

Meeting of:	<b>Cabinet</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Thursday, 06 March 2025</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Environment and Regeneration
Report Title:	Leisure Opportunities at Countryside Service Sites
Purpose of Report:	To seek authorisation to licence a pilot, on water leisure activity in Cosmeston Country Park
Report Owner:	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Places
Responsible Officer:	Director of Place
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	<p>Legal Services – Committee Reports</p> <p>Operational Manager, Accountancy</p> <p>Head of Sustainable Development</p> <p>Team Leader, Countryside Services</p> <p>Operational Manager Property</p> <p>Ward Member Consultation -Sully and Plymouth Ward Members.</p>
Policy Framework:	This report is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of green and blue spaces and in particular the Country Parks at Cosmeston and Porthkerry is recognised by the Council and ensuring the long-term future of these spaces is considered crucial particularly having regard to experience gained during the recent pandemic and to ensure that such places and the important nature and ecology found within them can be protected for future generations. The changing way that these spaces are used is also recognised with a focus on offering leisure activities to users of the park as well as maintaining the spaces as green areas.</li> <li>• To recognise that as part of the current placemaking work underway in all four main towns in the Vale of Glamorgan and more specifically, Penarth, summertime leisure activities have been identified as important to users of the park as part of the current consultation exercise.</li> </ul>	

- The Council has been approached by a leisure operator who would like to explore the opportunity of using part of the eastern lake at Cosmeston Country park for water-based activities from May 2025 through to September 2025 to test the suitability of the location.
- The report seeks approval to negotiate and complete a licence agreement for a maximum term of 20 weeks, through the summer months to pilot the proposal for an aqua leisure use to be operated within the eastern lake at Cosmeston Country park which could provide income to support the protection and future development of the Country parks with a focus on maintaining green and blue space and nature conservation.
- The request is also made to further explore opportunities for the future use of the medieval village buildings to financially support the continued operation of the country parks.

#### Recommendations

1. That Cabinet agrees to pilot an on-water aqua leisure activity with a third-party operator (for a maximum of 20 weeks through late spring and summer from May 2025 through to September 2025) as a water-based leisure opportunity on the eastern lake at Cosmeston Country Park with terms aimed at minimising any impact on the general visitors and users of the park and in a suitable location to minimise any impact on those areas of nature conservation.
2. That the Director of Place be given delegated powers, in consultation with the Chief Executive, Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Finance/S151 Officer, Operational Manager (Property) and Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Places, to agree fees/charges, terms and conditions for new the pilot leisure use with the operator and to authorise the Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal and Democratic Services to enter into the appropriate legal agreements on behalf of the Council in this regard.
3. That Cabinet refers this report to Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2025 for their consideration.
4. That officers investigate tourism and commercial opportunities regarding the Medieval Village buildings and report further to Cabinet.

#### **Reasons for Recommendations**

1. To increase opportunities for leisure activities in lower impact areas to support the wider provision of green and blue space and secure future income to support the costs of running Countryside facilities.
2. To allow commercial arrangements to be identified and agreed on a pilot basis for the summer of 2025.
3. In order that the Scrutiny Committee can consider the report prior to any final agreement with the relevant Leisure operators which will be required by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025.
4. To promote opportunities for sustainable tourism and realise income opportunities.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1** The eastern lake in Cosmeston has been previously used for leisure purposes such as paddle boarding and boating and the park offers several concession sites (including an established café building) for refreshment operators. However, it is considered that there remain opportunities for leisure and commercial activities which could support the wider operation of the Country Parks.
- 1.2** The Country Parks within the Vale of Glamorgan are considered to be destination venues for both residents and tourists as well as important green and blue spaces for local residents to enjoy. They remain pivotal in attracting tourists and are considered vital to the local economy. However, they constantly need to adapt to the needs of users and the development of new sustainable activities/attractions will improve the offer to users and encourage greater footfall. Residents of the Vale of Glamorgan will also recognise how important these green spaces are to support wellbeing and healthy lifestyles.
- 1.3** In addition, as part of the Placemaking consultation currently underway in the four main towns in the Vale of Glamorgan (and particularly in Penarth), the potential for more leisure activities at the County Park in the school Summer holidays has been identified as important to the residents.
- 1.4** Piloting a leisure use on the water in Cosmeston will allow the Council to more widely consider and develop a strategy to support the use of our important green and blue spaces in the future as part of a wider reshaping programme.
- 1.5** It is also recognised how important the Country Parks are to nature diversity, ecology and biodiversity and it is important that any proposed leisure use is both complimentary and supports the future of the park. Diversification of the offer at the Country Parks should help support the important re-wilding and nature conservation work which is already underway in the Country Parks. Furthermore, it is recognised the important role that the Country Parks have in supporting the Council's actions to deal with the declared nature and climate emergency.

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

- 2.1** The Council has been approached by an operator who offers water-based leisure activities who is seeking to relocate from their current location in Cardiff and has identified the eastern lake in Cosmeston Park as a suitable location which would enable the business to remain in the Southeast Wales area. The operators are seeking to operate for a trial period to pilot the activity on the lake, to allow both the Council and the operator the option of not renewing the licence at the end of the season should the pilot be deemed unsuccessful for either party.

- 2.2** Members will be aware that this lake has been used in the past for leisure uses such as paddle boarding and boating and this proposed operation would be similar in terms of improving the leisure offer at the site.
- 2.3** The west lake will remain activity free and solely for wildlife all year round and in addition all water activities on the east lake cease from 1st November until 28th February of the following year to ensure that overwintering wildfowl populations are not disturbed.
- 2.4** Improving the offer at the Country Parks will allow the Council to continue to support residents by making these important green and blue spaces available to residents without the need to charge for entry. More importantly by opening the Country Parks to sustainable leisure uses, the Council and Countryside Team can support and develop the important ecology and biodiversity at these sites.
- 2.5** The operators are very mindful of the Country Park's important role in providing blue and green spaces for residents and visitors to enjoy and is seeking to minimise the impact of any operation by locating any off-water support facilities away from the lakeside and in an area away from the main park.
- 2.6** Furthermore, in the future there is the potential of expanding the Country Parks sites (particularly in Cosmeston) making more land available in the future to address the nature emergency through re-wilding, tree planting and by increasing biodiversity. Leisure operations such as this will help the Council fund future improvements to the parks recognising the importance they have to both residents and visitors alike.
- 2.7** It is also hoped that bringing an additional attraction to the park will introduce new visitors who will use the existing facilities, in doing so further supporting the existing operators of the café and the other concessions in the park.
- 2.8** The Ongoing Consultation work currently underway as part of Placemaking in Penarth has identified a concern that there are not enough activities for younger people to enjoy in and around Penarth, particularly in the summer months. On water activities will significantly improve the offer that would be available to younger people in the school holidays.
- 2.9** The need to ensure security of the water activity equipment when the park is closed will mean that the leisure operators will employ its own security and CCTV and this should lead to a reduction in antisocial behaviour associated with the summer period in Cosmeston.
- 2.10** It is not intended that the Council invests in any such activities itself, but that the Council enters into an agreement with a third party. This will enhance what is currently offered at the sites, increase footfall and tourism opportunities leading to a new income opportunity, which will contribute to the future running and maintenance of the Country Parks.
- 2.11** However, it is considered that any new activity should improve the Council's asset and develop the visitor experience. In addition, any new activity should secure increased income generation for the Council.

- 2.12** At the end of the season a further report will be brought to Cabinet which will assess the outcome of the pilot leisure scheme and present options for the future.

### **3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?**

- 3.1** The original aims of this opportunity regarding the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives were as follows:
- 3.2** LONG TERM - On water leisure activities provide an additional attraction for the Country Park and help support the important nature, biodiversity and ecology work within our Country Parks and ensure the long-term future of the Park.
- 3.3** PREVENTION - By working with the private sector to bring a leisure use to the park which will include onsite security and CCTV facilities it will have a positive impact on crime and disorder by reducing the opportunities for unauthorised camping, lighting of fires, vandalism, fly-tipping and litter dropping.
- 3.4** COLLABORATION – The proposals would involve working with the private sector to support the Council to develop and fund the opportunities at the Country Park and allow the Council to continue to make this important green space available to residents of the Vale of Glamorgan.
- 3.5** INTEGRATION – The proposed pilot allows the Council to consider how the use integrates with the wider operation of the park and ensure that the leisure use will not be harmful or detrimental to the park itself.
- 3.6** INVOLVEMENT – if the proposed pilot is a success, a comprehensive marketing of the opportunity will be undertaken which will allow the Council to select the best operator for a longer-term operation. It should also be noted that the currently ongoing Placemaking work in Penarth has identified that those consulted as part of the process have identifies a lack of leisure opportunities particularly in the summer period for younger residents.

### **4. Climate Change and Nature Implications**

- 4.1** The Countryside Service offers a comprehensive environmental education package to schools, community groups and users.
- 4.2** Charges seek to ensure sustainability of sites and promote local economic development and employment through tourism.
- 4.3** Increased leisure and tourism activities within the Vale of Glamorgan will primarily reduce the need to travel for residents.

## **5. Resources and Legal Considerations**

### **Financial**

- 5.1** Saving targets for the Countryside Service include the generation of additional income and these proposals seek to raise income from users of services which require resources to maintain and/or deliver, in a fair and balanced way, whilst also maintaining viable competitive services and attracting visitors and tourists as appropriate.
- 5.2** Estates and Legal Officer`s resource will be required because of entering into any legal agreement with a third party, some of these costs will be reimbursed by the third party, where appropriate.
- 5.3** The Council will be required to negotiate terms and conditions and enter into appropriate legal agreements in respect of Recommendation 2.
- 5.4** Planning permission may be required by proposed operators following the pilot scheme and it will be for those businesses to seek the relevant permissions if necessary.

### **Employment**

- 5.5** There is no employment implications for the Council associated with this report.
- 5.6** The leisure operator will be seeking to employ over 20 young people as part of the proposed-on water activity.

### **Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 5.7** The Council will be required to negotiate terms and conditions and enter into appropriate legal agreements in respect of Recommendation 2.
- 5.8** Planning permission may be required by proposed operators, and it will be for those businesses to seek the relevant permissions if necessary.

## **6. Background Papers**

None.