

## **Meeting of the Executive Member for Leisure and Culture, and Social Inclusion, and Advisory Panel** 2 December 2008

Report of the Assistant Director (Lifelong Learning and Culture)

### **Rowntree Park- Ongoing development**

#### **Summary**

1. This report updates members on the three main ongoing development issues for Rowntree Park. Members are asked to give guidance on the way forward for each of the issues. The report will be accompanied by a presentation by the Friends of Rowntree Park.

#### **Background**

2. Rowntree Park is the city's Premier park serving both the local communities of Clementhorpe, South Bank and Fishergate and a wider city audience. Opened in 1921 as a memorial to those who fell and suffered in the First World War it has undergone several changes over the years. Most recently, between 2000 and 2003 it was largely restored to its former glory with the help of a £1.3m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund Urban Parks Programme and the work of the Friends of Rowntree Park.
3. Since then the Park has been awarded a Civic Trust Green Flag award each year since 2004, and in 2005 was runner up in the Street design award Urban Green Space category. Despite these accolades work continues to improve the park for residents and visitors. Physical works have concentrated on improving and rebuilding the tennis courts to modern competitive standards. The Friends have also continued to develop with the establishment of the Young Friends and the Very Young Friends, which compliment the work of the Parks and Open Space Community Officers and undertake activities in their own right.
4. A number of key challenge remain:
  - Restoration of the bowls pavilion – Ark in the Park
  - Flood management
  - Goose management

#### **Consultation**

5. This paper has been prepared in consultation with the Friends of Rowntree Park who will also be speaking at the EMAP. The issues highlighted have been the subject of an ongoing discussion with the Friends, local communities and Green Flag judges over a number of years.

## Development issues

6. **Restoration of the bowls pavilion – Ark in the Park.** Improvement and refurbishment of the bowls pavilion was an omission from the 1996 HLF bid and, following the improvements to the tennis courts, remains the one item left in the park in need of restoration. (See Annex 1 where the building is marked “pavilion and tickets”). Originally designed as a bowls pavilion in the 1970s, the main use of the pavilion over the last few years has been as a home for the Friends’ activities and the parks team’s Education programme. It is not especially suitable for any of these uses being too small, having the wrong internal layout and most importantly not being flood proof. When the park floods the building gets inundated with water and mud. Even when cleaned, it is left feeling damp and smelly. Since its double immersion (to date) in 2008 it is currently unusable as a base for park activities.
7. In 2006 the Friends set up a working group comprising Friends and council staff, with a view to canvassing opinion on how to resolve this situation. Following several rounds of public consultation the Friends, with the Council’s support, submitted a bid for funding under the Big Lottery Fund’s Community Buildings programme. The bid was for an eco-friendly building, on the same site as the current pavilion, with level access and with the innovative feature that it would rise up and float when the park floods, protecting the contents from damp and damage. The building would be used as a community space, classroom, changing rooms for sport and performance and an office for the park keepers. Unfortunately this bid was not successful but it has left a strong desire to see such a building in the park.
8. For the scheme to progress the Friends will soon be seeking planning permission which, if granted, would help in seeking funding for the project. They would also require a lease for the building or for this part of the park from the Council.
9. **Flood management** - Situated within the River Ouse flood plain, day to day use of the park is affected by river levels. As part of the original construction the park is surrounded by a flood wall which keeps out low to medium floods; However, in times of medium flood it is necessary to close the park for safety reason in case the flood wall were to breach and the park become full of water before an evacuation could take place. When river levels are more than 4.6m above normal summer levels water starts to over top the flood wall and the park fills up.
10. Once water is in the park it can take several weeks for the park to be emptied and cleaned - the flood wall acts in reverse and the park becomes a reservoir. As water recedes the river leaves behind a thick veneer of mud, which needs to be hosed off the paths, buildings, play equipment etc. It is only when this has been completed that the park can be opened safely.
11. The closure of the park and the time it takes to reopen after flooding is one of the issues which the Friends and other users have raised with the Council on a number of occasions. (For the most recent flood in late September it took 16 days to empty and clean up which is probably one of the quickest turn around times achieved). Initial investigations into emptying the park more quickly

suggest it would require either a) investment in new and better pumps; at present the Council has to hire in a secondary pump to compliment the existing permanent pump and/or b) the creation of a sluice gate in the flood wall which would allow a speedier empty of the park using gravity; at present the current configuration of the wall does allow this to happen.

12. Both options require further investigation into both their technical feasibility – the possibility of using green energy generated by the river itself has been suggested as one means of powering the new pumps and sluice gate - and what funding routes exist to support them.
13. **Goose management** – The issue of the number of geese in the park and the resulting mess has been the subject of much debate for the 12 years since the then Leisure Services Committee first considered the topic. The current regime is based around the annual treatment of eggs at nest sites so that they don't hatch, and periodic sweeping of the park paths both manually and with a mechanical sweeper. Full details of the Council's approach to goose management are attached as Annex 2. This spring the Friends formally adopted a position on the management of the geese with three elements:
  - a. An independent city-wide study
  - b. Improved non lethal methods
  - c. Considering a cull as the last resort
14. Independently of the Friends' view, local residents from Micklegate Ward have suggested that a cull should be undertaken to be funded from the 2009/10 Micklegate Ward Committee budget. This idea has been put to public consultation as part of the Committee's budget round on the understanding that any action would need further research. A formal decision on the public's response will be made at the February 2009 Ward Committee meeting.

## **Options**

15. **Restoration of the bowls pavilion – Ark in the Park**
  - a) To note the current situation
  - b) To offer support to the efforts of the Friends to develop the proposed Ark in the Park
  - c) To ask officers to draw up funding bid for the 2010/11 capital programme including investigation of external funding
16. **Flood management**
  - a) To note the current situation
  - b) To ask officers to investigate a bid to the venture fund to self finance any works
  - c) To ask officers to draw up funding bid for the 2010/11 capital programme including investigation of external funding
17. **Goose management**

- a) To note the current situation and carry on with the current management regime
- b) To submit a revenue bid fund a city wide study and report back to EMAP on any possible changes to the existing management regime

### **Implications**

18. **Finance:** None of the proposed works can be funded from within the existing parks and open spaces revenue or capital budgets. Funding bids would have to be made as part of the forthcoming budget round or in 2010/11 to allow time for schemes to be costed accurately and all funding routes explored.
19. **Legal and property:** There are no immediate implications although a lease of the pavilion will require legal and property input.
20. **Equalities and Diversity, Human Resources, Crime and Disorder, and IT implications:** There are none.

### **Corporate Priorities**

21. The continued investment in and development of the park would contribute to the corporate priority of 'improve the actual and perceived condition and appearance of the city's streets, housing estates and publicly accessible spaces' and have a positive impact across on the all five of the Lifelong Learning and Culture outcomes:
  - **Making York More Eventful** - More York residents and visitors will enjoy participating in, and taking the lead in cultural events and activities.
  - **Engagement in Learning** – More people will be supported into learning by providing opportunities for everyone to be part of a creative learning community, particularly focusing on the most disadvantaged.
  - **Being Healthy** – More residents will enjoy the good physical and mental health that comes from increased participation in active lifestyles.
  - **Supporting Stronger Communities** – Local communities will be supported to direct their own cultural activities and to take ownership of well maintained public spaces. Access will be open to all and we will enhance the quality of life of individuals and communities.
  - **Developing a Vibrant Cultural Infrastructure** – Residents will enjoy an increasingly thriving cultural sector and the economic benefits that flow from it.

### **Risk Management**

22. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified are operational and reputation risks associated with the ability to deliver improved services where funding is uncertain. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, the risk score has been assessed at 6, placing the issue in the Low category as an acceptable risk. This means that the risks will be regularly monitored.

## **Recommendations**

23. The Executive Member is asked to comment on the issues outlined.

Reason: In order that planning can move forward.

## **Contact Details**

### **Author:**

Dave Meigh  
Head of Parks and Open Spaces

### **Chief Officer Responsible for the report:**

Charlie Croft  
Assistant Director (Lifelong Learning and Culture)

**Report  
Approved**

√

**Date** 18.11.08.

### **Specialist Implications Officer:**

None

**Wards Affected:** All / Micklegate

**For further information please contact the author of the report**