

Arun District Council

REPORT TO:	Environment Committee – 21 November 2023
SUBJECT:	Bersted Brooks Park Project
LEAD OFFICER:	Philippa Dart – Director of Environment and Communities and Interim CEO Joe Russell-Wells – Group Head of Environment and Climate Change
LEAD MEMBER:	Councillor Sue Wallsgrove
WARDS:	Bersted Ward
CORPORATE PRIORITY / POLICY CONTEXT / CORPORATE VISION: The Bersted Brooks Park project will implement the council’s vision that aims to provide infrastructure that supports wellbeing, through easily accessible and safe greenspace, and encourage our community to embrace healthy and active lifestyles. It will also deliver the environment theme of the vision which aims to protect and enhance our natural environment, while considering climate change and biodiversity.	
DIRECTORATE POLICY CONTEXT: The Bersted Brooks Park project sits within the Environment and Communities Directorate plan.	
FINANCIAL SUMMARY: A sum of £320k for the project has been included in the capital programme. The allocation was agreed by the Environment Committee on 20 January 2022 and approved by Full Council on 23 February 2022. Project costs will include professional fees to prepare plans for the scheme and capital works to implement the proposals.	

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the project, a summary of the public consultation and masterplan proposals, and confirms the area of Bersted Brooks Park.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to:

1. Endorse the revised area of the Bersted Brooks Park masterplan as shown in Appendix 5.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 3.1 The report provides an update on the Bersted Brooks Park project, including a summary of the stakeholder engagement and public consultation, and outlines proposals to be taken forward.

4. DETAIL

4.1 Background

Arun District Council commissioned consultants Stephenson Halliday to advise on the enhancement of the open spaces at Bersted Brooks and Bersted Park. The key principle was to create a design concept masterplan for these areas to enable local people to visit and enjoy recreation in a countryside environment, whilst enhancing biodiversity and mitigating the effects of climate change and flooding.

The area proposed is approximately 47 hectares of public open space, in the ownership and management of Arun District Council. This includes Bersted Brooks Local Nature Reserve, and areas of public open space to the north and south of Rowan Way (A259) which were adopted from the residential development at Bersted Park.

4.3 Work undertaken to date

Work undertaken by the consultants has included the following:

- Review of site information and previous survey work to identify evidence gaps and produce a baseline and analysis report, including Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis.
- Engagement with stakeholders.
- Preparation of a draft concept masterplan for public consultation.
- Production of a final concept masterplan report following public consultation, with recommendations for proposed enhancement and future management and maintenance requirements.

During the initial scope review with the consultants, the reference to 'Country Park' was removed as this term was thought to be misleading and not representative of the planned proposals. The term was intended to differentiate between the district's formal, urban parks and the open spaces at Bersted which are more rural in character. However, 'Wildspace on your doorstep', a strap line introduced by Stephenson Halliday is more representative of the proposal – giving a local resource to local residents within the district.

4.4 Site review and analysis

In reviewing previous surveys and information about the site, Stephenson Halliday were able to identify any gaps in evidence, and assess constraints and opportunities of the site. These are summarised in Appendix 1.

The open spaces were analysed in terms of typography, hydrology, landscape character, connectivity, facilities and habitats. Future survey needs were also identified. A review of constraints looked at what is preventing the sites being used to their full potential, while site opportunities were summarised in themes linked to the environmental and social benefits of green infrastructure. The themes helped to form early proposal ideas with the aim of generating discussion in how the open space could be enhanced.

4.5 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement was carried out between March - June 2023 to obtain initial views from a range of stakeholders and feed these into the design proposals.

Contact was made with representatives from different organisations who have an interest in the open spaces. They were invited to share information on site management and give views on what improvement ideas might be feasible.

Stakeholders included Arun District Council (ADC) Officers, ADC Members, Bersted Parish Council, West Sussex County Council, Environment Agency, Southern Water, Natural England, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Arun and Rother Rivers Trust, Langmead Group, Friends of Bersted Brooks and residents of Bersted Park.

Stakeholders supported better access for visitors, enhancing habitat opportunities, inclusion of new facilities (e.g. temporary café, natural play) and promoting education. The importance of protecting wildlife and ensuring proposals do not impact on flooding was highlighted. Parking and the need for additional bins were noted as current challenges.

Residents of Bersted Park were asked how they currently use the open spaces, what they see as important and how the sites could be improved.

Many residents regularly use both Bersted Brooks and Bersted Park for a range of activities including dog walking, enjoying the wildlife and landscape and to keep fit. Opportunities to be close to nature, to enjoy a clean and litter-free environment and to feel safe were most important to residents when visiting the site. When thinking about improvements, residents identified concerns about ditch maintenance. This was followed by wanting improvements to flood mitigation and water quality and also the condition of the footpaths and site access.

In addition, residents of the Bersted Park development highlighted concerns about encouraging more people to the area which would increase issues with car parking, drainage and litter. A summary of the stakeholder engagement undertaken is included in Appendix 1.

4.6 Public consultation

Following the stakeholder engagement, the feedback was incorporated into the draft concept masterplan.

The proposals were published online for public consultation between 5 and 31 July 2023. The masterplan was also available to view at Bersted Community Centre on 15 July which gave people the opportunity to talk to the project team. The results of the public consultation which included Parish Council representation can be found in the summary report in Appendix 2.

The principles of enhancing the open spaces were supported with the results showing that most people responded positively to the proposals presented. The most popular proposals were as follows:

- 86% want to see the creation of natural flood interventions.
- 85% supported the idea of wetland planting to improve flood resilience.
- 76% were in favour of the interpretation and restoration of historic features.
- 71% agreed with the proposal for a wildspace meeting point.
- 70% wish to see the introduction of new ditch crossing points.

Other supported proposals included the creation of nature-only zones to encourage wildlife, the installation of raised walkways to enable year-round access, a safe crossing over the A259, the incorporation of natural play features and expanding the car park at Bersted Brooks.

Overall, respondents were largely supportive of the proposals for Bersted Brooks, but less supportive that the masterplan proposals include the residential area of the Bersted Park public open space. A number of comments stated a preference for making improvements at Bersted Brooks rather than Bersted Park.

In addition to the completed survey questions a number of written representations were also received. Particular concerns raised by residents focused on the issues set out in Appendix 3.

4.7 Summary of Consultant Report

Stephenson Halliday has provided a Concept Masterplan Report (Appendix 4) which summarises the aims of the project and the opportunities presented by the public open spaces. The report sets out the themes which came from the public consultation and recommends proposals to be implemented in a phased approach. The proposals are described in 4.8.

4.8 Summary of masterplan proposals and recommendations

The consultation results and feedback received has been valuable in understanding how people would like to see the proposals taken forward. They have defined the concept masterplan proposals and incorporate those which received the highest level of support. The masterplan area has been revised in response to the consultation and Appendix 5 shows the updated area of Bersted Brooks Park.

The masterplan is a long-term plan which can be delivered in phases over a number of years and as funding becomes available. This could include opportunities for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) funding. Some proposals are simpler in scope and can be progressed in the short term. Others are more complex and

will require further surveys and studies to be undertaken.

The following table sets out the vision and proposals for the open spaces and summarises the benefits of each:

Vision	Proposals	Benefits
1. A place to enjoy the outdoors	Raised walkways / improved access	To increase the accessibility of the open spaces and enable access all year round, including to areas susceptible to flooding.
	Nature only areas	To limit human activity in sensitive areas of the site and enhance wildlife habitats.
	Improved parking	To expand and improve quality of parking provision at Bersted Brooks.
	Wild space meeting point	To create a focal point for people to enjoy the natural setting.
2. To learn from and respond to nature and the landscape	Waymarking and signage	To assist people in navigating across the open spaces.
	Natural play	To create interest and promote learning for young visitors.
	Community events	To encourage sense of community and introduce volunteering across the open spaces.
	Historical interpretation / restoration	To further understanding of the site and its historical context.
	Natural flood interventions	To mitigate for the future impact of flooding.
	Linear edible landscapes	To encourage engagement with nature.
3. To bring wildlife to your doorstep	Enhance existing habitats and biodiversity through planting and management	To ensure wildlife and open spaces are accessible to local people.

The initial priorities for delivery will focus on expanding the car park at Bersted Brooks and introducing signage to help visitors navigate the site and are expected to be carried out by spring 2025.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Stakeholder engagement has been undertaken to seek input from a range of stakeholders to the design proposal. This was followed by public consultation on the concept design masterplan, as detailed in 4.5 and 4.6 above.

6. OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

1. To approve the recommendation as set out in the report.
2. To not approve the recommendation.

7. COMMENTS BY THE GROUP HEAD OF FINANCE/SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 7.1 Funding for delivering the project is included in the capital programme which was approved by Full Council in February 2022.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 A risk assessment and method statement will be produced by the Principal Designer for any proposals progressed, and the project will be delivered in accordance with the Construction, Design and Management (CDM) Regulations 2015.

9. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE & MONITORING OFFICER

- 9.1 This is an update report and there are no governance or legal implications at this stage.

10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 10.1 Additional revenue funding approved by Full Council on 23 February 2022 will contribute to the future management of the scheme.

11. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPACT (for review)

- 11.1 Where applicable, aspects of the proposals will be delivered in accordance with the Construction, Design and Management (CDM) regulations 2015. Risks will be considered by the project team and consultants during design phase, and

health and safety will be managed by the Principal Designer during the construction works. There will also be ongoing health and safety management responsibilities for the proposals, such as risk assessment, inspection and maintenance, that will need to be considered and appropriately resourced.

12. PROPERTY & ESTATES IMPACT

- 12.1 The Council will retain responsibility for the completed scheme. The proposals will result in improvements to council assets as well as additional maintenance obligations.

13. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) / SOCIAL VALUE

- 13.1 The project will help to improve the social and environmental well-being of visitors, and tackle health inequality by providing a good quality greenspace that is available for the whole community. The project also aims to improve accessibility to areas of public open space.

14. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT/SOCIAL VALUE

- 14.1 Environmental sustainability will be addressed at design stage to ensure that the council reduces its carbon footprint, its impact on the environment and the use of natural resources. Contractors will be required to provide evidence of their environmental sustainability policies, including any carbon impact footprints, and demonstrate how these will be applied/reduced on the project.
- 14.2 The scheme will provide a natural area designated for local people to visit and enjoy recreation in a countryside environment and improve their mental health and well-being. In addition, the scheme will enhance biodiversity and make improvements to flora and fauna.

15. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

- 15.1 Improvements to the open space for leisure and recreation will help to discourage crime associated with anti-social behaviour (ASB). Encouraging greater use of a well-maintained open space will allow the community to take ownership from the minority who may misuse the site. Improvements to site design and scheduled maintenance will open views and create clear sight lines.

16. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT

- 16.1 The proposed scheme fulfils the freedoms and rights within the Human Rights Act 1998. There are no negative implications in terms of human rights impacts.

17. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

17.1 There are no specific Freedom of Information or Data Protection issues arising from the proposals in the report.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Environment Committee - 20 January 2022, Item 579

Full Council Meeting - 23 February 2022, Item 681

Environment Committee – 17 November 2022, Item 429