



Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 21 June 2022
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 9
Subject	COTSWOLD WATER PARK PROJECT UPDATE
Wards affected	Depending on particular project element but widest area covered by Nature Recovery Plan affects: Coln Valley, Kemble, South Cerney Village, Siddington and Cerney Rural, The Ampneys and Hampton Ward and Fairford North
Accountable member	CLlr Juliet Layton Email: Juliet.layton@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer Report author	Philippa Lowe, Business Manager, Localities (Publica) Email: Philippa.lowe@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To provide an overview of the Cotswold Water Park Project To provide an update on progress
Annexes	Strategy on a Page, 17 March 2022 Map 1 Cotswold Water Park Boundaries and designations Map 2 Active and Sustainable Travel projects and new information board locations
Recommendation(s)	That the Committee reviews overall progress of the project
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Delivering our services to the highest standards● Responding to the challenges presented by the climate crisis● Presenting a local plan that's green to the core● Helping residents and communities access the support they need for good health and wellbeing
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	A relevant associated activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Local Cycle and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) online questionnaire 2022 has taken place● High level consultation on Kemble-Cirencester public transport study (which may include links to the western CWP)● Engagement work with key leisure operators and businesses in



	western CWP to support travel planning work.
--	--

1. BROADER LOCATION

- 1.1** To understand the wider context and scope of what is titled the Cotswold Water Park project, this report starts by setting a wider context and brief description of what is considered to be the Cotswold Water Park as a whole and how then the various project elements sit within that wider context.
- 1.2** Map 1 illustrates existing administrative, character, designation and policy boundaries, which define what is known as the Cotswold Water Park (CWP). For the purposes of this project, there are a number of different geographically bounded areas depending upon the focus for interventions associated with the four key strategic elements. For example, Map 1 includes the extensive area covered by the Nature Recovery Plan, which spans multiple administrative boundaries, whilst Map 2 illustrates the areas covered by the funded walking and cycling improvement projects, which are in a much more tightly defined area.
- 1.3** Located in the southeastern part of the District is an area known as the Cotswold Water Park (CWP). It covers 42 square miles (an area the size of Jersey) and crosses the Gloucestershire County boundary into both Wiltshire and Oxfordshire.
- 1.4** More broadly, the CWP derives its name from the area's distinctive characteristics which Natural England includes within the Upper Thames Clay Vales National Character Area. The CWP has been subject to extensive sand and gravel extractions since the 1920s and is an evolving low-lying landscape dominated by watercourses, including the Thames and its tributaries. It comprises agricultural land, approximately 180 artificial lakes and other wetland habitats, as well as active mineral workings.
- 1.5** The watercourses and lakes are nationally important areas for their wildlife interest, including for breeding and wintering wetland birds, aquatic plants; black poplars, bats and invertebrates such as dragonflies. There are also a number of nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Areas of Conservation in the CWP.
- 1.6** As well as being an important natural habitat, a key minerals extraction site, and fulfilling a water management function the CWP also plays a significant role as a visitor attraction and supports the health and wellbeing of residents. There are also multiple stakeholders and land owning interests associated with local businesses and visitor attractions.

2.0 Rationale for the Project

- 2.1** The multiple roles and functions that the CWP fulfils results in competing and often conflicting demands on the areas, particularly the pressures associated with large numbers



of visitors who may not be sensitive to the value and impact of their visit on sensitive ecologies and landscapes.

- 2.2 These tensions were exacerbated by the periodic tightening and easing of movement restrictions during the Covid pandemic and as a result, in 2020 the District Council facilitated a stakeholder meeting bringing together multiple interests to discuss the issues in the area. A partnership approach was agreed to tackle four key priorities with Task and Finish Groups set up to focus on those areas: Littering, Parking, Communications and Crime and Anti-social behaviour.
- 2.3 Solutions were agreed and implemented, mindful of the value of the CWP as an SSSI and the right balance of visitors, local communities and nature conservation. The solutions to provide new cycle and walking routes, for instance, sought to address the need to disperse visitors more widely in the waterpark. Social media campaigns were run and work was undertaken to engage with local schools, to help spread the word about the value of the Water Park. In addition, these campaigns focused on highlighting the behaviours required to support its unique character.
- 2.4 A stakeholder update meeting confirmed what had been completed, what would be picked up as business as usual service activities and what would be carried forward including delivery of the Nature Recovery Plan and further work on sustainable and active travel.
- 2.5 Finally, it was agreed that a partnership approach would continue to be used to address issues, which cannot be solved by any one organisation, particularly cross border issues and strategic efforts to influence behavioural change and the preparation and delivery of shared information to educate visitors on the value, role and importance of the CWP.

3.0 The Water Park Project 2022

- 3.1 The Council's updated Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 includes a priority to “Develop, implement and deliver a strategy for the Cotswold Water Park”. For the purposes of this project, it is time bound to December 2022 in order to focus efforts on delivery and recognition of available funding and resources. However longer term issues, developments and opportunities will be identified for future consideration. The priorities set out in the Corporate Plan are therefore to:
 - Produce a summary of the work through a ‘Strategy on a Page’
 - Produce action plans for each of the four strategic elements, holding stakeholder engagement as appropriate
 - Deliver on funded projects
- 3.2 The Water Park Project has an overall ambition to help the identified project areas reach their full potential as a ‘lovely place to walk and cycle where people can get from place to place enjoyably, safely and easily’. The project does this by:



- Providing well connected sustainable and safe access to leisure and wellbeing opportunities in an environment where respecting the natural assets is paramount
- Working strategically and in partnership to ensure promotion of shared values of 'enjoy and respect' to encourage respective visitor behaviours.

3.3 The project also supports the delivery of the Council's vision to create a greener, more connected and healthier district within the context of the nature recovery objectives for the area.

3.4 A Strategy on a Page (see annex 1) summarises details of the focus for the projects and how they deliver against the Council's priorities. The four strategic elements summarised below, are broken down with proposed activities categorised in short, medium and long-term priorities with developments and opportunities identified for future consideration. Project leads work to agreed milestones and deliverables.

1. **Sustainable Transport:** encompassing active and connected communities and travel. Enabling improved connection to and within the waterpark as well as encouraging positive model shifts, promoting public transport, cycling, walking, safety, active lifestyles and enhanced wellbeing.
2. **Tackling wider issues:** there is an on-going need to work closely with key stakeholders as well working directly in partnership to deliver projects to strike a balance between local residents and visitor economies in the area. A joined up response will also be required to deal with cross border issues and wider behavioural change, which may include educating visitors about the value and importance of the area and its ecology and the impact of littering, parking and road safety and other problematic behaviours.
3. **Communication and education:** working with partners to agree the right approach to raising awareness about the value of CWP for nature, how to provide appropriate signage and information to support the visitor experience and efforts to encourage appropriate behaviours from visitors
4. **Nature:** safeguarding and enhancing the valuable wildlife assets through prioritising nature recovery. Enabling a strategic approach to biodiversity and nature recovery in the area through a Nature Recovery Plan which aims to secure resilient ecological networks to benefit wildlife and to also provide a range of "ecological services", such as clean air and water, food provision, water management and improvements to wellbeing and the economy.

3.5 For each project, there is an associated geographic specific area depending upon the challenge or opportunity. For example, the Nature Recovery Plan covers a very wide area whilst the response to Covid and impact of high visitor numbers on particular 'honey pot' locations means the focus is understandably narrow.

4.0 Project Scope

4.1 There are associated activities taking place as part of a district wide programme "Active Cotswolds" which reported updates to Overview and Scrutiny earlier this year. However, due to the extensive geographical boundary of the CWP it was critical to ensure that the project was clear about its focus to ensure delivery of the identified projects. Interventions have therefore been targeted to address issues related to the impact of visitors whose primary purpose of visit is to the Lakes and their surroundings.



- 4.2 As noted above, some of the projects cover a very wide area such as the Nature Recovery work and some focus on our response to Covid and the impact of high visitor numbers on particular 'honey pot' locations. If issues arise that are outside the scope of this project they will be logged and prioritised accordingly as part of any potential future phases of project work.
- 4.3 Given that most of the issues experienced in the Water Park are also true for other parts of the district, there is an opportunity to share learning, trial solutions and to implement successful initiatives elsewhere.
- 4.4 The Project Mandate focused attention on opportunities arising from the allocation of Covid Contain Outbreak Management Funds to address the impact of visitors on honey pot locations with the objective of dispersing visitors more widely and enabling additional opportunities for residents to be physically active, through walking and cycling and to connect with nature to support health and wellbeing.
- 4.5 The following interventions were identified as being 'in scope' for the project. This includes development of elements of the Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for Cirencester that fall within the Water Park area and delivery of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) funded projects.
- Identification of longer term solutions and opportunities that link to wider Sustainable Transport Strategy and outcomes of LCWIP
 - Identification of improvements to the walking, cycling and public transport networks for the area and opportunities to take those forward
 - Targeting interventions and partnership working to address issues related to the impact of visitors whose primary purpose of visit is to the lakes and the immediate surroundings
 - Developing a partnership project or working group with the main leisure and tourism providers in the area to explore mutual access/transport issues and jointly implement solutions.
- 4.6 In relation specifically to the Nature Recovery Plan, it has its own Action Plan and is awaiting appointment of additional resources to support that work.
- 4.7 More focused deliverables were developed as follows:
- Completion of the Neigh Bridge Cycle Link (£106 funded).
 - Full delivery and implementation of the agreed projects funded through COMF tranche 1 allocations, including surfacing and vegetation improvements, cycle parking and installation of signage for circular routes.
 - Delivery of the local walking and cycling projects that have already been identified.
 - Undertaking data collection to provide an evidence base for the need for infrastructure and other interventions.
 - Working with Sustrans, Gloucestershire County Council and Cotswold Lakes Trust to identify a wider programme of improvement, including Local Cycle and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) opportunities.
 - To secure a resource that can help identify and horizon scan for funding opportunities.
 - Getting buy in from Project partners - articulating their expectation in terms of time, money and project management support.



- Engaging with key stakeholders associated with the Lakes area.
- Identify barriers to delivery such as breeding season for birds, SSSI, Planning, etc.
- Understanding the role Natural England plays and finding out from Cotswold Lakes Trust previous learning/experience as well as Gloucestershire County Council as the highway authority.
- Identifying a long list of potential projects and to ascertain how they can be developed and identify what aspects would be required to deliver them, including elements such as planning permission, land ownership issues etc.

5.0 Project Delivery

- 5.1 With a focus on delivery, the project has been allocated project management support in order to ensure tight and appropriate governance and that the project was being undertaken in line with the project management framework.
- 5.2 A project team is built around the four strategic areas and a project board meets bi-monthly to help ensure the project is being steered in the right direction and given appropriate support for effective delivery against the agreed key milestones and deliverables.
- 5.3 The reporting mechanism follows the project management framework, to ensure:
- The development and regular update of the project plan, budget, risk register, issues log, benefits plan, stakeholder management plan, communications plan and quality assurance plan.
 - Regular highlight reporting to the board
 - Regular updating of the central register of projects
 - The project boards are well administered (set up, agendas, minutes etc.)
 - People are clear about their roles and responsibilities
 - Escalating issues where necessary
 - Managing interdependencies (internal and external to the project)
 - Resolving issues
 - Effective management of the project team
 - That project outputs are fit for purpose
 - Communicating with users the purpose of the project and how they will be affected
 - Developing a benefits realisation plan to ensure that the outputs are used to deliver outcomes and benefits

6.0 Project Progress

Each of the four strategic elements contain deliverables, which combine to achieve the overall project objectives, as follows:

6.1 Active and Sustainable Travel

- 6.1.1 Work has been progressing on improvements around the project areas to make it easier for people to walk and cycle as noted below:
- New cycle parking installed in six car park and country park locations
 - Railway path surfacing work and vegetation clearance - between Cerney Wick bridge up to Spine Road and across to the other side.
 - New section of cycle path linking NCN45 (Railway Path) with Cerney Wick bridge (new cycle bridge)



- Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) have agreed to progress design work on Neigh Bridge Country Park link (foot and cycle path) from the Spine Road.
- Working with GCC to assess feasibility of a pegasus crossing of the Spine Road. Funding has been secured for this if a crossing is viable. The crossing will be signalled and for use by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.
- Cotswold Lakes Trust new challenge fund (which includes Active Travel proposals) launched on 10th March. Links into our COMF phase 2 project and we will be looking to work in partnership to leverage other funding.
- Work has begun on a study assessing options to improve public transport connections to Kemble Station, which may include connections to the western Water Park. This is due for completion at the end of July '22.

6.2 Communication and Education

- Work to date has focused on ways to help highlight the significance and sensitivity of the areas as a wildlife and environmental asset. Efforts have been made to share details of existing walking and cycling routes to influence behaviours and promote dispersal of visitors. Achievements to date include:
 - On-going promotion of “Enjoy and Respect” Campaign
 - Successful media campaigns to highlight nature value of CWP and the need for appropriate behaviours to protect wildlife
 - New wayfinding boards installed in 5 of the key destinations to guide visitors to new and interesting places

6.3 Tackling Issues

6.3.1 There is a close connection between this element of the project and the Council’s Clean and Green initiative which has many synergies, as does the Enjoy and Respect Campaign led by Cotswolds Lakes Trust and their future plans as part of their new Challenge Fund. Achievements to date include:

- On-going work with Police, Clean and Green Officers and local schools to promote the Enjoy and Respect campaign and run competitions to support sharing the messages
- Updated information on website <https://www.waterpark.org/> to help visitors manage their visit and for local residents and businesses to know how to report incidents <https://waterpark.org/report/>

6.4 Nature

6.4.1 In all of the work taking place as part of the Project, respecting the natural assets of the CWP is paramount. The following achievements support this overarching objective:

- Endorsement of Nature Recovery Plan, vision and objectives by Cabinet at meeting on 9th May 2022
- Website updated to with landing page for CWP Nature Recovery Plan and links to key documents <https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/planning-and-building/landscape/cotswold-water-park/>

7.0 Project Next Steps



The following bullet points provide the key milestones which need to be achieved to support progress and delivery against the project priorities.

- New project being established to extend strategic work at Water Park for future years (COMF phase 2). Project mandate agreed and Project Initiation Document being developed - £130,000 budget.
- Newly appointed Intern to develop a travel plan for the Western section of the Water Park. To include travel to and within the park. This will involve surveys, data gathering and qualitative information from face to face 'consultation'
- Hold meeting with Cotswolds Lakes Trust and Cotswold District Council
Communication leads to set out next phase of work to build shared communication and engagement plan
- Appointment of Assistant Biodiversity Officer to progress implementation of CWP Nature Recovery Plan
- Scope out opportunities to gain commitment from businesses who operate in the CWP to see if from a Corporate Social Responsibility perspective they can contribute towards some of the aspirations of the project
- Engage with neighbouring authorities to develop an approach whereby opportunities to pool finances and resources could have a significant positive multiplier impact and benefit to sections of the CWP that fall within their areas
- Develop a Memorandum of Understanding for cross border and multi-agency working and collaborations to formalise partnering commitments

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

The project was set up, and suitable governance arrangements put in place in March 2022, to ensure progress is made against the delivery of the agreed projects focused on four agreed strategic priority areas, as set out on the 'Strategy on a Page'. Efforts are targeted and ensure effective use of resources and funding. Furthermore, the project supports the wider objectives to make the district a healthy, connected and green place to live and work in.

9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None directly as a result of this report. Work on elements of the project is enabled through receipt of external funding.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 None directly as a result of this report.

11.0. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 The Cotswold Water Park Project maintains a risk register. A key example is the capacity of the Sustainable Transport Officer to deliver the agreed priority projects. Action taken to mitigate this is to work alongside other projects to avoid replication or duplication to maximise efficiency and lessen the burden on the officer's time. There are no risks arising directly from this report.



12.0 EQUALITIES IMPACT

12.1 The CWP projects have been framed in the context of healthy place shaping to ensure opportunities to improve access and inclusion are maximised. The projects, like the Active Cotswolds Programme, seeks to tackle health inequalities and improve physical activity and health outcomes for residents.

13.0 CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The CWP Projects will have a positive impact on climate change, for example through encouraging sustainable and active travel by providing easily accessible alternatives to private cars through walking and cycling. The implementation of the Nature Recovery Plan forms an important part of Cotswold District Council's approach to addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergencies. There are no implications arising directly from this update report.

14.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 None.

(END)