

Report subject	Hengistbury Head Visitor Centre Lottery funding
Meeting date	30 October 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	Hengistbury Head visitor centre was opened in 2014 using significant funds from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. 10 years on and a visitor centre business resilience and improvement bid for further funding of £203,000 has been successful.
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>£203,000 of external grant funds from the National Lottery Heritage Fund is accepted and used as part of a £251,000 project with the balance to be met from Heathland Mitigation funding.</p>
Reason for recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers against the Corporate Strategy for people and nature, as well as supporting the Heathland Mitigation SPD and priorities within the Green Infrastructure Strategy. • Secures important external grant funding • Match funding is being provided from existing capital funds, no revenue match funding is required • Supports the business development and resilience of the centre, with an aim of increasing income generation and reducing reliance on revenue funds • Provides funding to explore and test new business models as well as key improvements such as signage and increasing footfall to the centre • Enhances the reputation of the centre as a nationally and regionally important for both archaeology and for high quality access to nature

Portfolio Holder(s):	Andy Hadley, Portfolio Holder for the Environment
Corporate Director	Glynn Barton
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Wards	East Southbourne & Tuckton;
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. Post-covid the Hengistbury Head Visitor Centre (HHVC) has been re-establishing its base of operation, securing its loyal and superb volunteer base, without which it could not operate, as well as creating a stable financial footing to ensure the centre is open 364 days per year.
2. The progression of a National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) bid is built on how to make the centre operations more sustainable, increase income generation through diverse opportunities whilst retaining its status and current high-quality offer.
3. This project is therefore well considered in enabling the centre to support itself, reduce revenue burden and grow as a regionally important museum and cultural attraction.
4. The development of the centre is multi-faceted, using the NLHF funds as the main driver. However, long-term partnership working is already in place with Bournemouth University (Archaeology and Anthropology Department) and statutory bodies of Historic England and Natural England, where match funding has been approved.
5. Positively, since 2014, BCP Council (and The Parks Foundation) were a successful cohort in Rethinking Parks 1 and 2, followed by pioneering work (2019-2022) with the Future Parks Accelerator and National Trust in creating sustainable parks fit for the 21st century. We wish to use this learning to build resilience into the visitor centre business, deliver 'organisational sustainability' through improved commercial capabilities, invest in new skills and increased capacity to drive new revenue opportunities.
6. Hengistbury Head is one of the most visited spaces in BCP and harnessing the high footfall into the visitor centre is essential in future business planning. The funding from NLHF enables an assessment of the opportunities with focused capital investment to enhance trading and income generation, while retaining the ethos and spirit of place.
7. A team of approximately 160 volunteers already support the shop, museum and outside spaces, enabling a relatively small team to manage the centre. Alongside this, other project funding has secured improvements such as the Iron Age roundhouse, which has also significant numbers of volunteers.
8. The project includes the following main elements that will support new income generation:

- a. A new catering offer to supplement the existing retail offer – which currently attracts circa 130,000 visitors annually.
 - b. The opening of our Iron Age Village – Living in the Round NLHF Project – to paying schools and the public.
 - c. The instigation of 'Skyscape Archaeology' paid events for schools and the public (understanding how our prehistoric ancestors at Hengistbury Head conceived the world and visible universe and their place in it); and for inspirational journeys in the natural environment, prehistoric landscapes and promoting our local dark skies initiative.
 - d. The installation of an outdoor 'covered' classroom in our Visitor Centre courtyard to cater for additional new activities other than the above; for example, paid school visits and public events, nature studies, local heritage, arts/crafts.
9. Uplifting the directional/welcome signage at 12 key entrances to Hengistbury Head; to increase the footfall/spend at the Visitor Centre - putting the Visitor Centre at the heart of a new 'Greenspace Economy' by linking it to a new 10km Coastal Park Nature Park and proposed Stour Valley Park.
 10. Renewal and upgrading of interactive displays in the exhibition which have been running for 10 years
 - a. We have 160 volunteers currently and we will be delivering new skills for volunteers and staff alike to ensure that the activities continue to thrive and the heritage is protected.
 - b. In 2024/25 we hope to be awarded Museum Accreditation Status which will additionally ensure that the benefits of this project are retained and enhanced.

Options Appraisal

11. The application to the NLHF was low-risk as there are no specific match-funding requirements. The application is still significant in terms of officer resource and evidencing the need and 'why now' for the bid but has been passed as successful. Cabinet approval of the recommendation allows it to proceed and accept 'permission to start'.
12. Not proceeding with the project and utilising the awarded funds would harm the reputation of the Council with NLHF and potential future bids. BCP Council has a pipeline of successful projects funded by NLHF and a very positive reputation with them.

Summary of financial implications

13. Permission was sought from Financial Services to submit the funding bid.
14. This project brings forward a funded opportunity to consider the centre's future operation, resilience and seek business growth and increase income streams.
15. NLHF grant will resource existing members of the team and support revenue budgets
16. Project funding is comprised of:

NLHF grant	£203,000
Heathland Mitigation Funding:	
• Transfer available budget from an existing Heathland Mitigation project.	£18,000
• New allocation, see Appendix 2	£30,000
Total project value	£251,000

Summary of legal implications

17. The Visitor centre and surrounding land is wholly owned and managed by BCP Council.
18. Owing to its rich archaeological heritage, permission for any breaking of the ground is required from Heritage England and requires Secretary of State approval. A programme of works and management plan covers all day-to-day activity and relevant elements of this project have received support.
19. Natural England support the use of HHVC in mitigating harm to heathlands in the positive education and information it shares with the public. The ecology of the site, usage by high volumes of the public, including dog walkers, is carefully managed.
20. All relevant procurement requirements, including the Council's Financial Regulations and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Procurement Act 2023 (where applicable) for any works (or other arrangements) that are to be carried out by third parties under contract will be complied with.

Summary of human resources implications

21. The grant will fund an existing member of staff for two years, as well as recruitment of new staff to support trading and opportunities for the lifetime of the project.

Summary of sustainability impact

22. The Hengistbury Head Visitor Centre has received more than 1 million visitors in the past 10 years – offering them face to face engagement and learning related to the ecological emergency, climate change, coastal erosion, pollution, flooding and green energy. It is a cost-effective gateway for people to learn about the intangible issues related to sustainability as part of their visit to the countryside. More than 60 schools visit the nature reserve each year and the visitor centre adds value to there learning about sustainability
23. The Visitor centre has a green roof and solar panels and the project delivery from this grant award will allow further consideration of the sustainability of the centre.

Summary of public health implications

24. HHVC and the surrounding landscape, including Christchurch harbour and significant access to beach front, Mudeford Spit and adjacent areas, provide immeasurable benefit for public health and well-being. With c. 1.25m visitors annually, the visitor centre provides a vital point of contact with BCP staff and volunteers, access to a high-quality museum, courtyard, wildlife garden, seating and relaxation space, art and heritage displays and a place to get light refreshments.
25. At the heart of this provision is access for people to engage with nature across 162 Hectares of Local Nature Reserve where people can walk dogs, enjoy access to one

of the most wildlife-rich spaces in the country, with stunning views and access to highly designated spaces for archaeology and ecology.

26. People's health and well-being are massively improved by accessing Hengistbury Head and the visitor centre's enhanced offer through this project will further develop and add greater opportunities to improve this. Demonstrating physical and mental health benefits are specifically linked to the funding from the Heritage Lottery Grant

Summary of equality implications

27. An EIA conversation/screening document has been completed, it's summary comments are:
28. The Equality implications of the Heritage Lottery funded 'Building Resilience and Sustainability into the Hengistbury Head Visitor Centre' will be broad and very positive. Above all the increased revenues will ensure that the Visitor Centre remains open and thriving whilst delivering access to the countryside of the highest order. It is a good opportunity to use the grant funding to solidify our credentials in delivering Key BCP Strategies including:
 - High quality access to the countryside for all ages and abilities
 - Volunteering and community cohesion
 - Health and well-being objectives
 - Biodiversity improvements
 - Mitigating for climate change
 - Reducing light pollution
 - New job opportunities
 - Stimulating the local economy
 - Making BCP a better and more vibrant place to live, work and play.

Summary of risk assessment

29. No significant risks identified in the project as there is feasibility work and research to develop the concepts and ideas in the bid.
30. A risk register has been created.
31. A project board will manage the delivery.
32. Statutory bodies and partners are well engaged and will continue to support the centre's development.
33. Ward Councillors and Environment Portfolio Holder are aware of the project and have contributed to the overall process of acquiring the grant.

Background papers

Appendices

1. EIA screening tool
2. Natural England letter of support
3. Grant fund application form.