation of new enclosures and penguin pool which is due to be opened in the near future along with a retail and information point.
3. Preparations have commenced to deliver the next phase of this project which will include transforming the existing walk in aviary to a Masai themed centre, a new undercover space with new tropical themed species and to create a small children's zoo.
4. There is an opportunity to help fund this next phase of Lotherton Wildlife World and other improvements depending on the level of funding available for a bid and subject to the council providing at least 20% match funding.
5. The council would need to fill in an expression of interest form at the latest by 31st January 2018 which if endorsed would then result in an invitation to submit a full application later in the new year with a project start anticipated in summer 2018 and completion no later than the end of December 2019.

Recommendations

1. Executive Board is recommended to approve the submission of an expression of interest to the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Growth Programme.
2. Executive Board is requested to note that the Chief Officer Parks and Countryside will be responsible for implementing this recommendation with a submission ahead of the deadline of 31st January 2018.

1. Purpose of this report

- 2.1 This report outlines the potential for a bid to the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Growth Programme in order to develop the tourism offer at Lotherton Wildlife World.

3. Background information

- 3.1 In July 2011 Executive Board considered a report that set out a programme of investment into Lotherton estate with the aim to become a coherent, quality visitor attraction. Since then the estate has been managed through a joint project board in collaboration with Parks and Countryside along with Museums and Galleries. Under this joint working initiative, income to the whole estate has steadily risen from £575k in 2010/11 to £1.1 million in 2016/17 which represents a growth of £531k - an increase of over 90%. This in turn has had a positive impact on reducing the level of net subsidy associated with the management of the holistic estate.
- 3.2 This growth has been in part driven by a commitment to the promotion and expansion of the onsite event programme, supported by a series of investments into both the visitor focussed elements of the estate and also its infrastructure. Some of the improvements undertaken include:
- The development of an adventure playground and improved children's play
 - Establishment of a new vehicular access route
 - Improved visitor parking
 - Improved signage and interpretation
- 3.3 A report to executive board in October 2016 outlined ambitious plans to further develop Lotherton Bird Garden with the creation of new enclosures with a centre piece penguin pool with above and below water viewing. Work to develop this penguin pool is well underway as illustrated below:



- 3.4 There is a planned opening in the near future as part of the newly launched Lotherton Wildlife World which will also incorporate a new entrance with retail and information point. The development has already contributed to jobs and skills with the creation of 1.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) animal keeper posts and 1.5 FTE shop assistant posts and includes the introduction of a number of new species including tapir, warty pigs and capybara (as illustrated below) alongside a new forest boardwalk.



- 3.5 The Rural Payments Agency has announced a grant to be administered via Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEPs) with the aim to support projects that create jobs and growth in rural areas by increasing the number of visitors, length of stay and amount spent. The opportunity to bid for such a grant is therefore timely as preparations are made to deliver the next phase of the Lotherton Wildlife World project.

4. Main issues

4.1 Rural Payments Agency Tourism Infrastructure Grant

- 4.1.1 The grant would help fund the costs of capital expenditure on tourism infrastructure although creating skilled jobs is also a significant aspect of the project funding. A further issue to consider as part of meeting the grant award criteria is extending the tourism season outside the usual May to October offer.
- 4.1.2 The type of project applicable to Lotherton relates to a venture that makes some income to offset costs but is not intended to make a profit for which the grant funding would represent a maximum of 80% of the total cost, with the remainder met by the council. The maximum funding available for this sort of project is set in each LEP area, and in the Leeds City Region an initial amount has been allocated of just over £3 million for all projects funded, with a minimum grant of £35k. The LEP can also consider projects of a commercial nature or indeed projects that promote tourism but are not income generating, for which in both cases there is a maximum grant threshold of around £170,000 per project.
- 4.1.3 The council would need to fill in an expression of interest form including an outline of project costs and grant funding requested which if endorsed would then result in an invitation to submit a full application. The absolute deadline for an expression of interest is 31st January 2018 but there is an expectation that this will be made before then so the intention would be to submit before Christmas. If a subsequent application was successful it is anticipated that a decision would be made by early summer 2018 with projects aimed to be completed and claim submitted at the latest by 31st December 2019.

4.2 Potential Project to Fund

4.2.1 Lotherton is an ideal location for a fund of this nature as it is identified as a 'rural village' on the LEP area rural map. It already makes an important contribution to tourism in the area with 188,000 visits in 2015/16. The Lotherton Christmas Experience leading up to Christmas in 2016 boosted visitor numbers by over 55,000 compared to the same period in 2015 demonstrating the potential that Lotherton has to grow visitor numbers outside of the traditional peak summer period.



4.2.2 As indicated above the first phase of the Lotherton attraction development plan is nearing completion and preparations have commenced to deliver the next phase of the project. This will focus more on areas and facilities that are undercover in order to encourage visits in all weathers and seasons to increase the total number of visits each year and increase the dwell time of every visit in order to drive secondary spend. More specifically there are two new undercover/indoor zones proposed as follows:

- **Tropical:** this zone will completely transform an existing series of small aviaries into an undercover area using an arching canopy structure to bridge across from the current finch aviaries around to the re-designed turaco aviaries. Visitors will enter a walk-through mixed species aviary where tropical species will provide an abundance of colour, movement and interactivity. Linked, smaller aviaries will allow for conservation priority species to be seen before visitors encounter a group of African spurred tortoise with an outdoor enclosure as well as indoor space viewable through glass windows. Running opposite to this enclosure will be another new set of undercover exhibits, with the lower half of this display containing large snake and lizard species, with the upper half offering the opportunity to create a series of flexible and interchangeable exhibits to provide temporary display space for featured exhibitions.



- **Children's zone:** The area currently housing the parrots and small education room will be developed to improve provision for family fun and interaction. The existing run of small aviaries will be removed to create a small children's zoo area with resident pygmy goats, and more traditional small farm animals. Two large retained aviaries will be re-themed to create an impressive environment for an expanded parrot display, giving them improved space for flying and social interaction. The central walkway in this area will expressly cater for the very youngest visitors, with a small play and discovery zone with interactive interpretive materials, games and play structures. The buildings in this area currently house a small education room, offices, veterinary rooms and stores. The proposal is to re-locate the service elements to create space to develop an indoor visitor centre with interactive displays, exhibitions, viewing of hatching facilities, along with handwashing and visitor toilets.



- 4.2.3 The undercover space has the potential to increase visits over the autumn and winter and in addition there is the potential to develop the success of Lotherton Christmas Experience by seeking further opportunities for events over this period which could for example include a Halloween offer.
- 4.2.4 A further key aspect of the next phase of this project is developing the Africa zone. There is an existing large aviary structure which will be transformed into an Africa journey which will begin with a newly created mongoose exhibit with child friendly viewing window heights. A Masai hut will be created around the existing uncovered entrance gates to completely remodel this walkway. In the enclosure itself, the visitor will be able to enter a newly created hollow baobab tree placed adjacent to the pool. Viewing will be from inside the tree allowing an up close experience with birds resting around the pool. The exit house will mirror the Masai hut of the entrance and will include a flat screen monitor display linked to remote nesting-box cameras.
- 4.2.5 Upon exiting the aviary, the next enclosure on the visitor path will be a pair of servals (wild African cats) with excellent visitor viewing opportunities. Internal theming will mirror their grassland habitat, with a central platform structure facilitating raised access for resting/basking behaviours. This area will also fulfil one of the key requirements for a central display area where talks, displays and events can be performed. This will take the form of a new seating area and performance area, contained and themed as if within a Masai village compound with thorn scrub and brushwood fence, on the exit to the main aviary.



- 4.2.6 In order to implement the next phase of the project successfully it will also be necessary to further develop skills and it is anticipated that the bid would potentially include additional apprentices as well as enable existing apprentices in the service to be able to develop their skills within a visitor attraction context. There is further scope to offer the opportunity for the creation of a number of freelance posts involved in education and access.
- 4.2.7 The level of funding bid would be determined in discussion with the Rural Payments Agency and LEP ahead of a formal expression of interest. A successful funding bid could potentially lever in additional funding opportunities to consider other improvements on the estate to develop the tourism offer. This could include the following:
- Amend the road layout at the entrance to the site to create an additional ticketing facility and to reduce the potential for queueing onto the highway.
 - Provide a weather resilient surface on the road to the main car park to ensure that winter parking is possible.
 - Install additional grass reinforcement to provide additional all-weather parking within the main car park.
 - Extend electric power around the site to provide lighting for roads, car parks etc. to allow their use beyond daylight hours, particularly in the winter season.
 - Create a new toilet block in the car park.

4.3 Improving the Tourism Offer

- 4.3.1 Tourism is a significant and growing sector of the Leeds economy and a major contributory factor to the success of the city benefitting everyone who lives and works here. Leeds is currently the 6th most popular visitor destination for overnight visitors in the UK and the 5th most popular UK conference destination. Visitor numbers and tourism spending in Leeds is growing rapidly and at a faster rate than the national average. In 2016 we welcomed 27.79 million visitors generating £1.64 billion to the local economy. VisitLeeds, the destination management organisation for Leeds raises the profile both nationally and internationally to help drive this growth. Welcome to Yorkshire are successful in raising the profile of Yorkshire and work collaboratively with VisitLeeds in doing so. Both organisations may assist in raising the profile of any future investment to Lotherton to attract visitors.
- 4.3.2 Maintaining and developing the breadth and quality of the visitor offer is critical for any city both for visitors and residents. Lotherton is an important attraction within the regional tourism offer and is in a strategic location near motorway networks. It is also complimentary to the wider product across Yorkshire and is a stable feature in regional, national and international visitor itineraries.

5. Corporate considerations

5.1 Consultation and engagement

- 5.1.1 The primary focus of this funding bid is to deliver the next phase of improvement at Lotherton Wildlife World. This was the subject of a report in October 2016 as part of a wider report on visitor attraction improvement. The consultation undertaken as part of the preparations for these wider improvements is therefore salient to this funding bid. Consultation will be undertaken on any aspects not already consulted on if opportunity arises during the bid process to consider wider improvements.

5.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 5.2.1 A screening document has been completed and is available as a separate attachment to this report. No additional impacts have been made at this stage in relation to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration.

5.3 Council policies and best council plan

- 5.3.1 The Vision for Leeds 2011 to 2030 sets out a revised vision for the city with the specific objective for Leeds to be the best city in the UK by 2030. In establishing this vision one of the top priorities to emerge from consultation was for the city to be a cleaner greener city. Aspects of this priority can be found in all of the areas in which the vision is intended to make a difference, although specific reference can be made to the commitment within the vision for Leeds to be the best city to live with good green spaces where everyone can enjoy a good quality of life. Developing a project funding bid has the potential to benefit visitors to the
- 5.3.2 The proposals contained in this report contribute to the Best Council Plan ambition of becoming a more efficient and enterprising council. These improvements also support the Best Council Plan 2016/17 priorities of 'Enhancing the quality of our public realm and green spaces' with increased visitor numbers 'Supporting economic growth'; an improved learning offer also contributes to the priority around 'Improving educational achievement'.

5.4 Resources and value for money

- 5.4.1 The Rural Payments Agency has announced a grant to be administered via Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEPs) with the aim to support projects that create jobs and growth in rural areas by increasing the number of visitors, length of stay and amount spent.
- 5.4.2 The type of project applicable to Lotherton relates to a venture that makes some income to offset costs but is not intended to make a profit for which the grant funding would represent a maximum of 80% of the total cost, with the remainder met by the council. The maximum funding available for this sort of project is set in each LEP area, and in the Leeds City Region an initial amount has been allocated of just over £3 million for all projects funded, with a minimum grant of £35k. The LEP can also consider projects of a commercial nature or indeed projects that promote tourism but are not income generating, for which in both cases there is a maximum grant threshold of around £170,000 per project.
- 5.4.3 The council would need to fill in an expression of interest form including an outline of project costs and grant funding requested which if endorsed would then result in

an invitation to submit a full application. The absolute deadline for an expression of interest is 31st January 2018 but there is an expectation that this will be made before then so the intention would be to submit before Christmas. If a subsequent application was successful it is anticipated that a decision would be made by early summer 2018 with projects aimed to be completed and claim submitted at the latest by 31st December 2019.

- 5.4.4 The level of funding bid would be determined in discussion with the Rural Payments Agency and LEP ahead of a formal expression of interest. A successful funding bid could potentially lever in additional funding opportunities to consider other improvements on the estate to develop the tourism offer.

5.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

- 5.5.1 The decisions requested in this report are eligible for call-in, in line with the council's executive and decision making procedure rules.

5.6 Risk management

- 5.6.1 There are no risks identified with an expression of interest for this grant. The level of funding bid would be determined in discussion with the Rural Payments Agency and LEP ahead of a formal expression of interest. A successful funding bid could potentially lever in additional funding opportunities to consider other improvements on the estate to develop the tourism offer.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The grant funding identified has the potential to fund the next phase of improvements at Lotherton Wildlife World in in turn help fulfil the ambition to increase the number of visitors to the estate and to Lotherton Hall. A bid of this nature also provides an opportunity to fund apprentices and develop skills as well as improve the overall regional tourism offer.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 Executive Board is recommended to approve the submission of an expression of interest to the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Growth Programme.
- 7.2 Executive Board is requested to note that the Chief Officer Parks and Countryside will be responsible for implementing this recommendation with a submission ahead of the deadline of 31st January 2018.

8. Background documents¹

- 8.1 None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.