

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**CABINET – 15 June 2011**

### **DRAFT DEAN CASTLE COUNTRY PARK MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2011 – 2016 AND ASSOCIATED DRAFT STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT**

#### **Report by Deputy Chief Executive / Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval for public consultation relating to a draft Management and Development Plan for Dean Castle Country Park and its associated Strategic Environmental Report

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In 1974, a policy and priorities investigation was undertaken throughout the then Kilmarnock and Loudoun District under section 173 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. It was discovered that there was a shortfall of approximately 340 acres of open space and amenity areas within the district. It was therefore suggested that some of this shortfall be made up with the creation of a District Park.
- 2.2 About this time, Lord Howard de Walden was in the process of gifting Dean Castle with 40 acres surrounding the Castle to the Kilmarnock and Loudoun District Council “to be preserved and managed for the benefit of the citizens of Kilmarnock and the general public, as subjects of outstanding historic or architectural or aesthetic interest”.
- 2.3 While the District Council was considering the creation of a District Park, the Countryside Commission for Scotland’s revised information sheet 4, a policy for Country Parks was also studied and as a result, a survey of this type of development was undertaken throughout Ayrshire and Western Scotland. Preliminary talks were held with the Countryside Commission for Scotland, the Nature Conservancy Council, the Scottish Tourist Board, the Scottish Sports Council, the Forestry Commission and various other national bodies and representatives of Strathclyde Regional Council.
- 2.4 On 21<sup>st</sup> December 1977 Kilmarnock and Loudoun District Council accepted the recommendation that a Country Park should be established at Dean, centred on the Castle and 40 acres of woodland. Kilmarnock and Loudoun District Council extended the Country Park by purchasing additional land.
- 2.5 Country parks are areas of land close to towns and cities, managed by local authorities to give people convenient opportunities to enjoy the countryside and for open-air recreation. Country Park is a statutory designation. Local authorities may designate country parks where they consider there to be a need using their powers granted by section 48 of the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967, which states that “A country park is a park or pleasure ground in the countryside which by reason of its

position in relation to major concentrations of population affords convenient opportunities to the public for enjoyment of the countryside or open-air recreation.”

- 2.6 Dean Castle Country Park is East Ayrshire’s only designated Country Park. It is situated in the north east of Kilmarnock and extends to over 80 hectares. It was registered in 1981 as Scotland’s 14<sup>th</sup> Country Park and has grown in popularity over its 30 years. It is now listed as the 5<sup>th</sup> most visited Country Park in Scotland.

### **3. DRAFT MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR DEAN CASTLE COUNTRY PARK 2011 - 2016**

- 3.1 The document sets out the operational context and policies of Countryside Services who have management responsibilities for Dean Castle Country Park, the River Ayr Way and specific routes within the Core Path Network. It then goes on to describe and discuss the management approach and projects that will be undertaken at Dean Castle Country Park during the period 2011 to 2016.
- 3.2 The purpose of the document is to explain the context in which Dean Castle Country Park sits, to describe what we aim to achieve at the Country Park and to identify, through management actions, how we will do this. It will also be the basis for on-going discussions about the Country Park’s management and give our communities and general public a rationale for management actions and the opportunity to comment on them.
- 3.3 As well as outlining the regular tasks and responsibilities that Countryside Services have for the management of Dean Castle Country Park this document will also provide a framework for carrying out enhancements whether recreational or conservational and suggest longer term aspirations. It will also detail changes in existing management techniques that are in response to current public sector policies and trends, as well as in keeping with best value good practice.
- 3.4 The Management and Development Plan will not only be used to guide the management of the Country Park, but will be used as a tool to attract external investment.
- 3.5 In order to create a more innovative approach to management development and promotion of the Country Park as well as for ease of management, the Country Park will be split into 3 management units. Each management unit will be split further into compartments. A series of projects and management prescriptions are proposed for each compartment.

#### **Zone 1: Historic Management Unit**

The main aim is to focus on the key historical legacy of the Dean Estate including the historic, designed landscape, by integrating the visitor experience offered within Dean Castle into its surrounding area and managing the landscape in a more historically sympathetic fashion.

The objective for this zone is to restore key aspects of the historic designed landscape creating a sympathetic setting for the Castle and built features which is respectful of the past whilst contemporary in design, encouraging greater appreciation of our local heritage, for example:

- Restoration of original pinetum and development of arboretum;
- Clearance and interpretation of Motte and Bailey, the site of the original Kilmarnock Castle;
- Victorian style planting in the beds instead of annual bedding plants.

### **Zone 2: Urban Farm Management Unit**

'Pet's Corner' is currently the most popular area of the Country Park with over 70% of visitors coming to the Country Park to visit the animals and adventure play area. However, there is currently very little 'turn over' in the animal population. Changing the focus from petting zoo to farm will allow us to develop a breeding programme, concentrating on a smaller number of animal breeds which will result in a more cost effective and vibrant animal area.

The objective is to develop a demonstration Urban Farm which provides opportunities for recreation and education within a rural setting whilst reflecting modern and traditional farming and conservation practices.

Examples of projects in Zone 2 include: Animal breeding programme; Introduction of children's mazes; Lagoons and Farm Sculpture Trail.

### **Zone 3: Countryside Management Unit**

The management of this zone will be directed at bringing the extensive woodland resource back into positive management ensuring public safety, biological enhancement, improved recreational and educational opportunities and integration with wider biodiversity and recreational corridors in line with the Central Scotland Green Network.

The objective of the Countryside Zone is to conserve and enhance the landscape value of Dean Castle Country Park by introducing proactive and innovative management which will improve the recreational and educational opportunities whilst encouraging greater biodiversity, for example:

- Proactive management of the woodlands to include felling of non-native tree species and replacing them with native species;
- Creation of a community woodland along Kennedy Drive;
- Extension of the path network with over 10km of new paths throughout areas not currently accessible;
- Carrying out a full tree audit and identifying hazardous trees for removal.

3.6 As well as this zoned approach the management and development plan outlines a number of management objectives that will be addressed and used to develop and improve the Country Park. These objectives will cut across all of the management units and include:

- Outdoor Access: focussing on key routes for promotion within the Country Park and strategic routes which link the Country Park to the wider core path network and neighbouring attractions
- Interpretative Trails: encouraging visitors to explore other areas of the Country Park instead of staying within the locations around the main buildings. This will include informal, fun and innovative interactive trails such

as a bird song trail using MP3 players, a fortune telling trail and a geocaching trail using handheld GPS machines.

- **Traffic Management:** addressing the issue of parking, rationalising these areas and making disabled parking bays more clearly signposted. There is also the need to address the number of vehicles that access the Country Park.
- **Sustainability:** exploring opportunities to deliver sustainable forest management and to promote recycling and sustainable transport systems
- **Community Involvement:** finding ways to ensure that all sectors of the community feel involved and welcome at the Country Park
- **Built Features:** auditing the existing buildings and their suitability for their current use. The buildings were built when the Country Park was attracting approximately 25,000 visitors a year. With over 550,000 visitors, these buildings are no longer able to sustain the volume and detract from the visitor experience.
- **3<sup>rd</sup> Party Interests:** assessing the value of external lease arrangements and opportunities for new and innovative private and public partnerships.

#### **4. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

- 4.1 The Dean Castle Country Park Management and Development Plan requires to undergo a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA in accordance with the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. SEA is concerned with the protection of the environment. It is a beneficial and thorough assessment process which ensures that environmental considerations are taken on board at an early stage in the Plan preparation process, to ensure management and development takes place with minimal environmental impact.
- 4.2 SEA is an integral part of, and will be taken into account throughout the Plan process. At key stages, the public will be able to comment on the environmental assessment and all comments will be taken on board. The public will be able to see how their comments have influenced the SEA process, as SEA requires the environmental assessment to be transparent and accountable.
- 4.3 In February 2011 the Scoping Report was submitted to the Consultation Authorities to agree the Scope of the Plan and the consultation period. Comments from the Consultation Authorities have been taken into account in the preparation of the draft plan and its Strategic Environmental Report.

#### **5. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The outcomes of the management and development plan will impact on the Community Plans: Delivering Community Regeneration, Promoting Lifelong Learning and Promoting Health and Wellbeing

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The financial implications arising from the implementation of the plan will be met from departmental budgets and external funding streams.

## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There will be no personnel implications arising from the implementation of the Management and Development Plan for Dean Castle Country Park.

## **8. POLICY / LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The implementation of the Management and Development Plan will ensure compliance with the Countryside Scotland Act 1967.

## **9. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 If Dean Castle Country Park is not managed in a strategic fashion, there may be a risk of degradation of one of South West Scotland's key visitor attractions.

## **10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 10.1 There is no direct equality impact issues arising from this report

## **11. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- i) approve the draft Dean Castle Country Park Management and Development Plan for public consultation;
- ii) approve the draft Strategic Environmental Report for public consultation;
- iii) remit to the Deputy Chief Executive/Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services to implement a public consultation process in relation to these plans;
- iv) otherwise note the content of the report

Elizabeth Morton  
**Deputy Chief Executive / Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services**

AF/JG/AF  
8 June 2011

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Draft Dean Castle Country Park Management and Development Plan

Draft Strategic Environmental Report

Members requiring further information should contact Anneke Freel, Countryside Development Manager on 01563 554748

**Implementation Officer: John Griffiths, Head of Leisure Services**