

REPORT TO:		Council	
DATE:		07 July 2016	
PORTFOLIO:		Cllr Miles Parkinson, Leader	
REPORT AUTHOR:		Craig Haraben (Acting Head of Community Services)	
TITLE OF REPORT:		Rhyddings Park Heritage Lottery Bid	
EXEMPT REPORT (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A)	No	Not applicable	
KEY DECISION:	No	If yes, date of publication:	

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to update members on the situation regarding the Heritage Lottery Bid for Rhyddings Park in Oswaldtwistle and to provide members with information via an arboricultural consultant's report about the Sequoia Tree.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The contents of this report be noted
2. Members decide whether to make recommendations to Cabinet in respect of the landscape plan agreed by the National Heritage Lottery Board and, specifically whether they wish to recommend that the plan is changed in anyway in respect of the sequoia tree

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2012 the Parks & Cemetery Service started working with the Friends of (FO) Rhyddings Park to explore the possibility of applying for Parks for People funding administered via the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).
- 3.2 The outcome of a consultation with the FO Rhyddings Park showed that local residents would like to see the refurbishment of park facilities, the re-building of the coach house to provide a community base within the Park and the walled garden area refurbished and brought back into use as a community food growing area. This way forward was also supported by the local schools and GP surgeries that returned the consultation document.
- 3.3 In addition to the refurbishment work, there was a desire to have staff in place for two years after construction work had been completed to encourage participation and develop the audience of people who use the Park, including engaging with hard to reach groups. After examining the criteria for Parks for People funding it was clear that funding would be available for both the capital and revenue elements of this project.

- 3.4 Cabinet agreed on 3 December 2013 for the Council to work towards securing Parks for People funding via the HLF for Rhyddings Park in Oswaldtwistle.
- 3.5 In early January 2016 the Council received the fantastic news that the Parks for People funding bid relating to Rhyddings Park in Oswaldtwistle had been successful. The project had been allocated £1,461,900 for the delivery stage of the project by the HLF. The total value of the project, including in-kind funding and volunteer work, is £2 Million.
- 3.6 The funding secured from the HLF will allow for:
- The restoration of the Coach House as a community venue;
 - Returning the derelict walled garden to its traditional use of food growing, including the construction of Victorian style greenhouses;
 - Working with Bootstrap Enterprises to develop a social enterprise based in the restored former Coach House, generating income for the Park from meeting rooms, a cafe and a training kitchen;
 - Creating a performance space area and develop a programme of community arts working with Hyndburn Arts at the nearby Civic Arts Theatre;
 - Establishing a training and volunteering programme linked to park management, community engagement and health promotion;
 - Providing education resources and opportunities for local schools;
 - Developing programmes of guided walks and family fun activities.
- 3.7 In addition to the funding to enable the park refurbishment, revenue funding will also be made available to employ two HLF funded staff to facilitate audience development and improved horticultural skills within Rhyddings Park.
- 3.8 In late January 2016 a petition was started on Facebook due to some local opposition to one element of the parks refurbishment, the removal of the sequoia tree to facilitate the landscape improvements to the Rhyddings Street entrance of the Park.
- 3.9 It was agreed that an independent arboricultural consultant's report (refer to Appendix) would be commissioned in respect of the tree and the issue opened up for debate at Council.

4. THE HISTORY OF THE PARK

- 4.1 The history of Rhyddings Park dates back to 1853, when the Park was originally the grounds of a private house for the Watson family, who were local mill owners during the industrial revolution.
- 4.2 Robert Watson, who built what was known as Rhyddings Hall and gardens in 1853, was also responsible for building many houses of various scales in the area, for workers, foreman and managers of his mills. The majority of these properties still exist today and provide an opportunity to interpret the park, former mills and mill workers housing in a co-ordinated way.
- 4.3 In 1909 Rhyddings Hall and its gardens were opened as a public park and handed over to the local authority. The overall layout of the landscape has changed very little since its formation in the mid 1800's. The sites links to the social, built and landscape history of the area are some of the reasons Heritage Lottery Funding was sought for the refurbishment of this park
- 4.4 The sequoia is a relatively recent addition to the landscape, being planted in 1973, and has no direct link to the history of the site as a private residence and garden from 1853 or to the sites inception as a public park in 1909.

5. HERITAGE OF THE PARK IN CONTEXT OF THE PARKS FOR PEOPLE HLF SUBMISSION AND PROPOSED LANDSCAPE DESIGN PLAN

- 5.1 The overall design approved by the National Heritage Lottery Board has been formulated with the social, built and landscape history of the site in mind.
- 5.2 The historic designed landscapes projects team from English Heritage and Lancashire County Councils Specialist Landscape Advisor considers Rhyddings Park to be of regional/county importance for its surviving "Victorian villa garden" layout and features which have been incorporated into the public park. The County Landscape Specialist Advisor rates Rhyddings as an example of an historic urban park in the first rank of Hyndburn's historic parks. He noted that comparisons of the 1893 OS map with the current OS map shows the vast majority of the original landscape remains. It is of particular interest because the Park itself remains within its historic urban landscape.
- 5.3 Rhyddings Park also helps showcase the effect of the rapid boom and bust of the industrial revolution and its effect on the urban landscape, historic landscapes which define towns such as Oswaldtwistle today. The Spinning Jenny was developed in Oswaldtwistle and first used in the nearby Stonebridge Mill, itself later owned by the Watson family that built Rhyddings.
- 5.4 Rhyddings Park occupies an elevated position on a NW facing slope over-looking the Rhyddings Conservation Area and commands panoramic views over the town of Oswaldtwistle and surrounding moors. The Conservation Area Plan notes both the importance of this position and of the significant view down Rhyddings Street towards the mill (see figure 1)

Figure 1



- 5.5 This view is currently blocked by the sequoia and, as such, is not available. This view, noted for its importance in the conservation area plan, will be lost indefinitely should the tree stay in its current location. The proposed landscape design approved by the National Heritage Lottery Board allows for this important vista to be re-instated and the Oswaldtwistle market cross to once again become an important focal point and feature of Oswaldtwistle.
- 5.6 The Oswaldtwistle market cross is currently located inside the park, but cannot be seen from Rhyddings Street due to the location and size of the sequoia. The market cross was erected in 1910 as a park feature, the year after Rhyddings was opened as a new public park. It is made of sandstone with a cruciform head detailing Celtic inspiration. It is located on the axis between the old Hall and Rhyddings Street and it is proposed to relocate the cross to become a focal point for visitors to the Park coming from Oswaldtwistle using the Rhyddings Street entrance to the Park.

6. ARBORICULTURAL CONSULTANTS REPORT

- 6.1 An independent arboricultural consultant has examined the tree and written the report attached to this paper (refer to Appendix). The report sets out a series of facts and conclusions about the tree.
- 6.2 The findings of the report can be summarised as follows:
- (i) The tree is in good health for its age and species
 - (ii) The tree is currently 50 feet tall.
 - (iii) If left in situ the tree can be expected to grow to 78 ft. in 25 years, 106 ft. in 50 years and 161 ft. in 100 years.
 - (iv) Due to its size the tree cannot be transplanted and moved to another location
 - (v) The large, lowest branch (as shown on photograph 2 of the arboricultural consultant's report) on the tree should be removed because due to its size and weight, and the presence of the occluded wound at its base there is a probability of it failing.
 - (vi) Due to its location in a parkland setting, there is the possibility of the tree being infected with honey fungus.
 - (vii) An amendment to the proposed landscape design approved by the National Heritage Lottery Board would be required to allow the tree to remain in situ. This would require a redesign of the plan and any additional costs to be quantified.
 - (viii) The risk of lightning strike and the levels of anxiety would increase if the tree was allowed to reach maturity (160 feet approx.), as it is situated in an urban, residential context.
 - (ix) Should the tree be removed in line with the proposed landscape plan, a replacement tree of approximately 33 ft. in height (two thirds of the size of the tree currently) could be purchased and planted in a more appropriate location in the Park.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Delivering the landscape plan agreed by the National Heritage Lottery Board (including the removal of the tree) would incur no additional project costs
- 7.2 Removing the tree and replanting a replacement tree in a more appropriate location in the park (as outlined in the arboricultural consultant's report) would require an additional £8,250 of funding to be found

- 7.3 Requiring the landscape plan agreed by the National Heritage Lottery Board to be amended to leave the tree in its current location would require the Council to make a number of financial provisions for the short, medium and long term.

Short term – funding would need to be made available to cover any additional costs (over and above those budgeted for in the project) borne by the need to build a retaining wall capable of supporting the weight of a tree expected to ultimately grow to 160 feet. Initial estimates suggest additional funding of approximately £10,000 would be needed.

Medium term – The Council will need to set aside funding for any future inspections and tree work necessary to keep a large tree located at the entrance to a park, adjacent to residential properties in a safe condition. The Council will also need to set side contingency funding should the tree become infected with disease and require remedial work or removal. Financial provision will need to be made to repair the retaining wall should the weight of the tree as it grows lead to ground movement and subsidence.

Long term – the Council will need to set aside funding for any future inspections and tree work necessary to keep a large tree located at the entrance to a park, adjacent to residential properties in a safe condition. The Council will also need to set side contingency funding should the tree become infected with disease and require remedial work or removal. Financial provision will need to be made to repair the retaining wall should the weight of the tree as it nears maturity lead to ground movement and subsidence.

8. IMPLICATIONS

Financial implications (including any future financial commitments for the Council)	See section 7
Legal and human rights implications	The Council has a duty under the Occupiers Liability Act and Health & Safety at Work Act to ensure its green spaces are safe for visitors and staff.
Assessment of risk	<p>Enacting the original plan agreed by the National Heritage Lottery Board removes all future risks associated with the sequoia.</p> <p>Enacting the original plan agreed by the National Heritage Lottery Board and replanting a replacement sequoia in a more appropriate location in the park reduces the risks associated with a tree of this type. The proposed location for the replacement tree would see less pedestrian traffic in close proximity to and removes the risk of damaging adjacent properties.</p> <p>Amending the plan agreed by the National Heritage Lottery Board to leave the tree in situ, would in the short term leave the risk associated with this tree at its current level. In the long term due to the fact the sequoia will become a very large tree (the largest in the area) the risk associated with managing a tree like this in its current location will increase with size, due to its proximity to footpaths, passing pedestrian and vehicular traffic and its proximity to properties on Park Lane and Rhyddings Street.</p>

Equality and diversity implications	Not applicable
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9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985:

List of Background Papers

- 9.1 Cabinet report dated 8 June 2016 titled Rhyddings Park Heritage Lottery Bid
- 9.2 Cabinet report dated 3 December 2013 titled Rhyddings Park Heritage Lottery Bid

10. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

The report does not contain exempt information under the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A and all information can be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.