

Update on the Ham Hill Project and National Lottery Heritage Fund grant offer

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Ward Member(s)	Cllr. Hewitson (Hamdon Ward), Cllrs. Capozzoli, Hull and Rowsell (Northstone, Ivelchester & St Michael's Ward)
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Purpose of the Report

1. To seek permission to accept the grant offer of £1.6m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to enable the delivery of the "Uncovering Ham Hill's past for its future" project. To provide an overview of the progress against the Ham Hill project to date. To explain the breadth of positive outcomes that will be realised through delivery of a diverse range of project activities and site improvements. To provide information on timescales and budgets for the project.

Forward Plan

2. This report did not appear on the Full Council Forward Plan as officers were waiting for all statutory permissions and grant offers to be secured before bringing it to committee. The National Lottery Heritage Fund offer was received on December 5th 2022.

Public Interest

3. In 2018 the Countryside Service at SSDC started developing a project to protect and safeguard the special site at Ham Hill Country Park. Nationally important for its heritage, ecology and geology, the large countryside site is also an important space for informal recreation. Ongoing pressures are damaging the site, and current management arrangements are not sufficient to ensure the continued appropriate management of the land and all its assets. From 2019 – 2022 the Countryside Service have managed the development stage of a National Lottery Heritage Fund project to assess the best way to protect the future of the site. The Country Park and project now have a £1.6m grant offer from the Heritage Fund and it sits at the start of an exciting delivery stage, which will see great benefits for people, nature and heritage.

Recommendations

4. That Full Council:-



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- a. note the report and progress of the project.
- b. authorise the Director of Service Delivery to accept the Terms of Grant set out in the letter dated 5 December 2022 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund in respect of the Council's **Uncovering Ham Hill's past for its future** project.

Background and Development of the Project

5. Ham Hill Country Park is centred on Hamdon Hill, a large Iron Age hill fort and Scheduled Monument with evidence of human occupation since the Stone Age. The Country Park offers superb views across Somerset and has wildflower meadows, peaceful mature woodlands, steeply sloping Iron Age ramparts and a network of paths for all to enjoy.
6. The Country Park is popular with residents and visitors, attracting an estimated 300,000 plus visits a year. The erosion caused by these visitors, as well as tree and shrub encroachment and animal damage has meant that the Scheduled Monument has now been put on the Historic England 'At Risk' register.
7. Since its original designation in 1975 the Country Park has expanded significantly through land purchases, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The existing ranger base and toilets are no longer central within the Country Park. Funding from the National Heritage Memorial Fund enabled in 2019 the purchase of 30 hectares of land that included the 'At Risk' ramparts and existing car parks.
8. The Country Park is managed by a team of two rangers assisted by volunteers; the demands of visitors and management of 173 hectares are now beyond their resources.
9. A new approach is needed to manage the site and the existing users, whilst attracting new target audiences who currently experience barriers to visiting the Country Park. The Covid-19 pandemic led to even larger numbers seeking outdoor recreation opportunities locally, with a resultant increase in pressure on the Country Park. Extensive research and consultation has occurred during the development of proposals throughout 2020/21 and 2021/22. This has included visitor surveys, schools surveys, volunteer surveys, various stakeholder discussions, comparator site visits and multiple trial activities.
10. As a result of this work the project has developed a broad range of objectives;

Improvement of site, nature conservation management and scheduled monument protection: with new tools and machinery habitats will be enhanced and protected, woodland fragments linked and grasslands appropriately managed. Species specific approaches will take place when required e.g. for dormice or for the rare shrill carder bee. Heritage conservation work will include protecting ramparts where erosion threatens their integrity and restoring features like the lime kiln. New staffing will enable the work to be delivered. Car parking improvements, highway & pedestrian safety works and access improvements will improve the site overall. Ultimately key features of the monument will no longer be considered "At Risk" and the site will be an ecological hub on the newly emerging Nature Recovery Networks, its management will support delivery against climate action plan targets. Into the



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future the geological Site of Special Scientific Interest and Scheduled Monument are protected.

Visitors have increased awareness, understanding and knowledge through the provision of a new modest, single storey, visitor centre with reception, café, activity and learning space and permanent public display of archaeological investigations and associated finds. The unique geology and ecology of site are explored through a range of interpretation and more people will understand and appreciate the special nature of the site. Wider site interpretive signage & waymarking will be delivered and the site adopts a coherent and appropriate brand. Enhanced staff and volunteer training in heritage and ecology will ensure face to face interpretation helps visitors gain the most from their visit. Ham Hill gains the national recognition as a heritage site that it deserves, and it becomes a destination of choice for school and interest groups.

Provision of more opportunities for a wider range of people to become engaged and involved, including through new volunteering opportunities; a new engagement ranger will coordinate and deliver new activity and learning programmes. Existing partnerships are built upon and new sessions target both current and new visitors, particularly those with barriers to accessing the site. Community archaeology projects, geological trails, forest schools, heritage mornings and arts projects restore interest in the site and generate new engagement. New volunteering strands include visitor centre volunteers, wildlife and habitat monitoring, roaming rangers and activity & engagement volunteers, all contributing to a thriving voluntary community. The old ranger base will act as a volunteer hub to support these new types of volunteering.

The project intends to dramatically expand the opportunities for volunteering, involving a broader range of opportunities and a wider demographic of volunteers. Over the duration of the project volunteering is forecast to increase by over 1800 days. A key part of the future proposals is doubling the size of the ranger team, from two to four, with the addition of an Assistant Countryside Ranger and Countryside Engagement Ranger roles, working together across the range of tasks required in the Country Park. The new posts will be initially project funded for three years, but there may be opportunity to incorporate them into the regular site expenditure as income increases.

Achieving future financial sustainability through new sources of regular income from primarily catering and retail will result in a dramatic rise in income. The experience gained from the Yeovil Country Park shows the positive impact catering income can have. A donation system for visitors will also be implemented, alongside limited and appropriate retail sales from the visitor centre.

As of January 2023 the project has secured planning consent and both visitor centre and landscape Scheduled Monument Consent's from Historic England. The application for a Traffic Regulation Order (to reduce the speed limit on the highway through site) is also submitted. Project funding was confirmed as in place in December 2022 with the grant offer from the National Lottery Heritage Fund made under their standard grant terms and conditions.

Delivering the Project



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11. Project implementation is across 4 years from 2023 to 2026. Project management will be by the Leisure and Recreation Manager with support from the Countryside Manager. A member of the Property Services team will provide construction project management.
12. Key outputs include –
 - New site staff in place May 2023
 - Highways speed limit and traffic calming measures in place by end of 2023
 - Landscape & habitat improvements from May 2023 – June 2026
 - New activity programme from July 2023 – June 2026
 - Volunteer recruitment & Volunteer Hub opening from July 2023
 - New visitor centre & facilities opening October 2024
 - Limekiln restored May 2025

Financial Implications

13. The total project costs are £2,167,700 and project budget is fully secured from a range of grant funders with an SSDC capital contribution of £449,000 across four years. Landscape costs have been developed by the countryside team with the support of consultants and a Quantity Surveyor. Costs have been interrogated by expert advisors at the National Lottery Heritage Fund and as a result of current inflationary pressures the Heritage Fund increased the grant offer by £50,000 to enable resilient inflation and contingency budgets.

Item	Budget Costs
Purchase of Machinery	
Machinery to help in the land management	40,000
Monument Work	
Contractor and materials budget for scrub removal, path restoration, badger exclusion, & lime kiln restoration	35,000
Habitat Improvement	
Shrill Carder bee project & other habitat improvements	6,000
Paths, Car Parking & Infrastructure	
New paths & walling repairs, traffic calming, car park repairs and signage, etc.	131,200
Countryside Management Staffing	
Funded for 3 years to deliver heritage asset protection work (practical land management) - Assistant Ranger	104,000
Countryside Engagement Ranger	
New member of staff funded for 3 years	101,000
Activity Programme	
Engagement activities, training, volunteering & support to break down access barriers for new audiences	81,000
Interpretation & Analysis	
Interpretation & analysis of the site's heritage	113,000
Visitor Centre	



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Visitor Centre & welcome/ exhibition/ learning space/ café/ including services	1,067,700
Activity Hub	
Woodland shelter for learning groups, living archaeology, green woodworking, courses & gatherings - incl. path improvements	10,000
Promotions	
Promotion of Ham Hill as a tourism asset - to be undertaken by SSDC Countryside & Tourism	-
Professional Fees for delivery stage	151,300
Total Costs £	1,840,200
Contingency -	132,700
Inflation -	194,800
Project Cost Total	2,167,700

Confirmed Funding	
Heritage Fund	1,600,000
SSDC Capital Funding Approved	449,000
Fine Family Foundation	30,000
Clarks Foundation	3,000
Bannister Foundation	11,500
Wolfson Foundation	74,200
	2,167,700

- The project team continue to develop further bids to Historic England's Heritage at Risk fund and Awards for All to ensure resilience in delivery budgets.
- A project business plan extends for six years after the end of the delivery phase and projects café and other income streams to inform future planning.

Legal implications (if any) and details of Statutory Powers

- Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 gives the Council a general, unfettered power to provide such recreational facilities as it sees fit. In addition, the general power of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, which gives the Council the power to do anything that individuals might generally do. These provisions give the Council power to accept the grant on the terms provided.

Note: under the provisions of regulation 4 of the Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) (No.2) Regulations 2008 this contract will transfer automatically by operation of law to Somerset Council on 1 April 2023.

Risk



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17. The project risks have been tracked on the SSDC risk management system. During the development stage the biggest risks were considered to be;
- Securing planning and scheduled monument consents
 - Securing sufficient grant funding (taking into account inflationary pressures)
 - Potential archaeological discoveries during evaluation trench excavations.

As of December 2022 these risks have been closed and new delivery risks recorded. The primary risks for the delivery stage include;

- Pressures on the delivery budget from rising materials costs,
- Project staff workloads, including any staff changes due to LGR,
- Unexpected archaeological discoveries during groundworks for visitor centre or wider landscape improvements.

A range of approaches and mitigation measures are in place against each risk including learnings from the development stage.

Council Plan Implications

17. The Ham Hill project features in both the Environment and Healthy Self reliant Communities priorities of the Council Plan due to its broad outcomes for both people and the environment.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

18. The project elements of relevance include construction of a new visitor centre, improvements to the highway and car parks, habitat management improvements and a new public education programme.
19. Construction of a new visitor centre – the building is of low carbon design and includes solar PV. Engineered to retain warmth and create air flow it will only need a small air source heat pump to maintain the ambient temperature. With timber cladding it is designed to blend with the landscape and pilings mean it has a physically light touch on the protected site. A Biodiversity Net Gain assessment for the site was part of the planning application and the offsetting requirements will be delivered by the ranger team on site.
20. Improvements to the Highway and car parks – hard surfacing will be kept to a minimum to reduce water flow issues, but where hard surfacing is required e.g. limekiln car park, it is to facilitate installation of EV charge points and disabled parking bays.
21. The landscape improvement works include management of woodlands for dormice & bats and meadows for skylarks and shrill carder bees. These protected species will have monitored programmes of management to ensure populations can establish and flourish. All management works are detailed in the five year Ham Hill Land Management Plan that is being refreshed to cover the entire project delivery period.
22. The new centre and engagement ranger will provide new and diverse opportunities for exploring climate change and environmental education messaging; from forest school



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sessions to bird walks, more people will understand the ecology and natural environment at Ham Hill and the pressures it faces.

Equality and Diversity Implications

<i>An Equality Impact Relevance Check Form has been completed in respect of the Proposal?</i>	Yes
<i>The Impact Relevance Check indicated that a full EIA was required?</i>	No
<i>If an EIA was not required please attach the Impact Relevance Check Form as an Appendix to this report and provide a brief summary of its findings in the comments box below.</i>	
<i>If an EIA was required please attach the completed EIA form as an Appendix to this report and provide a brief summary of the result of your Equality Impact Assessment in the comment box below.</i>	
Additional Comments	
<i>The project specifically aims to increase access to Ham Hill and its fascinating history and habitats. Physical access improvements will be delivered to path networks and infrastructure. A new visitor centre will offer a gateway to the site, with better toilets, and a Changing Place. More and better surfaced disabled parking will be adjacent to the centre and better waymarking will ensure confidence in visitors to explore the site. A new Engagement Ranger will offer a broad range of activities and workshops across a range of target groups and visitors. Volunteering will be diversified and expanded to include new visitors centre guides, roaming rangers and activity volunteers. All residents and visitors should benefit from the project and there are no identified negative impacts for those with protected characteristics.</i>	

Privacy Impact Assessment

- The only personal data held for the purposes of delivery of this project would be that of registered volunteers. This will held and maintained in line with the Council's and Countryside Services policies.

Background Papers

- Purchase of Land at Ham Hill Country Park. District Executive July 2018
- Letter from the National Lottery Heritage Fund dated 5 December 2022 (attached)