



**FOR PUBLICATION**

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PLACES**

**WEDNESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2022**

**Report of the Executive Director - Place**

**Countryside Service Review**

**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 To provide the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee – Places with an overview of the purpose and content of a proposed new Service Business Plan that has been prepared for the Council's Countryside Service.
- 1.2 The Scrutiny Committee is requested to:
  - a) consider the headline information presented on the proposed new Countryside Service Business Plan; and
  - b) provide feedback on the Service Business Plan that can be used to inform the completion of the document for its subsequent approval.

**2. Information and Analysis**

- 2.1 The Council conducted a fundamental review of the Countryside Service during 2019-20. The outcome of the review was a recommendation to create a Public Service Mutual to whom the Council would transfer the responsibilities and functions of the Countryside Service to. At this time, the primary drivers for change for progressing this arrangement were to evidence service quality and to secure financial savings for the Council via the Public Service Mutual's expected ability to self-fund its operations over the medium to long-term by accessing grant funding and generating profit from traded services.

- 2.2 These requirements were re-examined by the Council in 2020/21, given the importance that Derbyshire's residents and visitors have placed on the Countryside Sites since Covid-19 and the adoption of the Council's Climate Change Strategy 2021 – 2025. These new drivers for change led to the Council identifying that the Countryside Service had a revitalised role in directly delivering its strategic objectives and that the uncertainty caused by Covid-19 presented a significant risk to the commercial deliverability of the Public Service Mutual model.
- 2.3 Therefore, in Autumn 2021, the Council's Cabinet and Corporate Management Team agreed that:
- a) The Countryside Service is a critical part of the Council's offer to residents and visitors, and central to Derbyshire's climate change agenda.
  - b) The Service remains managed within the Council, albeit with the development of strong relationships with partners.
  - c) The Service draws up a new commercially focused business plan to ensure that it continues to meet the Council's needs in the future, with implementation in the next financial year.
- 2.4 Furthermore, it was agreed the new business plan should be developed in such a manner to allow the Council to retain its direction (governance and management) of the Countryside Service but also enable new and innovative improvement and growth initiatives to be secured, for example, through:
- An updated in-house delivery model.
  - A reappraisal of paused investment opportunities.
  - The identification of further invest to save opportunities.
  - A forward vision for a re-modelled in-house Service, which could include the creation of a Local Authority Trading Company or concessionary arrangements for potentially commercial assets.
  - An assessment of the outcomes the Service can reasonably deliver within an agreed financial envelope.
- 2.5 This position was reported to the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee – Places on 17 November 2021. Subsequently and in accordance with these objectives a new Countryside Service Business Plan has been developed. This report provides an update to the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee – Places on the scope and intentions of this new Plan.

- 2.6 The proposed new Countryside Service Business Plan establishes the strategic and operational direction for the Council's Countryside Service for the three-year period 2022-23 to 2024-25. The Plan reflects the high status that the Council has placed on addressing climate change, nature recovery, and using natural capital to stimulate inclusive social and economic growth for Derbyshire.
- 2.7 These circumstances offer a unique opportunity for the Countryside Service to invigorate its priorities, functions, and outcomes to make a step-change in its contributions to delivering the Council's strategic agenda. Success for the Service will depend not only on its nature conservation credentials but also its ability to forge new commercial partnerships, design alternative service models, secure efficiency savings and new funding sources, ensure quality standards, and co-produce solutions with communities.
- 2.8 The proposed new Service Business Plan is designed to enable these circumstances through the delivery of six policies:
- a) Providing expert, tailored, and value for money stewardship to the Countryside Sites.
  - b) Protecting, restoring, and enhancing Countryside Sites to promote natural capital and mitigate the impacts of climate change.
  - c) Designing and operating the Countryside Sites to improve public health and wellbeing.
  - d) Enabling the Countryside Sites to host opportunities to raise educational attainment, secure skills for employment, and initiate exciting career opportunities.
  - e) Creating social value by empowering Derbyshire's communities to lead the development of suitable Countryside Sites.
  - f) Generating economic growth by applying public, private, and social sector commercial enterprise to the remit of the Countryside Service.
- 2.9 A PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix 2) provides headline information from the proposed new Countryside Service Business Plan, as follows:
- The purpose of the Plan, which is to establish the strategic and operational direction for the Countryside Service.
  - An overview of the Countryside Service's portfolio of sites, resources, and responsibilities.
  - An appraisal of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats relating to the Countryside Service.
  - The drivers for change that the Countryside Service needs to effectively respond to.

- The policies that the Countryside Service will prioritise (as referenced above) and how these will be delivered.

### **3. Consultation**

- 3.1 Relevant Council officers, including all Countryside Service staff, are being consulted on the draft Countryside Service Business Plan.

### **4. Alternative Options Considered**

- 4.1 **Do nothing** - This option has been rejected as it will not achieve the objectives for the Countryside Service that the Council set in autumn 2021.

- 4.2 **Create a Public Service Mutual** - This option has been rejected for the reasons explained previously to the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee – Places and referenced in this report at paragraph 2.2.

### **5. Implications**

- 5.1 Appendix 1 sets out the relevant implications considered in the preparation of the report.

### **6. Background Papers**

- 6.1 Report to the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee – Places, Countryside Service Review, dated 17 November 2021.  
<https://democracy.derbyshire.gov.uk/documents/s11081/Review%20of%20Countryside%20Service.pdf>

### **7. Appendices**

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – Implications.
- 7.2 Appendix 2 – Countryside Service Business Plan (Power Point Presentation).

### **8. Recommendations**

That the Committee:

- a) Considers the headline information presented on the proposed new Countryside Service Business Plan.
- b) Provides feedback on the Service Business Plan to inform the completion of the document for its subsequent approval.

## **9. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 9.1 To provide relevant information to the Scrutiny Committee to enable their consideration of the headline themes of the proposed new Countryside Service Business Plan.
- 9.3 To seek the Scrutiny Committee's feedback to inform the final drafting of the new Service Business Plan.

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## **Implications**

### **Financial**

- 1.1 The Council's financial contribution to the Countryside Service will be reduced by £0.400m over the period 2022-23 to 2024-15. A key priority within the proposed new Countryside Service Business Plan is to address this shortfall in funding through new income generating opportunities.

### **Legal**

- 2.1 The proposed new Countryside Service Business Plan will support the Council in complying with the biodiversity and nature recovery duties placed on the Council by the Environment Act 2021. Furthermore, new service delivery models and contracts that may result from the Plan's delivery will have legal/commercial implications.

### **Human Resources**

- 3.1 The staffing establishment of the Countryside Service will be reviewed during 2022-23 to ensure it is fit for purpose to deliver the proposed new Service Business Plan.

### **Information Technology**

- 4.1 Information technology is an essential tool in the Countryside Service's stewardship of the Council's Countryside Sites and woodlands and trees.

### **Equalities Impact**

- 5.1 None directly relating to this report.

### **Corporate objectives and priorities for change**

- 6.1 Resilient, healthy, and safe communities.
- 6.2 High performing, value for money and resident focused services.
- 6.3 Effective early help for individuals and communities.
- 6.4 A prosperous and green Derbyshire.

**Other (for example, Health and Safety, Environmental, Sustainability, Property and Asset Management, Risk Management and Safeguarding)**

7.1 None directly relating to this report.