

## **CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

### **Cabinet Briefing Note**

**Date of Meeting: December 17<sup>th</sup> 2013**

**Briefing Paper of: Brendan Flanagan**

**Subject / Title: Tatton Vision: BeWILDerwood update**

**Portfolio Holder: Cllr Les Gilbert**

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 This paper provides a progress update on 'BeWILDerwood', a proposal that is part of the wider 'Tatton Vision' that contributes to Outcome 2, (Cheshire East has a strong and resilient economy) and specifically delivers the following service objectives:

- ***Deliver sustainability for Tatton Park for future Generations through revenue generation, increased visitor numbers and investment in the green and built infrastructure***
- ***Promote inward investment to deliver jobs growth, support business expansion and encourage visitor spend through support for visitor attractions and wider Visitor Economy businesses and contribution to place marketing objectives.***

1.2 To put the 'vision' in context:

- By 2017 the aim is to substantially develop the visitor experience through targeted investment in Tatton Park, generate new sources of income and in doing so, both reduce the need for a public subsidy and generate income that will help to maintain and conserve the estate in the longer term.
- Since 2010/11 Tatton Park has already reduced the contribution to its operating budget by nearly 50% while growing the business, improving turnover over the same period by 26% to £3.8m.
- Bewilderwood was initially approved by Cabinet on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2011 as a cornerstone of this approach, growing the business further, helping Tatton to achieve 1m visitors and achieving the reduction or removal of the budget requirement.

1.3 As part of developing a 'vision' for Tatton Park, the opportunity to develop an attraction for the family market in a woodland setting on the Estate was identified. BeWILDerwood offers an attraction that is in line with the Tatton brand, would meet National Trust requirements, is suitable for the site and provides a "bespoke" offer which it is believed would address market potential. The Council received external advice on the commercial viability of the proposal from PWC along with other legal and commercial advice before progressing the project. There are no direct dependencies between the Bewilderwood project and other projects being developed or considered as part of the Tatton Vision programme.

**2. BeWILDerwood**

2.1 BeWILDerwood is an outdoor attraction in a wild wood setting based on adventures from books written by Tom Blofeld, whose family own the estate in the Norfolk Broads on which BeWILDerwood has been built. The award winning attraction appeals to families with toddlers to teenagers. It is strongly based on the principles of sustainability and sensitive management of the natural habitat. The bespoke nature of the BeWILDerwood proposition and potential of the resultant business to underpin future conservation and management at Tatton Park has been endorsed by The National Trust, whose permission, as owners of the site, is required for the project to progress.

**3. Business case**

**4. Key risks and benefits**

Risks	Benefits
Planning issues in relation to development in an historic setting. Potential risk of 'codifying' objections to other development at Tatton.	Contribution to economic sustainability of Tatton Park through the 'Tatton Vision'
If BewilderWood does not happen: There would be an ongoing financial impact	Estimated contribution to the local economy: +£7.6 million pa when open

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on the Tatton Vision targets.  Attraction may go elsewhere in the region and be competition to Tatton.	Contribution to visitor economy growth.  Job creation – c.76 FTE's
Need to review the business plan and financial model prior to progressing (subject to planning). Need to mitigate any financial and reputational risks.	Opening up parts of the heritage asset currently not accessible to the public
Delays in a planning decision leading to slippage of the project by another year	Increased income contribution used to offset the existing conservation deficit
Subject to planning: Potential for call-in, judicial review, farmland possession, completion of negotiation, agreement of NT licence to sub-let etc all required and could cause further delays	A bespoke attraction for Tatton Park over which CEC retains control as lender.

## 5. Current position

5.1 Following public consultation, revisions to the planning application have been made by BeWILDerwood and await the final piece of the jigsaw in terms of an additional report on quantifying the conservation mitigation to create public benefit. A 5 year programme of work to address the conservation deficit at Tatton will be used to gauge whether this benefit outweighs any negative planning issues and would provide a basis of the sub-lease agreement from the National Trust to Cheshire East if planning permission is given. If Planning permission is approved, the business case will be reviewed and considered again through the Council's capital approval procedures before finalising agreements with BeWILDerwood. This will provide the opportunity to refresh and review the detailed business case taking account of any changes to parameters from the intervening years.

## 6. Conclusion

6.1 If approved, the scheme requires a 10-12 month build. Any further delays beyond determination in January/February 2014 would impact on the 2015 target for opening if the application is successful, resulting in slippage of the financial benefits and re-profiling of the associated budget plans for the Tatton Vision. Subject to approval, the business case will be reviewed to ensure due diligence and if still valid, the negotiated terms would be concluded before the project is progressed.

6.2 If unsuccessful, the outcome would have a direct impact on the benefits profile for the Tatton Vision necessitating a significant revision of the original financial plan. This would leave a £225,000 shortfall that would not be funded through the Tatton Vision, requiring ongoing revenue support for Tatton by the Council, though significantly reduced from the c.£1m budget that existed before the 'Tatton vision' programme was adopted and investment in the product commenced. It would also mean that the conservation deficit would not be addressed from the additional income generated over the lifetime of the project.

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6.3 Bewilderwood is an important element of delivering the original 'Tatton Vision' programme. Without it, delivery of the Tatton Vision programme benefits would continue to a point, with incremental improvements continuing through investment in the rest of the programme alongside a corresponding need to invest to maintain the success already achieved. However, without a significant new attraction that meets the approval of the National Trust and is in keeping with the spirit of Tatton Park, the full goal of building a sustainable business model to underpin the conservation and management of the historic estate while eliminating the need for public funding may not be fully realised.

**7. Key question**

**Subject to planning approval, do Members agree the principle of progressing negotiations with Bewilderwood as a priority project in delivering the 'Tatton Vision' in line with the original Cabinet decision, in order to negotiate the most advantageous terms for the Council and delivery of the full 'Tatton vision' benefits.**