

## Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee

05 February 2025

### Part 1 - Public

#### Matters for Cabinet - Non-key Decision



Cabinet Member	Cllr Des Keers, Cabinet Member for Community Services
Responsible Officer	Robert Styles, Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services
Report Author	Chris Fox, Leisure Services Officer, and James Fay, Leisure Services Manager (Outdoors)

#### Haysden Country Park Management Plan 2025-2029 – Consultation Draft

### 1 Summary and Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report presents a draft Management Plan for Haysden Country Park and seeks Member comment prior to formal public consultation.

### 2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

- 2.1 Sustaining a borough which cares for the environment.
- 2.2 Through its Corporate Strategy, the Council are committed to caring for and enhancing the environment within the Borough. The management plan is a key document that supports the Council's corporate ambitions and also underpins applications for external accreditations such as the Green Flag Award and Country Park status, which are recognised standards of open space.

### 3 Recommendations

- 3.1 The Committee are requested to comment on and endorse the draft Haysden Country Park Management Plan 2025-2029 and the proposed consultation process and make any recommendations to Cabinet.

### 4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 The Council has committed to producing site specific Management Plans for its principal public open spaces. Five-year Management Plans have previously been developed for Tonbridge Racecourse Sportsground, Leybourne Lakes Country Park (now managed by the Leisure Trust), and Haysden Country Park. The existing Management Plan for Haysden Country Park expired in December 2024

and, therefore, needs to be reviewed and updated for the next five years. In preparation for this, we have already carried out a market survey of users and these results have been incorporated into the draft Plan.

- 4.2 This will be the fifth operational Management Plan for the Haysden Country Park and has been developed to give guidance and direction to the future management of the site for both users and managers. The previous Management Plan was highly successful in delivering projects and attracted investment in the park of over £300,000. The Management Plan is an essential requirement for the Green Flag Award (the national award the park has achieved since 2006), Country Park Accreditation and Local Nature Reserve status.
- 4.3 The overall aim for the site is to provide a Country Park that offers a welcoming place for recreational use that is compatible with its nature conservation features, ensuring the sites integrity is maintained for the benefit of the local community. A balance is to be achieved between all key elements and none shall, within reason, dominate others.

## 5 Proposal

- 5.1 Having a Management Plan for a site is sound industry good practice. The draft Plan is intended to provide guidance and direction for the management of the park and be used to inform future maintenance and development of the site. The document also assists in achieving awards and leveraging in external funding.
- 5.2 The Plan is essential to achieve the Green Flag Award and has also been developed in line with the criteria of the award - the international standard for parks and open spaces. Achieving 3 Green Flag Awards is one of the Council's Key Corporate Performance Indicators. The Green Flag Award criteria include: a well-maintained site, cleanliness, community involvement, health and safety, a welcoming site, marketing and climate change.
- 5.3 The draft Plan follows the format of the Council's previously adopted Management Plans. A copy of the draft Management Plan is shown at **(ANNEX 1)** and has been circulated separately with these papers for Members' consideration and a summary of the sections is provided below.
- 5.4 **Where are we now?** The first section of the Plan describes the current situation, at the time the Plan was written. It is an introduction and tells us what we have at present and what we are trying to achieve.
- 5.5 **Vision** – where do we want to get to? This section of the Plan describes our vision for the site and sets out our management aims and objectives
- 5.6 **How will we get there?** This section sets out how we are going to achieve our aims. A Five-Year Work Programme sets out long-term targets and annual Action Plans focusing on each year will flow from this.

- 5.7 **Monitoring and review** – how will we know when we have arrived? The final section of the Plan looks at how we will track progress and how the plan might be updated.

## **6 Other Options**

- 6.1 The Council could adopt the Plan without any further public consultation, but we have always consulted the public in the past giving them a chance to comment and provides an additional level of transparency.
- 6.2 Not produce a management plan for the park. Without a Management Plan we would be unable to enter the national Green Flag Award and would then fail to achieve one of the councils Key Performance Indicators. The Plan is also needed for the nationwide Country Park Accreditation Scheme and as a Local Nature Reserve. Standards at the Park would then be without any agreed plan of action, external audit and scrutiny. The Plan also forms justifications for financial contributions from developer contributions and for external funding bids. The Plan also sets out a number climate change and biodiversity ambitions which may be unachievable without it.

## **7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 7.1 The Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework. Projects will need to be funded by a combination of external funding or donations, revenue and capital budgets and delivered with the support of volunteers.

## **8 Risk Assessment**

- 8.1 As sound management and good practice, the Plan sets out the council's approach to risk management.

## **9 Legal Implications**

- 9.1 Legal Services will be involved throughout the public consultation process.

## **10 Consultation and Communications**

- 10.1 Subject to Member comment at the meeting, it is proposed that formal public consultation takes place in early 2025, on the following basis.
- 10.2 All key stakeholders (including the list of 'charities and organisations') will be directly notified when the draft Plan is available for comment. A copy of key stakeholders is shown at **(ANNEX 2)**.
- 10.3 Copies of the draft Plan will be deposited at the Council Offices at Kings Hill and Tonbridge Castle.

- 10.4 A copy will be available to view on the Council's website.
- 10.5 Posters will be displayed at the park advising visitors on the consultation process.
- 10.6 The Council's Media Communications team will publicise the Plan on social media.
- 10.7 A list of comments received along with any recommended alterations to the Plan will be reported to a future meeting of this Committee.

## **11 Implementation**

- 11.1 The Plan would come into effect from late Spring/early Summer 2025 subject to consideration of the outcome of the public consultation by this Committee and subsequent Cabinet approval.

## **12 Cross Cutting Issues**

### **12.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity**

- 12.1.1 Adaptation and resilience have been considered in the Plan and forms one of the judging criteria for the Green Flag Award.
- 12.1.2 Climate change advice has been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.
- 12.1.3 The plan sets out our climate change and biodiversity baseline and objectives within the projects section.

### **12.2 Equalities and Diversity**

- 12.2.1 Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users. The impact has been analysed and varies between groups of people. The results of this analysis are set out immediately below.
- 12.2.2 An independently commissioned access audit of the park forms Appendix 4 of the plan.

### **12.3 Other If Relevant**

- Procurement
- Business Continuity / Resilience
- Health and Safety
- Healthy Lifestyles

- 12.3.1 The use of contractors is a fundamental component of managing the park. Officers adhere to the Councils Procurement Policy when commissioning contractors to deliver services at the park see Section 9 of the Plan.
- 12.3.2 Business Continuity / Resilience. As a non-statutory service that has high demand from public we want to provide a financially sustainable park with good resilience.
- 12.3.3 Health and Safety is an essential element of providing safe, secure, good quality public open spaces, Officers have developed this plan in accordance with the Councils Corporate Health and Safety Policy.
- 12.3.4 Healthy lifestyles are provided by offering many outdoor opportunities to the public at the park including angling, water sports, walking, cycling, catering, volunteering and mental welling by contact with other people and the natural world.

Background Papers	Market Survey of Haysden Country Park Access Audit of Haysden Country Park <b>Appendix 4</b> in the plan
Annexes	<b>ANNEX 1</b> - Consultation draft Haysden Country Park management plan 2025-2029 <b>ANNEX 2</b> - Key Stakeholders