



**Policy and Resources Committee:  
Tuesday, 19 November 2024**

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**Report of: Assistant Director Planning & Regulatory Services**

**Relevant Lead Member: Councillor Dowling Deputy Leader of the Council & Lead Member for Planning & Community Safety**

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**SUBJECT: ALLOCATION OF COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY FUNDING TO BEACON COUNTRY PARK FOOTPATH UPGRADES**

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Wards affected: Skelmersdale North; Up Holland;

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek authorisation to allocate strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding of £109,000 to spend on the delivery of footpath upgrades at Beacon Country Park.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

- 2.1 That the allocation of £109,000 of Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy funding to spend on the delivery of footpath upgrades at Beacon Country Park as detailed in this report is approved.

## **3.0 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Members will be aware that Beacon Country Park is the prime countryside site in the Borough, consisting of over 300 acres of countryside spread across the slopes of Ashurst Beacon between Upholland, Dalton and Skelmersdale.
- 3.2 In 2023, it was considered that future improvement to the park would be necessary and therefore the Beacon Country Park Transformation project was identified for inclusion on the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Schedule (IDS). The IDS is a database of infrastructure projects identified as being required to support the

growth of the Borough. Projects on the IDS may also be considered suitable to access Community Infrastructure Levy funding held by the Council.

- 3.3 In order to design and develop the Beacon Country Park Transformation project a master planning process is being undertaken. Public consultation carried out in summer 2023 is informing this process. The consultation showed that the demand for improved access is one of the key desires of the public.
- 3.4 The park has a network of over 3km of surfaced tracks and footpaths that allow users of all abilities to access nature. The majority this network was originally installed in 2012. Recent increases in site use caused by additional footfall and extreme weather events have accelerated the wear on the current paths and the current path network requires resurfacing and upgrading. Such works are considered to be and over and above that yet to be identified as part of the Beacon Country Park Transformation project.
- 3.5 £80,000 UK Shared Prosperity Funding was secured in late 2023 to deliver the proposed footpath upgrades in the park. The deadline for full expenditure of this funding is 31 March 2025.
- 3.6 A tender package was advertised through the Council's appropriate procurement procedures, to include resurfacing, the installation of a short section of new track and minor upgrades to ensure longevity and minimal future maintenance requirements. A map indicating the location and lengths of paths included in the tender for upgrade is provided within Appendix 1 of this report.
- 3.7 To ensure full expenditure of the UKSPF funding by 31 March 2025, it is necessary to award a tender as soon as possible to enable commencement and completion of the work in Winter 2024/25.

#### **4.0 CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 The quoted costs returned through the tender process are significantly higher than first estimated, and therefore the UKSPF funding that has already been secured will not be able to cover the full cost of the project.
- 4.2 Under procurement processes, officers will seek to assess and scrutinise the tenders. However, modification of the current tender to rationalise deliverables will be required in order to seek any revised costings.
- 4.3 It is considered that a repeated tendering exercise now with elements of the work removed will compromise the quality and quantity of the works able to be carried out. Also, it would not be feasible within the required timescales of the UKSPF spending window.
- 4.4 An application for CIL funding has therefore been submitted to the CIL/S106 Working Group for consideration, to make up the shortfall in funding based on the most current costings. This amounts to a CIL funding request of £109,000 to enhance the current funding package. The full application and breakdown of funding is provided at Appendix 1 to this report.

- 4.5 The current Governance and Expenditure Framework for CIL and S106 (The Framework) as revised and ratified by Council in October 2024 permits that recommendations on CIL funding expenditure on projects requiring over £100,000 of CIL funding may be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration and authorisation at any time.
- 4.6 The Framework does not require projects to undergo further public consultation if they have already been suitably publicised and consulted upon. Projects must however still be assessed against the CIL criteria as to their suitability and the CIL/S106 Officer Working Group consulted.

## **5.0 CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 The Framework requires that the project is subject to consultation by the CIL/S106 Officer Working Group. This Group met on the 1 October 2024 and the project was presented and discussed at Item 13 of the agenda.
- 5.2 The group unanimously agreed that the proposal was a suitable type of infrastructure and that it met with the CIL funding criteria. No objections were received, and the group resolved that the proposal should be supported.
- 5.3 It is considered that suitable public consultation was carried out in Summer 2023, the method and results of which are made available at Appendix 2 of this report.

## **6.0 ASSESSMENT**

- 6.1 Creation of new and upgrades to existing footpaths within Beacon Country Park are identified as strategic infrastructure in the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Statement (IDS) as strategic footpaths and strategic green infrastructure.
- 6.2 A need for this project has arisen due to new development in Skelmersdale and surrounds which has led increased footfall and visitor numbers to Beacon Country Park.
- 6.3 If funding is awarded, it is estimated that the project may commence Winter 2024, estimated for completion within 6 weeks. Costings have already been identified through the tendering process and UKSPF funding has already been secured. No other funding sources are available.
- 6.4 The project will improve access to greenspace for a range of users with mobility issues - wheelchair users, pram pushers, people with impaired vision and walkers with a limited range will benefit. The project will also support and enhance the use of the 2 new on site all-terrain mobility scooters acquired and a changing places toilet that has recently been installed. There are associated health benefits (physical and mental) that arise from improved access to nature. Improvements will also bring increased use of the park and encourage longer stays that will help generate income for the Council run café within the park.

- 6.5 It is considered that the benefits associated with this project will assist in achieving the Council's Corporate Priorities and those objectives contained within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018 – 2021 and Leisure Strategy 2015 – 2025 that specifically seeks to utilise CIL funding to continue the development and improvement of the Council's parks and open spaces.
- 6.6 The Council is the sole owner of Beacon Country Park and future maintenance and management of the park, and the works delivered by this project will be by the Ranger Service within current resources. It is considered that the projects work will have no barriers to delivery or sustainability in this regard.
- 6.7 Failure to secure CIL funding will result in the non-delivery of this project in its current form and the UKSPF funding already secured will not be able to be expended by the current spending deadline.

## **7.0 NEXT STEPS**

- 7.1 If the allocation of funding for this project is authorised, this will be subject to a legal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to ensure that CIL funding amount is appropriately spent and that any underspend is returned to the Strategic CIL funding pot accordingly.
- 7.2 For clarity and transparency, as the UKSPF funding element must be spent in full by 31 March 2025, there will be a requirement to ensure that this portion of the funding must be spent first before any CIL funding.

## **8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The upgrade to footpaths will significantly improve access in and around Beacon Country Park and promote walking and cycling which will have positive sustainability implications for Skelmersdale, Up Holland and the wider Borough and visitors to this flagship country park. The project will encourage a more active and healthier lifestyle and access to nature resulting in improvements improved physical and mental health and overall wellbeing of the users of the park.
- 8.2 The allocation of funding to green infrastructure assets such as footpath improvements will *'encourage, enable and promote active travel choices such as walking and cycling'* and *'preserve, maintain and promote the use of Council-owned green space across the Borough'* which are key objectives of the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2030.

## **9.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The proposal will be funded through Community Infrastructure Levy Strategic funding and UKSPF, as outlined at Sections 3 and 4 of this report.

## **10.0 RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 10.1 Without the additional CIL funding sought, the project will not be able to be delivered. The UKSPF funding already allocated has a deadline for expenditure of 31 March 2025.
- 10.2 The legal MOU will secure the use of the funding on the project and should the project fail to be delivered the Council will be able to seek recovery of the funding amount.

## **11.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 The proposal will promote health and wellbeing by providing an opportunity to increase access to open space and nature which is proven to improve both mental and physical health.

### **Background Documents**

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders, therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report.

### **Appendices**

1. *Beacon Country Park Footpath Upgrades – CIL Bid Application Form*
2. *Beacon Country Park – Public Consultation Results*
3. *Equality Impact Assessment*