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## BLATCHES FARM WORKING PARTY

### 1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides a progress report from the Blatches Farm Working Party on the proposed Cherry Orchard Country Park and recommends the adoption of a business plan for the project.
- 1.2 The provision of a country park is not a statutory function.

### 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Members will recall that Essex County Council has given this Council until the end of March 2000 to produce a business plan for the development of a country park at the land formerly known as Blatches Farm. The County Council will then decide on whether it is prepared to make available the land for use as a country park and, if so, on what terms.

### 3 BUSINESS PLAN

- 3.1 The Blatches Farm Working Party met on 8 March to consider a further, more detailed draft of the business plan previously presented to the Council last November. The Working Party was informed that this plan had already been the subject of discussion between officers of the District Council and officers of the County Council and was now in a form where it could be formally submitted to the County Council. A copy of the business plan is attached at the appendix to this report.
- 3.2 In considering the business plan, the Working Party noted that if the proposed country park receives the support of the County Council further discussions would need to take place with all interested parties on the final detail of the scheme. In particular, there would be a need to involve the Friends Of the Roach Valley in both the development and future maintenance of the park. It was also recognised that Southend on Sea Borough Council would wish to have a more detailed input in the event that it should decide to contribute financially to the project. Nevertheless, it was felt that the plan as it now stood should be submitted to Essex County Council in support of the initial bid to establish a country park.
- 3.3 During discussion, the Working Party acknowledged that the continued use of the name "Blatches Farm" for the country park project was no longer appropriate given that the farmhouse bearing that name had already been sold to private ownership. However, the Group was reminded that its previous recommendation to rename the project as "Cherry Orchard Country Park" had yet to be agreed by the Council.

**4 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Development of the land at the former Blatches Farm as a country park will provide additional facilities for the young people of the District and so assist in reducing the incidence of crime and disorder.

**5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The development of the Blatches Farm site will further enhance the local environment.

**6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 These are set out in the attached business plan.

**7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 These will depend upon the agreement reached between the District Council and the County Council in relation to the use of the land.

**8 PARISH IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The former Blatches Farm lies within the Parish of Rochford. Rochford Parish Council and other neighbouring parish councils have indicated their broad support for the establishment of a country park.

**9 RECOMMENDATION**

- 9.1 It is proposed that the Council **RESOLVES** to approve the business plan attached at the appendix to this report and to submit this to Essex County Council in support of the proposed establishment of a country park at the land formerly known as Blatches Farm. (HLCS)

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**Background Papers:**

None

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**ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**BLATCHES FARM BUSINESS PLAN**

**PROPOSED COUNTRY PARK**

## **SUMMARY**

This Business Plan contains the financial details, timescales and descriptions of the various options for developing the agricultural Blatches Farm site into a Public Country Park.

The project to create the Blatches Farm Country Park will be undertaken in five stages. There need be no specific time restriction as to when the phases should take place. The phasing will be dependant upon capital funding from Rochford being available.

The Council has already earmarked resources to complete Phase 1 of the project during 2000/2001.

The project will be funded by a combination of Rochford Council's budgetary provision and grant funds.

The total estimated capital costs for the creation of the Country Park is £313,200.

The estimated revenue cost for each phase is shown in Appendix C

Successful grant applications will give approximately £146,000 towards capital costs. The remaining £167,000 would need to be found from Rochford Council's own budgetary provision although the Council has approached the neighbouring authority of Southend Borough Council to form a funding partnership.

The feasibility of the scheme going forward is based on the assumption that the County Council would wish to work in partnership with the Councils of Rochford and Southend with their contribution being donation of the land without cost.

## **BACKGROUND**

Blatches Farm is a 100 acre piece of land running along the Roach Valley from Gusted Hall Woods in the west to the new Cherry Orchard link road, the B1013 in the east.

The site is an attractive shallow valley with a plateau area towards the south east end.

Most of the site is managed for intensive arable agriculture, there is no mosaic system of small fields mixed farming or managed hedgerows. Most of the site at present is in fact a monoculture of field beans. The agricultural management of the site sees it treated each year with herbicides, artificial fertilisers and a range of insecticides.

There is a stream on site which is steeply banked with no pools, slow reaches or adjacent marsh/reed bed areas. The aquatic vegetation is poor but there is however, a considerable population of the protected Water Vole.

The site is devoid of any discernible woodland and the trees that are present require attention to improve their health and general appearance.

The only public access to the site at present is along a narrow public footpath and a proposed bridleway. This excludes the public from the great majority of the site and only caters for those fit enough to complete a lengthy round trip with no provision for the elderly and infirm, or parents with young children or the disabled.

### ***THE COUNCIL'S DESIRE TO ESTABLISH A COUNTRY PARK ON THIS SITE AIMS TO FULFIL FOUR PRIMARY OBJECTIVES.***

- To provide access to the whole of the site for all sections of the community but especially for those groups with access ability problems.
- To retain the open space and natural contours of the land.
- To remove the intensive agriculture from the valley.
- To increase the ecological importance and bio diversity of the site in a managed way.

### **THE PROJECT**

Rochford District Council is negotiating with Essex County Council, the owners of the land, for its acquisition and development as a Country Park. The aims and objectives of the Country Park have already been stated. They will be achieved by the following works:-

- **"..whole site access.."**

a network of cycle routes and bridleways giving access to and from the site

unrestricted pedestrian movement to all parts of the Park

a car park on site to give all abilities access to the Park

surfaced all weather route to give year round access for those less abled visitors

- **"..removal of intensive agriculture "**

no herbicides, insecticides or fertilisers to be used on site

no agricultural crop

the sowing of a low maintenance native grass/floral sward

- **"..retain open space and contour "**

sympathetic woodland planting with a graded edge following the natural contours of the land will enhance its rolling aspect

the native sward will maintain views and the open aspect of the site

- **"..Increase ecological importance "**

native broad leaf woodland planting in a species mix and density compatible with the soil and local woodland types

the woodland management would be a continuous cover multi-age, multi-species stand

the native sward would be managed using a cutting regime suitable to increase floristic diversity

the water feature with associated reed beds and marsh would provide an aquatic habitat now lost in most drained/ditched agricultural landscapes

Appendix A gives an indicative layout of the proposed site.

## **COST OF THE SCHEME**

It is estimated that the capital cost for creating a country park at Blatches Farm would be in the region of £313,200 at current day prices as indicated in Appendix B.

The revenue costs for each phase of the scheme have been estimated and shown in Appendix C.

## **PROJECT FUNDING**

It is anticipated that a significant sum of money could be attracted to the scheme through a variety of funding agencies.

### **The Forestry Authority.**

Approaches have been made to this organisation for grants through its Woodlands Grant Scheme. There are three different sections to their grant payments:-

Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS)	£1,050 per hectare
Community Woodland Supplement (CWS)	£950 per hectare
Better Land Supplement (BLS)	£600 per hectare

The woodland planting at Blatches would qualify for all three sections giving a possible total of £2,600 per hectare. The twelve hectares of proposed planting would therefore attract approximately £31,000 grant aid.

### English Nature

English Nature have confirmed that they would welcome a designation of the site as a Local Nature Reserve. On receiving the Local Nature Reserve status, the Country Park would qualify for a grant under the new L.N.R. grant scheme. This could attract a grant of up to £5,000 per specific new project in the Park.

### Environmental Trust/Landfill Tax

Provides funding through grants using the Landfill Tax Credit. An application has been submitted for a sum of £115,000 towards the capital costs of the project over the three years.

## PROJECT TIMESCALES

It is proposed that the development of the country park is undertaken in a number of phases. This would allow the project to be flexible and provide for discreet standalone sections. The phasing would be stretched over a number of years.

### **Phase 1 – August to December 2000**

- would see the construction of the lake including reed beds, associated aquatic vegetation and adjacent waterside trees/shrubs
- the planting of all 12 hectares of native broadleaf trees
- the establishment of a native grass/wildflower sward (low maintenance)

### **Phase 2 – January to April (year to be determined)**

- orchard planting, native traditional varieties of Essex fruiting trees
- semi and standard tree planting (clumped) over 10 acres
- fencing of perimeter including field and kissing gates
- construction of cycle and horse route

### **Phase 3 – May to July (year to be determined)**

- picnic area, benches,
- information boards
- waste bins, dog bins

#### **Phase 4A - August to December (year to be determined)**

- access to and construction of car park area
- fencing of access and car park
- screen planting of car park/access

#### **Phase 4B – January to March (year to be determined)**

- general repairs and maintenance
- beat-up of tree plantings
- replacement of vandalised/damaged materials

#### **Phase 5 – April to August (year to be determined)**

- construction of toilets (abled/disabled, male/female)
- sign posts, self-guide trail
- information maps/boards, entrance sign

It would be proposed that the facility would be completed by September 2002.

The Council has had discussion with Southend Borough Council and negotiated with them use of a car park facility at the rear by Edwards Hall Park. The use of this car park would mean that the proposed Country Park at Blatches Farm could be accessible to a wider user group by the end of Phase 1 and provide the basic amenities of a low maintenance Country Park. The future development of the site would then be dependant upon the availability of funding from the partner Councils.

### **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

The writing of specifications, the placing of contracts and the management of actual works will take approximately 90 days for a suitable Officer or Consultant.

The estimated cost for a suitable Consultant will be approximately £50,000. This amount is included in the capital estimate for the project.

The management of the site following completion of all works has yet to be decided. It is unlikely that there will be a permanent presence on site, more probable is the inclusion of the Park in either a Grounds Maintenance Contract or as part of an existing function within the Authority.

### **MARKET**

When the County Council desire to sell this piece of land became known, there was a huge swelling of public interest and concern.

In a very short time, an action group had been formed, the "Friends of the Roach Valley", who gathered a petition in excess of 3,000 signatures voicing their concerns for this special piece of the Rochford District.

**Presentations were made by this Council to the "Friends" highlighting the Country Park design that had been produced by its Officers. The "Friends" were very supportive and welcomed all aspects of the design. They organised all potential user groups of the site and arranged for them to liaise with Rochford Council for the design of the Country Park. The finished scheme which this Business Plan covers is the result of all these consultations, discussions and meetings.**

**Within a short distance of the site there are three different Local Authority Boroughs with a total combined population in excess of 330,000.**

**Within 40 minutes drive there are in excess of half a million people.**

**With such a large concentration of people in a relatively small area, pressures on existing Country Parks, Local Nature Reserves and Open Green Spaces has been increasing. These increasing pressures are now having detrimental effects on the landscape.**

**A Country Park in the Roach Valley would not only ease a lot of the pressures on sites throughout the local districts but would also give a unique Country Park.**

**Working with nature, the Country Park created, will be a site where both people and wildlife benefit.**

**Draft/blatches farm wp/business plan project**

**Cherry Orchard Country Park**

**Composite Design**

Vehicular Access:

1. From the B1013

**Key**

- Benches
- Picnic area
- Orchard screen
- Lake
  - Water
  - Reed bed
  - Toilets
  - Access and car park
- Cycle route
- All ability route
- Broadleaf standards
- Seeded area
- Native broadleaf woodland



This design has been prepared as part of the Cherry Orchard Country Park project and is for the use of the client only. It is not to be used for any other purpose without the written consent of the client. The client is responsible for the accuracy of the information provided and for the accuracy of the design. The client is also responsible for the accuracy of the information provided and for the accuracy of the design.

CHERRY ORCHARD PARK- CAPITAL COSTS

<u>Phase 1</u>	<u>2000/2001</u> £	<u>Year to be Determined</u> £
Fees	27,500	
Lake Construction	55,000	
Information Boards	500	
Grass Seeding	20,000	
Tree Planting	26,000	
Grant	- 63,500	
<b>Total</b>	<b>65,000</b>	

<u>Phase 2</u>	<u>2000/2001</u> £	<u>Year to be Determined</u> £
Fees		4,000
Orchard Planting		4,500
Standard Trees		20,000
Fencing		12,000
Grant		- 18,250
<b>Total</b>		<b>22,250</b>

<u>Phase 3</u>	<u>2000/2001</u> £	<u>Year to be Determined</u> £
Fees		2,000
Picnic Area		4,000
Benches, Bins		3,200
Grant		- 3,600
<b>Total</b>		<b>5,600</b>

<u>Phase 4</u>	<u>2000/2001</u> £	<u>Year to be Determined</u> £
Fees		9,000
All Ability Route		15,000
Access		42,000
Repairs / Replacements		5,000
Grant		- 28,500
<b>Total</b>		<b>42,500</b>

<u>Phase 5</u>	<u>2000/2001</u> £	<u>Year to be Determined</u> £
Fees		8,000
Toilet Facilities		35,000
Cycle / Horse Routes		16,000
Signs		3,000
Final Opening		2,000
Grant		- 27,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>37,000</b>

**Note:** Total Capital Cost without Grant Aid: £313,200

Total Capital Cost with Grant Aid: £172,350

CHERRY ORCHARD PARK – 6 YEAR COSTS FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL PHASE

<u>Phase 1</u>	<u>2000/1</u>	<u>2001/2</u>	<u>2002/3</u>	<u>20003/4</u>	<u>2004/5</u>	<u>2005/6</u>
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Lake Construction	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Grass Seeding	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Tree Planting	500	3,000	-	-	-	-
Cost of Capital	2,000	3,900	3,900	3,900	3,900	3,900
Total	6,500	10,900	7,900	7,900	7,900	7,900

<u>Phase 2</u>	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Year 2</u>	<u>Year 3</u>	<u>Year 4</u>	<u>Year 5</u>	<u>Year 6</u>
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Orchard Planting	600	500	-	-	1,500	-
Standard Trees	3,000	2,000	-	-	800	-
Fencing	500	-	500	-	-	-
Cost of Capital	700	1,300	1,300	1,300	1,300	1,300
Total	4,800	3,800	1,800	1,300	3,600	1,300

<u>Phase 3</u>	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Year 2</u>	<u>Year 3</u>	<u>Year 4</u>	<u>Year 5</u>	<u>Year 6</u>
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Picnic Area	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Benches Bins etc.	650	650	650	650	650	650
Cost of Capital	150	350	350	350	350	350
Total	1,800	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000

<u>Phase 4</u>	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Year 2</u>	<u>Year 3</u>	<u>Year 4</u>	<u>Year 5</u>	<u>Year 6</u>
	£	£	£	£	£	£
All Ability Route	-	-	-	-	1,000	-
Access	-	-	-	-	2,000	-
Cost of Capital	1,300	2,600	2,600	2,600	2,600	2,600
Total	1,300	2,600	2,600	2,600	5,600	2,600

**CHERRY ORCHARD PARK - 6 YEAR COSTS FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL PHASE**

<u>Phase 5</u>	<u>Year 1</u> £	<u>Year 2</u> £	<u>Year 3</u> £	<u>Year 4</u> £	<u>Year 5</u> £	<u>Year 6</u> £
Toilet Facilities	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Cycle / Horse Routes	-	-	-	-	2,000	-
Signs	200	200	200	200	200	200
Cost of Capital	1,100	2,200	2,200	2,200	2,200	2,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,300</b>	<b>12,400</b>	<b>12,400</b>	<b>12,400</b>	<b>14,400</b>	<b>14,400</b>

**Note: Cost of capital based upon the assumption that grant aid would be received.**