

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

1 March 2011

**Report of the Chief Leisure Officer and the
Cabinet Member for Leisure, Youth & Arts**

Part 1- Public

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken
by the Cabinet Member)**

1 LEYBOURNE LAKES COUNTRY PARK – MARKET SURVEY RESULTS

Summary

This report informs Members of the results of the 2010 market survey carried out at Leybourne Lakes Country Park, and brings forward proposed improvements for consideration.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 A user survey was carried out at Leybourne Lakes Country Park during the summer of 2010, as part of Leisure Services' ongoing market research programme, and in accordance with the Outdoor Leisure Performance Plan. The survey consisted of over 400 face to face interviews conducted at various locations within the Country Park. A previous survey was undertaken in summer 2005.

1.1.2 The survey was carried out in July – September 2010, and in general terms, covers three main areas:

- Characteristics of market and patterns of use, including diversity;
- Customer assessment of the existing services;
- Meeting customer needs in the future.

1.2 Survey Results

1.2.1 A copy of the report's Executive Summary can be found at **[Annex 1]** and a full copy of the survey report can be made available to Members on request.

1.2.2 I am sure Members will be pleased to note the survey indicated that, taking everything into account, 97% of visitors were satisfied with their visit overall (very satisfied (83%), fairly satisfied (14%)), with only 2.7% indicating dissatisfaction. Encouragingly, this reflects an increase in overall satisfaction levels of 5%

compared to the previous survey undertaken in 2005, and a significant increase of 17% of visitors that were very satisfied.

- 1.2.3 The two main reasons given for visiting the Park were to walk (42%) (including walking the dog and just walking through) and to use the play area (26%). One in ten came to enjoy the countryside, and cycling, jogging, angling and water sports (scuba diving and canoeing) accounted for 16% of the activities visitors undertook during their stay. Occasional users were more likely to be on a family trip which often included a picnic.
- 1.2.4 Users were drawn from a wide catchment area with 64% resident within 5 miles of the Park, and 36% living 5 miles or more away, of which 15% lived 20 miles or more. This highlights that the Country Park remains a predominantly local facility, supported by the fact that 43% of visitors came on foot with a further 7% cycling.
- 1.2.5 Three out of four respondents were aware of the Green Flag Park Awards and 68% were aware that Leybourne Lakes holds the award.
- 1.2.6 Very high satisfaction ratings were recorded for a number of facilities at the Park including cleanliness, attractiveness, provision of bins/seats/benches, the play area, Park signage, facilities for the disabled and the Ranger Service.
- 1.2.7 Whilst high satisfaction levels were generally recorded, the three lowest levels of satisfaction were noted for Refreshment Facilities (88% Satisfaction) Toilet Facilities (83% Satisfaction) and Car Parking Facilities (79% Satisfaction). These issues are discussed further below:
- Refreshments – Satisfaction with the refreshments facilities has increased by 18% compared with the 2005 User Survey, although 12% still feel the facilities could be improved. It is proposed that the current onsite mobile catering facilities be reviewed within the context of potential facility improvements outlined at sub-section 1.2.8.
 - Toilets - Some dissatisfaction was shown with the Park's toilets, in regard to maintenance, quantity of toilets (not enough throughout the Park) and location (too far from play area). It is, therefore, proposed that the Rangers continue to monitor the condition of the toilets to ensure cleanliness standards are maintained, and that the provision of additional toilets at the Park be considered.
 - Car Parking – The survey identified that amongst users of the car park, there was a 21% dissatisfaction level, with 40 respondents considering parking charges to be too expensive. The cost for parking at the Country Park is currently 60 pence for up to four hours, and this compares extremely favourably with Kent County Council's Country Park charges that are up to £2.00 per visit. Leybourne Lakes also offers a season ticket at a rate that is £10 cheaper than the County Council. Members will be aware that parking charges for both of the Borough Council's Country Parks will

remain unchanged from the 1 April 2011 and be reviewed as part of the Council's overall review of charges for its car parks, which will be reported by the Director of Planning, Transportation and Leisure to a future meeting of the Car Parking Advisory Board.

1.2.8 Visitors were also consulted on potential improvements at the site with the three most desired improvements highlighted below:

- Facility Improvements - Described as a visitor centre in the questionnaire, including a café, water sports centre and educational facilities this addition to the Park would prove popular with 70% of visitors. The opportunity for some form of facility improvements has been recognised within the Council's Capital Plan, with a scheme being selected for evaluation. Caution will, however, need be taken when bringing forward any proposal as it will be essential that the integrity of the site is not compromised and that any proposal is sympathetic to its immediate environment. It is recognised that appropriate consultation will need to be undertaken with local Members and the local Parish/Town Councils and any proposal will be developed alongside the production of the new site Management Plan due to be drafted in 2011/12.
- Improved Refreshments Facilities – As stated in sub-section 1.2.7 a number of users would like to see improvements to the current catering arrangements. This issue will be considered within the evaluation of facility improvements as stated above.
- More Activities/Facilities for Children – Recent years have seen the introduction of the play area and play trail at the Country Park that have been welcomed and well used by visitors to the Park. A number of activities have also been run at the Park including the Junior Ranger programme, wildlife activity days and bird walks. It is proposed that the annual programme of activities be reviewed to investigate any opportunities to extend the number of events or increase promotion of those already taking place. Members will be aware of improvements to the surfacing of the play area planned for later in the year, as detailed in a separate report in these papers.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 None.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 Where possible, any actions to meet customer needs will be delivered through existing revenue budgets. Where funding is required for facility improvements this will be met through developer contributions held by the Council for this purpose.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 None.

1.6 Policy Considerations

1.6.1 Customer Contact, Healthy Lifestyles, Community.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

1.7.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report.

1.8 Conclusion/Recommendations

1.8.1 The market survey results have highlighted that Leybourne Lakes Country Park is appreciated and highly valued by the visiting public. Overall satisfaction levels are extremely high and increases have been noted since the previous survey undertaken in 2005. This reflects the investment placed into the Park by the Council, supporting Parish/Town Councils, staff and volunteers. A number of improvements have been identified and will be considered over the forthcoming year.

1.8.2 It is, therefore, **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that:

- 1) the 2010 market survey results for Leybourne Lakes Country Park be noted, and
- 2) the proposed improvements identified within the report be considered alongside the review of the Site Management Plan, and be reported to a future meeting of this Board.

The Chief Leisure Officer confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendations, if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Daniel Gooch

Leybourne Lakes Country Park Market Survey 2010

Robert Styles
Chief Leisure Officer

Martin Coffin, Cabinet Member for Leisure,
Youth and Arts

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	N/A
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	The proposals aim to extend and provide additional/improved facilities with free public access for all.
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?	N/A	N/A