

RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL AND
SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL



RUNNYMEDE JOINT COMMITTEE

DATE: 18th March 2019

LEAD OFFICER: Chris Hunt

SUBJECT: Runnymede Pleasure Grounds

AREA(S) ALL
AFFECTED:

SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

The Runnymede Pleasure Grounds is due to have a £4.8m refurbishment and this report outlines progress to date and options for future use of the site as a visitor destination for local people and others coming to the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Runnymede Joint Committee is asked to note the report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

N/A

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 1.1 Runnymede Pleasure Grounds (RPG) is a public open space on the banks of the River Thames, mid-way between Egham and Old Windsor. It is held by the Council as Trustee and the Trustee function is delegated to the Community Services Committee.
- 1.2 The RPG is a popular visitor destination and is well used in particular during the summer months. Facilities at the RPG include a café, play area and paddling pool.
- 1.3 In 2017 a full business case was developed based on work carried out by The Leisure Consultancy and the Chris Blandford Associates. This looked at a number of options and potential income streams from the key areas which were seen to be the café, car parking and new holiday lodges.
- 1.4 In 2018 the Council agreed to loan the trust £4.8m to redevelop the site to be paid back over a 30 year period. Aecom were taken on as the employers agent and a design team was brought together to take the project up to the end of RIBA stage 3.

2. ANALYSIS:

- 2.1 The proposals for RPG are based on the need to improve the site as a visitor destination and the key objectives at the start of the project were to create:
- An iconic destination for the whole family
 - A park that makes best use of RPG's location, next to the River Thames, attractive natural habitats , good access, national monuments and heritage connections e.g. the Magna Carta
 - A park that is used throughout the year
 - A park that can enhance existing income streams and provide new income streams for the council
 - Create enhanced riverside areas.
- 2.2 The facilities proposed as part of the development includes:
- New café with multi-purpose space and external decking
 - New play space and wet play area
 - Increase in the number of hard standing parking spaces
 - Provision of holiday lets with two purpose built lodges and conversion of existing cottage
 - Fishing platforms
 - New landing platform for ferries
 - Landscaping and signage
- 2.2 The new café will provide both indoor and outdoor space that will enable it to be used for both grab and go catering but also for more formal evening dining. The internal space will cater for approximately 40 covers with a similar number of outdoor spaces. There will be a multi-use room which can be utilised for a range of events and activities including meetings, education sessions and opens up to provide a bigger catering space for events. The Provider of the catering services on site will be subject to a competitive tendering process due to take place later in 2019.
- 2.3 To ensure that the site can cater for year around use the existing hard standing car park will be extended. This will make the site more accessible in particular during the winter events when the grass overflow car parking will be closed.
- 2.4 A member of staff will be employed to manage the site and set up a programme of regular activities to run out of the café and using the existing open space. It is anticipated that this could include walking groups, exercise classes, silent cinema etc. The regular programme will operate throughout the year to encourage year round use of the site.
- 2.4 The new wet and dry play provision will be a significant draw to the site with new interactive play provision and a water splash park. The play areas are being designed by Davis White, a nationally renowned play provider, and there will be consultation sessions with local schools on the design in the near future. An application has been made to the London Marathon Trust for funding of up to £150,000 towards the play provision; a decision on whether the bid can be progressed to the next stage is expected at the end of March 2019.

- 2.5 The introduction of holiday lodges to the RPG was something that was considered once it was understood the level of income that could be generated. There will be a maximum of three lodges one of which will be a conversion of the existing cottage on site. Discussions are still ongoing with the Runnymede on Thames Hotel to manage the lodges once operational. The lodges will provide visitors to the area with good quality accommodation which provides easy access to the Runnymede Meadows but other local tourist attractions such as Thorpe Park. The holiday lodges will be managed and marketed by the hotel and will provide a family offer which currently is not available locally.
- 2.6 There will be improvements to the path which runs next to the river bank, in some areas this is currently only a desire line, i.e. well-trodden path but on the grass. There will be a gravel path installed to enable year round use. The path will also match the new proposed path on the National Trust land that is being installed between their car park at the National Trust Tearoom and RPG.
- 2.7 A new landing platform will be installed near the Queens statue for use by the French Brother's River Boats. A new ferry service is to be introduced linking the RPG to Ankerwycke and the National Trust Tearoom. This should increase the footfall to the RPG and enable visitors to spend a whole day in the area.
- 2.8 The plans for RPG and the broader National Trust improvements with new paths and interpretation will make the meadows more of a tourist destination by linking the various elements along the river. Council officers are continuing to work closely with National Trust colleagues on this as plans for both sites develop.
- 2.9 We are currently in RIBA stage 3 with work due to start on site after the summer. The project plan is very tight and it does look like the café will not be open until later in the summer of 2020 but other elements will be phased for completion in the spring including the car park, play facilities and lodges. During the summer of 2020 catering could well continue in the existing café until it needs to be demolished and after this time mobile provision will be made available to ensure that there continues to be a catering offer on site and any revenue is not lost.
- 2.10 In November 2018 the Community Services Committee agreed to fund the installation of an ANPR system at RPG. This will be installed in the spring of 2019 and will ensure that all users pay for their car parking. It is estimated that at least 25% of all users do not pay for the car parking and it could be more so a comparison of summer car park income against previous years will take place later in the year. The ANPR system will be set up to allow free use for the first half hour and additional savings for visitors who may be taking part in activities or those with annual passes. An enforcement protocol will need to be agreed and implemented once the system is in place.
- 2.11 Runnymede is already a well visited area of Surrey and in July 2015, Visit Britain published an analysis of the Great Britain Tourism Survey 2014. This report estimated that consumer spending on tourism in Surrey had an annual value of £176 million. The same report estimated that annual spend in Runnymede was at a level of approximately £18 million, with approximately £5 million of expenditure being generated from holidays, £6 million from visiting friends and relatives and £7 million from business tourism.

- 2.12 To develop Tourism locally there needs to be a draw for people and the proposals in Runnymede Meadows as a whole will help to create that place to visit, where you can spend a whole day. Tourism also requires events and festivals (e.g. the River Celebration 2018/ Open Heritage annually in September), local museums history and exhibitions, Health and Activity (Orbit Leisure, Runnymede Hotel and Spa, Foxhills), Parks and Open Spaces (e.g. Runnymede Borough Council parks events, walking, cycling), activities for people who come to Runnymede on business alone and with their families and great hotels e.g. Great Fosters is the AAs Hotel of the Year for England 2018/19.
- 2.13 In 2018 Runnymede Borough Council organised the River Celebration as a template for future tourism events. A film was produced 'A Year on Runnymede's Rivers', which is on U Tube and was run as part of the Rivers Exhibition in Chertsey Museum, which was visited by 2, 033 visitors from May to September 2019. A permanent website has been developed for Runnymede tourism, please see www.visit.runnymede.co.uk. The website has a Things to do page, a link to run the river film, a community web page to advertise community events and a Frequently Asked Questions page on how to travel to Runnymede, book accommodation, where to eat, where to link up to free Wi-Fi etc.
- 2.14 To develop Tourism locally requires a partnership approach and officers will be looking to develop this over the next 12 months linking in with the business partnership and other stakeholders.

3. OPTIONS:

- 3.1 The project is in an advanced stage and there are no significant changes proposed to the layout unless these come out of the planning application which will be submitted in April 2019. Discussions with the Runnymede Hotel are ongoing and the financial arrangement is due to be discussed at a meeting to be arranged once the full lodge design has been agreed.

4. CONSULTATIONS:

- 4.1 Significant consultation has taken place on the RPG project with both an online survey and face to face. The united reformed church in Egham High Street and the RPG were the venues for the face to face consultation.

A summary of all the face to face responses is detailed below:

- 98% of responders had visited RPG
- When asked what they like to do there 41% said going for a walk, 18% said relaxing, 21% said to picnic, 20% said visiting the play area and the same number said visit the café.
- 75% visited RPG either weekly, monthly or 3-4 times a year

- When asked what they like/dislike about the current offering, the most popular aspect (21%) was the peaceful, natural, open setting. The most common negative comment (29%) was that the site needs improvement and updating
- When asked to comment on the proposals, 43% described them as good/wonderful/long overdue
- When asked about the provision of holiday lodges, 60% thought them a good idea
- When asked if they would be interested in attending events at the refurbished RPG, 66% indicated that they would

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 The project budget is £4.8m which is being funded via a loan to the trust. The loan will be paid back over a 30 years period. The cost of operating the RPG will be covered by income raised from the catering concession, car parking, the lodges, events, regular activities and rental from French Brothers and the Skiff and Punt Club.

6. WIDER IMPLICATIONS:

6.1

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Crime and Disorder	No significant implications
Equality and Diversity	No significant implications
Localism (including community involvement and impact)	The project has been consulted on widely locally and been well received. This forms part of the regeneration programme for the Egham area.
Sustainability (including Climate Change and Carbon Emissions)	The development will make all the elements as sustainable as possible.
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	No significant implications
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	No significant implications
Public Health	The facility will have a significant impact on public health providing leisure and recreational activities which will cater for as wide a range of the population as possible.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 7.1 Members of the Committee are asked to note the progress being made in delivery of the project, the outcomes to be achieved and the link with the development of Tourism in the Borough.

8. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

- 8.1 The Client Officers will continue to monitor the progress of the project and report back on a regular basis to the Community Services Committee as trustees of the RPG. .

Contact Officer:

Chris Hunt, Head of Community Development, Runnymede Borough Council
01932 425670

Consulted:

Local residents, Council Members and Officers

Annexes:

Project programme and site layout – to be provided separately

Background papers: none
