

Derbyshire County Council
Countryside Service

Service Business Plan 2022/23 to 2024/25 (draft)

Improvement and Scrutiny
Committee
21 September 2022

Introduction

This Service Business Plan establishes the strategic and operational direction for Derbyshire County Council's Countryside Service over the three-year period 2022/23 to 2024/25.

The Plan reflects the high status that the Council has placed on addressing Climate Change, enhancing biodiversity, and using Natural Capital* to stimulate inclusive social and economic growth for Derbyshire.

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.

Importantly, the Plan's Work Streams will be managed to enable the Council to review and approve their delivery at relevant gateway points.

* The term Natural Capital is defined in Appendix A.

The Countryside Sites

- 130 diverse Countryside Sites with an area of 1,660 hectares (4,100 acres).
- Many former industrial landscapes adjacent to communities.
- Managed by 54.9FTE staff, a cost to the Council of £2.186m pa, and generating an income of £0.932m.
- Provide an extensive network of existing Natural Capital across Derbyshire.
- 53 woodland sites that cover 850 hectares and so account for 51% of the Service's land management area.
- 17 of the Sites provide active and sustainable travel routes between the County's neighbourhoods and connecting large conurbations.
- The sites are popular visitor attractions due to their recreational, landscape, cultural, and heritage credentials.
- 16 are designated as County Wildlife Sites, eight are identified as being Local Nature Reserves, three are Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- Eight of the sites have a "Friends Group" that takes a proactive role in their management and upkeep.
- Three sites have current Management Plans that have been prepared and accord with the Green Flag quality mark standard.
- Four reservoirs managed in accordance with the Reservoirs Act 1975) and regulated by the Environment Agency.

Service Strengths

Tapton Lock Visitor Centre

- Valued by residents and visitors of Derbyshire COVID-19 has demonstrated how important green spaces are to communities.
- Officers are highly skilled and qualified and have strong personal motivations to sustain the natural environment.
- Enabling the Council to demonstrate leadership in addressing Climate Change and promoting Natural Capital.
- Fostering strategic and operational partnerships with public, private and community entities.
- Many Countryside Sites are adjacent to Derbyshire's communities.

Service Opportunities

- Managing, conserving, enhancing, restoring and developing natural capital and ecosystem services
- Optimising the social, economic, and environmental of the Countryside Sites.
- Providing expertise and resources for Derbyshire to adapt to, and mitigate, the impacts of Climate Change.
- Innovative / entrepreneurial new service models; new funding, staffing and partnerships e.g., Public Health and Social Care.
- Development of officers whilst attracting new capacity.
- Encourage and engage with a wider diversity of users and beneficiaries of the Countryside Sites.
- Enabling the improvement of the natural environment via a Derbyshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Service Weaknesses

- Very limited Management Plans in place for the Countryside Sites.
- No quality, accessibility or functionality standards set or monitored for the Countryside Sites.
- Lack of transparency on the type, cost, and quality of grounds maintenance provided by Vertas Derbyshire Limited.
- Officers are facilities management focused, and in providing routine and basic grounds maintenance tasks.
- Very limited proactive community engagement.
- No monitoring of the public use, or satisfaction with, the Countryside Sites.
- Effective promotion and co-ordination of conservation volunteering has been lost.
- Limited encouragement of social or private sector enterprise.

Service Threats

- Large and diverse portfolio of sites to manage that have formal and informal public access – land, water, and structures.
- Reduced revenue budget cost of the Service to the Council of £0.464m by April 2025 (a 35% reduction compared to 2021/22).
- Greater demand from the public, and a wider audience of interest, but limited current officer and funding capacity to co-produce solutions with communities.
- Vulnerability to health and safety risks due to grounds maintenance and capital asset management not being sufficiently effective.
- Loss of unique experience and know-how when officers' leave the Service.
- Workforce development and succession planning not advanced.

The Drivers for Change

Derbyshire

- County Deal for Derbyshire and Derby
- Derbyshire County Council Council Plan 2021/25
- Derbyshire County Council Medium-term Financial Strategy
 - ➤ £67m savings requirement for 2022/23 to 2026/27
 - Of which £40m has yet to be identified
- Derbyshire County Council Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018 2023
- Derbyshire County Council Climate Change Strategy 2021 2025
- Derbyshire County Council accepted Nature Recovery Notion of Motion (2 February 2022)
- Vision Derbyshire Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2022)
- Derbyshire Economic Partnership COVID-19 Economic and Skills Recovery Strategies 2021 2025
- Cabinet / CMT decision to prepare a new business plan for the Countryside Service (November 2021)

The Government

- 25 Year Environment Plan (2018) e.g. 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat
- The Environment Act 2021 e.g. Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Biodiversity Net Gain
- Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution (2020) e.g. nature based job creation
- England Trees Action Plan (2021) e.g. new Woodland Creation Partnerships

Six Policy Statements

- 1) Providing expert, tailored, and value for money stewardship to the Countryside Sites.
- 2) Protecting, restoring and enhancing Countryside Sites to promote Natural Capital and mitigate the impacts of Climate Change.
- 3) Designing and operating the Countryside Sites to improve public health and wellbeing.
- 4) Enabling the Countryside Sites to host opportunities to raise educational attainment, secure skills for employment, and initiate exciting career opportunities.
- 5) Creating social value by empowering Derbyshire's communities to lead the development of suitable Countryside Sites.
- 6) Generating economic growth by applying public, private, and social sector commercial enterprise to the remit of the Countryside Service.



Policy Statement 1: Providing expert, tailored, and value for money stewardship to the Countryside Sites **Policy Goals (objectives)** A consolidated and multi-functional portfolio of Countryside Sites. Enabling inclusive, safe, and public access to good quality and varied green space environments. Effective and appropriate conservation and enhancement of Derbyshire's natural and historic environment. Securing new and significant social, economic, and environmental value outcomes. Allowing the Council to accurately assess the multiple benefits of green infrastructure to inform policy and business investment decisions. Demonstrating financial efficiency.





Policy Statement 3: Designing and operating the Countryside Sites to improve public health and wellbeing



Policy Goals (objectives)

- Improved physical and mental wellbeing of Derbyshire's citizens.
- Enhancing the life chances of Derbyshire's most vulnerable children, young people, and adults.
- Improved air quality.
- Alleviating demand on the health and social care system through preventative interventions.
- Demonstrating best practice in making "green" public health and social care activities more resilient and accessible, and of sustained selfuse by participants.

Policy Statement 4: Enabling the Countryside Sites to host new opportunities to raise educational attainment, secure skills for employment, and initiate exciting career opportunities

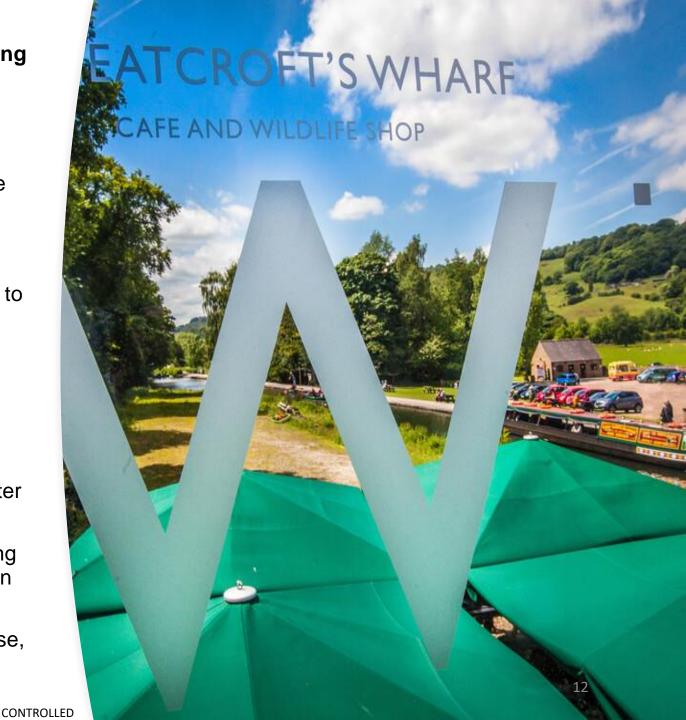
Policy Goals (objectives)

- Improved GCSE attainment grades.
- All people in Derbyshire having opportunities to access good quality employment and lifelong learning.
- Those with learning disability and long-term health conditions can access suitable training and employment.
- Reducing young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET).
- An inspirational careers programme in the green economy, nature and heritage conservation, education, and social care.

Policy Statement 5: Creating social value by empowering Derbyshire's communities to lead the development of suitable Countryside Site

Policy Goals (objectives)

- Create circumstances for productive and collaborative relationships with Derbyshire's citizens and its Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (the Sector).
- Organising, delivering, and sustaining public services to ensure the success of the Council Plan within an ongoing context of public sector austerity.
- Addressing long-standing inequalities in the county's deprived neighbourhoods.
- Higher levels of service user satisfaction, preventing expensive direct public sector interventions; and, making cost savings to the public purse through greater effectiveness and efficiency.
- Enhancing Derbyshire's democratic culture by enabling the participation of individual citizens and the Sector in making decisions that affect their communities.
- Strengthened influence, capacity, commercial expertise, collaboration, and sustainability of the Sector.



Policy Statement 6: Generating economic growth by applying public, private, and social sector commercial enterprise to the remit of the Countryside Service

Policy Outcomes (deliverables)

- Developing appropriate Countryside Sites as exemplars of Derbyshire's Natural Capital and / or heritage.
- Generating a sustainable, diverse, and complementary community, visitor, business, and natural environment benefits offer to society.
- Attracting local and non-local visitors, with their expenditure on site making a notable contribution to tourist spend in Derbyshire.
- Blending public, private, and social enterprise that co-produces the Countryside Sites future uses, development, funding, and management.
- Harnessing creative approaches and delivering innovative solutions to ensure financial viability that can be replicated and scaled-up.
- Acting as a primary sustainable travel hub for connectivity across the county and encouraging cycling and walking.
- Offering benefits that enhance the rural economy and space for start-up independent business to grow.



Next steps

- 1) Consultation on the draft Service Business Plan with:
 - Councillor Carolyn Renwick, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Environment
 - Appropriate Council officers, including the Countryside Service staff
- 2) Feedback used to complete a final draft of the Service Business Plan
- Service Business Plan to be considered by CMT / Cabinet in October 2022 for approval

Appendix A

Natural Capital

Natural capital represents the elements of nature that have value to society, such as forests, fisheries, rivers, biodiversity, land, and minerals. It includes both the living and non-living aspects of ecosystems.

Stocks of natural capital provide flows of environmental or 'ecosystem' services over time. These services, often in combination with other forms of capital (human, produced and social) produce a wide range of benefits to society.

