

Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Dorset County Council



Date of Meeting	26 March 2018
Officer	Dr Ken Buchan (Coast and Countryside Service Manager)
Subject of Report	The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and Dorset County Council's 'green assets'
Executive Summary	<p>The Government published its 25 Year Environment Plan in January 2018 to deliver on the ambition to be 'the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it'. The plans set out a wide-ranging and ambitious agenda for cross-government action, which has similarly wide-ranging implications for local authorities and their partners. This paper:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) summarises the key implications for Dorset County Council arising from the 25 Year Environment Plan;(ii) highlights some of the opportunities and issues arising from the Plan;(iii) presents the interim conclusions of a review of DCC 'green assets' conducted in this context.
Impact Assessment:	<p>Equalities Impact Assessment:</p> <p>There are no equalities impacts arising from this paper though the 25 Year Plan sets an ambition to help people from all backgrounds engage with the environment which could be supported by local action.</p> <p>Use of Evidence:</p> <p>The paper is informed by the evidence set out in the 25 Year Plan, supplemented by local data.</p>

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	<p>Budget:</p> <p>There are no immediate budget implications arising from the recommendations though the long-term financial impact of failure to manage environmental risks, and the opportunities for developing economic benefits to Dorset and financial benefits for the County Council, are significant. It was recently estimated that Dorset's environmental economy is worth between £0.9 billion - £2.5 billion per annum.</p> <hr/> <p>Risk Assessment:</p> <p>Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the County Council's approved risk management methodology, the level of risk has been identified as:</p> <p>Current Risk: LOW Residual Risk: LOW</p> <hr/> <p>Other Implications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property and Assets: DCC green assets have been reviewed in the context of this paper • Physical activity: DCC green assets provide opportunities for physical activity to support public health and wellbeing
<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>That the Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the implications of the 25 Year Environment Plan across the full range of local authority services and County Council functions as summarised in section 2. 2. Consider the opportunities arising from the 25 Year Environment Plan in section 2 and support officers in pursuing these. 3. Comment on and endorse the interim conclusions of the 'green asset' review summarised in Appendix 1.
<p>Reason for Recommendation</p>	<p>To support delivery of corporate outcomes, particularly in respect of 'healthy' and 'prosperous', associated with maintenance and enhancement of Dorset's environment.</p>
<p>Appendices</p>	<p>Appendix 1: 'Green asset' review.</p>
<p>Background Papers</p>	<p>HM Government 25 Year Environment Plan: A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment</p> <p>Dorset Local Nature Partnership: A Natural Place for Business, a Natural Capital Investment Strategy for Dorset</p>
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1. Background

- 1.1 The Government published its 25 Year Environment Plan in January 2018 to deliver on the ambition to be 'the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it'. The plan sets out an ambitious agenda for cross-government action, which has similarly broad implications for local authorities and their partners.
- 1.2 The Government has emphasised the complementary relationship between its Industrial Strategy, published in November 2017, and the 25 Year Environment Plan. The concepts of 'clean growth' and environmental protection are central to the Industrial strategy and the 25 Year Plan is equally designed to boost productivity by enhancing 'natural capital' – defined as the sum of the land, air, water, minerals, seas, soil and ecosystems that support life and deliver value to communities as 'an essential basis for economic growth and productivity over the long term'. In doing so the Plan seeks to move beyond the dated notion of 'economy' and 'environment' always being in conflict and recognising that future economic development depends ultimately on a healthy environment and sustainable use of natural resources.

2. Summary of 25 Year Plan and implications for DCC

- 2.1 Table 1 summarises the high-level goals of the 25 year Plan and shows how these are relevant to all four of DCC corporate outcomes; Safe, Healthy, Independent and Prosperous.

Table 1: high level goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan and links to DCC outcomes

25 Year Plan goals	DCC outcomes
Clean Air	'Healthy' (air quality as a public health issue)
Clean and plentiful water	'Healthy' (water quality/availability as a public health issue)
Thriving wildlife	'Healthy' (public health and wellbeing issue); 'Prosperous' (fisheries, forestry and agriculture sectors)
Reduced risk of environmental hazards	'Safe' (public safety); 'Prosperous' (development constraints/ opportunities)
Sustainable use of natural resources	'Prosperous' (resource efficiency/cost issues, low carbon economy, food and drink)
Enhancing natural heritage and improving engagement with the natural environment	'Healthy' (public health and wellbeing issue), 'Independent' (life skills and experience)
Climate change mitigation and adaptation	Safe, Healthy, Independent, Prosperous (cross-cutting impacts especially for vulnerable groups)
Minimising waste	Healthy (public health issue), Prosperous (economic impacts of resource use)
Managing exposure to chemicals	'Healthy' (public health issues)
Enhancing biosecurity	'Safe' (public safety issues)

- 2.2 In the wake of publication of the 25 Year Environment Plan the Local Government Association highlighted in Parliamentary Briefings the key implications for local authorities as relating to waste, flood risk and air quality. The LGA said it supported the Government's ambition to eliminate avoidable plastic waste, highlighted recycling food waste as a key priority, called for devolution of flood risk funding to councils and argued that plans to improve air quality needed to be adequately funded. The implications for communities and local authorities arising from the Plan are, however, significantly broader than the issues highlighted by the LGA.
- 2.3 Table 2 summarises some of the specific policy commitments arising from the Plan which are most relevant to local government functions across Dorset, and highlights the implications, issues and opportunities which these may raise.

Table 2: specific policy commitments and implications for local government

25 Year Plan Policy Commitment	Implications for local government
<i>Chapter 1: using and managing land sustainably</i>	
<p>Embedding an 'environmental net gain' principle for development, including housing and infrastructure plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger new standards for green infrastructure • Expansion of protected species licensing to improve protection whilst streamlining process • High environmental standards for new development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher expectation that spatial planning policies and decisions will deliver 'net environmental gain' (not just avoiding damage), and promote green infrastructure, strengthening the existing National Planning Policy Framework • Suggests that approaches pioneered in Dorset (e.g. Dorset Biodiversity Protocol) will align well with new emphasis • New focus on sustainable construction
<p>Improving how we manage and incentivise land management through a new environmental land management system, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with farmers to use fertilisers efficiently • Protecting crops while reducing the environmental impact of pesticides • Action to improve the health of soils on which food production ultimately depends • New woodland creation grant scheme to deliver environmental and carbon goals and increase 'home grown' timber production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental shift in emphasis of financial support for agriculture from food production to delivery of public goods, principally environmental enhancement • Significant implications (potentially very positive) for rural economy, agriculture as a sector and the County Farms Estate • Opportunities for new income streams for good management of public land (already a significant income generator for DCC through agri-environment schemes on countryside sites) • Further restrictions on neonicotinoid pesticides would support efforts of local authorities and communities to boost numbers of beneficial pollinating insects
<p>Reducing risks from flooding and coastal erosion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updating the national flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy in 2019 • Review of funding needs beyond 2021 to attract non-public sector investment • Measures to increase flood resilience and avoid flood risk through planning system • Expanding the use of 'natural flood management systems' • Increase the uptake of sustainable drainage systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased emphasis on climate resilience and adaptation in spatial planning • Potential policy changes in National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance to reinforce this • Further changes to arrangements for managing surface water flooding and the outcomes delivered by Lead Local Flood Authorities (a Dorset Highways function) • Greater emphasis on supporting communities and individuals to make their own properties more flood resilient where flood risk can not be eliminated
<i>Chapter 2: Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a Nature Recovery Network to complement and connect our best wildlife sites • Action to restore the loss of marine biodiversity • Restoration of 75% of the 1 million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites • Creation/restoration of 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site network • Recovery of threatened, iconic or economically important species • Reduced impact of plant/animal disease • Tackling of invasive non-native species and improved biosecurity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of ambitions will require cross-boundary, partnership working – Dorset is well placed to lead in this given strong track record of partnership working and delivery • Potentially greater role for councils to manage non-native, invasive species (we already have some responsibility for this) • Implications for arboriculture services arising from the Tree Health Resilience Plan and biosecurity policies designed to tackle disease (e.g. Ash Dieback) • Implications for trading standards in relation to biosecurity measures

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new Tree Health Resilience Plan in 2018 	
<p>25 Year Plan Policy Commitment</p>	<p>Implications for local government</p>
<p>Respecting nature in how we use water by reforming water abstraction, increasing water supply and incentivising water efficiency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce abstraction of water from rivers and groundwater • reach or exceed objectives for rivers, lakes, coastal and ground waters that are specially protected • reduce leakage by at least an average of 15% by 2025 • minimise harmful bacteria in designated bathing waters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implications for strategic planning, the pattern and nature of future development to take account of water availability, water quality, and the need for water efficiency and/or water resource development • Consultation in 2018 on a National Policy Statement for water resources • Tougher approach to abstraction licensing could have implications for sectors like agriculture as well as communities generally, requiring innovative approaches to make better use of water as a scarce resource
<p><i>Chapter 3: Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing</i></p>	
<p>Helping people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces including through mental health services, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging children to be close to nature, in and out of school, with particular focus on disadvantaged groups • Helping primary schools create nature-friendly grounds • Considering how environmental therapies could be delivered through mental health services • Ensuring high quality, accessible, natural spaces close to where people live • Development of a 'Natural Environment for Health and Wellbeing' programme to support local authorities, health partners, teachers and planners to promote the environment as a pathway to health and wellbeing • A programme to support schools and Pupil Referral Units in most disadvantaged areas get pupils in contact with nature/the environment • Support for a national expansion of care farming, trebling the number of places to 1.3m per years for children and adults in England 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong emphasis on improving access to the natural environment as a preventative measure for a range of physical/mental health benefits – Dorset already pioneering this approach via the 'Healthy Places' workstream of the Dorset Sustainability Transformation Plan • Emphasises need for continued close working between Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board, Local Nature Partnership and Local Enterprise Partnership members to pursue these opportunities • Opportunities for landscape services to deliver public realm/school improvements • Implications/opportunities for outdoor education services • Implications for provision of services to vulnerable adults and children, and opportunities for these to make greater use of greenspace assets to deliver benefits to these and other service users • Opportunities to expand care farming initiatives (already operated at Holtwood Community Farm, part of the County Farms estate) with implications for adult care services and County Farms
<p>Greening towns and cities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating more green infrastructure in line with a national framework of green infrastructure standards to be reviewed by summer 2019 • Supporting local authorities to assess green infrastructure provision against these new standards and incorporating them into national planning policy guidance • Manual for local authorities to shape procurement and maintenance practices for urban trees • New requirements for councils to consult before removing street trees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implications for local authority spatial planning, development management and greenspace management functions • Implications for local authority arboriculture services arising from plans in relation to tree stock

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25 Year Plan Policy Commitment	Implications for local government
<i>Chapter 4: Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste</i>	
<p>Maximising resource efficiency and minimising environmental impacts of waste. Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving zero avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042 • A new Resources and Waste Strategy in 2018 to promote resource efficiency • Reducing littering and fly-tipping • Preventing marine plastic pollution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implications for waste management policy and practice • Provides national backing for locally led behaviour change campaigns such as Dorset Litter Free Coast and Sea (led by Dorset Coast Forum, hosted by DCC) – corporate communications issues/opportunities
<p>Reducing pollution, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishing a Clean Air Strategy in 2018 • Meeting legally binding targets to reduce emissions of key air pollutants • Ending the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars by 2040 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implications for local transport planning, highways, fleet and public health. • Longer-term, more fundamental implications for re-design of transport systems (e.g. provision for Electric Vehicles) as a result of 'de-carbonising' transport systems
<i>Chapter 5: Securing clean, healthy, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing a sustainable fisheries policy to replace the Common Fisheries Policy • Achieving good environmental status in our seas while allowing marine industries to thrive • Maintaining clean recreational waters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implications for coastal economy, fisheries and visitor economy which all depend on sustainable management of the coastal and marine environment
<i>Chapter 6: Protecting and improving our global environment</i>	
<p>Tackling climate change mitigation and adaptation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut greenhouse gas emissions including from land use change, agriculture and waste • Make sure that all policies, programmes/ investment decisions take account of climate change • Implement a second National (Climate) Adaptation Programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implications for Local Resilience Forums, emergency planning functions arising from the National Adaptation Programme Review • Climate impacts and extreme weather have implications for infrastructure (e.g. highways) and disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups - therefore implications for a wide range of public service providers
<i>Putting the plan into practice</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation on 'a new independent body to hold government to account and a new set of environmental principles to underpin policy-making' • 'Developing a set of metrics to assess progress towards our 25-year goals' • Strengthening leadership and delivery through better local planning, more effective partnerships and learning from pioneer projects • Establishing a new green business council and exploring the potential for a natural environment impact fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide-ranging implications for environmental regulation and enforcement • Potential implications for local authority performance management regimes • Implications for local planning and partnerships • Implications for business community and LEPs and potential opportunities to access new funding streams

3. Dorset County Council's "green assets"

- 3.1 Prior to publication of the 25 Year Environment Plan, DCC's Coast and Countryside Service Manager, with input from the Senior Estate Surveyor (Rural Practice), had been reviewing DCC's 'green assets' with a view to understanding their strategic significance, their value relative to their cost and the case for their retention or disposal. Interim conclusions of this review were presented to the

member-led Country Parks Liaison Panel on 26 January 2018, which provides advice to officers on the management of green assets including and beyond the Country Parks. Members of the Panel endorsed the approach taken and it was suggested that the interim conclusions be summarised in this paper and presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its consideration. This is at Appendix 1, and the Committee's comments would be welcome.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The Dorset Local Nature Partnership's recent annual forum was addressed by a senior DEFRA official who summarised the key points of the 25 Year Environment Plan and paid tribute to the partners already working in Dorset to put the principles within the plan into action. She particularly welcomed the fact that environmental partners in Dorset were not waiting for Government to give the signal to act, but were already acting to deliver practical environmental improvements on the ground. This suggests that Dorset is already at the forefront of the agenda set out in the Plan. As such the Plan appears to present little in the way of risk or negative impact, and importantly presents significant opportunities for places like Dorset where the quality and value of a healthy environment is already well recognised. The green assets within the County Council's ownership and influence offer further opportunities to leverage these benefits.

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March 2018

APPENDIX 1: 'GREEN ASSET' REVIEW

A. Introduction

The Coast and Countryside Services within the Environment and Economy Directorate is a front-line delivery service supporting provision of the essential environmental goods and services necessary to maintain economic growth and community wellbeing. The Service has responsibility for operating and maintaining a wide range of public environmental assets – country parks, visitor centres, local countryside sites, trailways, national trails, rights of way, and picnic sites. These can be defined as our 'green assets'.

The County Council owns and manages a number of these green assets, and manages several others on behalf of other public bodies such as the District, Town and Parish Councils, and there are some County Council green assets managed by others on our behalf. This review considers the sites owned by the County Council.

It is important that we ensure our green assets are used in ways which best support the needs of the County Council's business and the wider community, hence the need for this review. The countryside asset may have been acquired for that purpose, or became countryside having had a former use such as a landfill, or may have been purchased as part of a landholding acquired for a different reason, such as a highway improvement.

Whatever the original reasons for acquisition, in the light of continuing decline in local government funding, it is timely to undertake a review to ask the question whether retaining the site remains the right answer. There are three main options – for each site we could retain, dispose of part or all, or consider an alternative delivery model involving a third party. In the last category we could consider asset transfer with continued county council support for management, asset retention with a greater role for management by the local community, or lease and management to the local community.

B. Format of the Green Asset Review

This review has considered the value derived from each asset, as well as untapped opportunities, based on the following analysis:

B.1 Financial case

The financial performance of the Country Parks and Hardy's Birthplace Centre is aimed at achieving 'full cost recovery' for above-the-line costs, and in 2016/17 this was more than achieved overall, such that these sites have become significant net contributors to the service. While this may not be possible to replicate for smaller sites, it is important we evaluate the cost of maintaining these assets set against the benefits they provide in terms of environmental quality and social value.

B.2 Environmental quality

A key purpose of green assets should be to maximise their environmental quality and a number of the larger sites are already covered by local, national or international environmental designations in recognition of this. Maintaining high environmental quality is beneficial for its own sake but also to harness the many benefits that a high-quality environment offers to the local economy and to enhancing public health and wellbeing.

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B.3 Social value

For our larger green assets, we can monitor visitor experience, both quantitatively by visitor numbers and qualitatively by visitor feedback, such as via Trip Advisor. These measures are consistently positive and attest to the public service value, and associated reputational benefits, which they offer. Our green assets are also important for community engagement, and without the support of the army of volunteers at the Country Parks, and embedded into our practical greenspace management teams, we would not be able to deliver the levels of service we currently do for the people of Dorset.

Increasingly we see our green assets through the lens of their contribution to health and wellbeing. There is now good evidence nationally that the natural environment contributes significantly to prevention at scale, delaying the time when people require medical intervention in their lives, leading to cost savings to the health and social care services. This is clearly expressed in the STP for Dorset, and is being delivered through the 'Healthy Places' workstream led by Public Health Dorset.

B.4 Number of sites

The review considers 31 sites that are allocated to the Coast and Countryside Service for their management. The list includes the larger countryside sites where there are buildings, particularly the Durlston CP, Avon Heath CP and Hardy's Birthplace VC, that have already been considered by other reviews (e.g. Way We Work property review) and by the Country Parks Liaison Panel through the 2017 Income Strategy.

C. Analysis of Green Assets

The Country Parks Liaison Panel, at its meeting on 26 January 2018, considered the Green Asset Review. The Panel endorsed the approach and noted the following highlighted by the review:

C.1 Financial performance

- The continuing strong performance of the Country Parks where income marginally exceeded expenditure in 2016/17 financial year
- Batcombe Picnic site/Hilfield woodland. It is planned to sell the timber from the woodland to the neighbouring Hilfield Friary for use in their biomass boiler
- Once existing Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) and Countryside Stewardship (CS) funding agreements expire we are dependent on whatever schemes are brought forward post Brexit. However, the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan offers us optimism that there will be suitable alternatives. In the future it is possible there will be greater opportunities to secure income for 'provision of public goods'. These public goods would include maintaining biodiversity and landscape quality, carbon sequestration, flood risk management, and contribution to health and wellbeing.
- There is no revenue income for any of the Trailway sites. There should be a focus on trying to draw income to maintain these assets, possibly from sources supporting Active Travel, or sponsorship, or crowd funding, given their popularity with the public
- A significant opportunity has been identified with local stakeholders to create a North Dorset Countryside Centre, perhaps similar in size to the Hardy's Birthplace Centre. This could create a modest income source to help maintain the Trailway, perhaps through catering and bike hire leases, and provide a focus for health and wellbeing activities based along the Trailway. There are a range of options for how this could be operated and by whom, but some input from the County Council is likely to be required to establish its viability
- The small picnic sites scattered across the county do not draw income except in one case. However, they cost very little to manage, just a few hours a month, and always combined with other work in the local area (mainly Rights of Way maintenance)

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- The Winfrith Newburgh Picnic site has a catering lease for a mobile café. This provides a significant net income to the service above the cost of maintaining the site. However, the picnic site is currently in a poor state of management and urgent measures to improve this situation are planned
- Continued management of Jellyfields and Wanderwell Quarry nature reserves gives the Greenspace Management Team access to a pool of active volunteers in the Bridport area, helping us to carry out a range of countryside management activities on Rights of Way and on the Trailway. This access to volunteer effort needs to be borne in mind when considering the headline cost of managing the sites.
- There are already leases in place to Town and Parish Councils, and others, where the local community is in a better place to deliver management

C.2 Environmental designations / interest

- All sites carrying national or international designations, or significant local wildlife interest, are under schemes of management such as HLS or CS which provide us with income to support management
- The historic landscape at Black Down is being enhanced by the grazing management which is likely to reveal the existence of hitherto unrecorded monuments as scrub cover declines
- A few of the smaller sites would benefit from wildlife survey e.g. Five Bridges
- The local wildlife interests of grasslands surrounding the parking areas in the smaller picnic sites would be enhanced through cut-and-collect management, rather than strimming, to reduce long-term maintenance costs
- We are working in partnership with the 'Back from the Brink' partnership of national NGOs along the North Dorset Trailway to offer our land as a place to plant wild Barberry trees. In due course these trees would be likely to sustain the local population of the nationally-protected Barberry Carpet Moth. The largest population of the moth in the UK is currently close to Stourpaine.
- Management of all sites contributes to enhancement of the local landscape

C.3 Social value

- The Country Parks, given their size, offer the greatest opportunity to develop their health and wellbeing offer to the community. Most advanced is the Durlston Pleasure Grounds project, but there is significant opportunity to be developed at Avon Heath
- There remains the potential to recognise Black Down and Thorncombe as a Country Park as a strategic green infrastructure site for the Dorchester area, to help support planned growth of the town, but this needs further work
- There is an opportunity to develop a partnership with Hilfield Friary and other landowners in the local area to Batcombe
- There are opportunities to develop Walkabout Leaflets centred on most of the smaller picnic sites, except those close to the Lulworth Ranges. These leaflets would provide detailed information about accessing the Rights of Way network nearby
- There is an area of land at Okeford Hill that has no public access. This land has no potential for enhancement of its social and community value.

D. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Green Asset review has concluded the following:

- The costs of running larger sites, including the Country Parks, is generally covered by income from a variety of sources. The exception is Hardy's Birthplace VC where this recently established centre is on the pathway to full cost recovery, but not there yet (details within the Income Strategy 2017).

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- Although the smaller sites have very few income sources they cost very little to manage, yet all provide significant social value to the communities they serve.
- The Trailways do not have sources of income but where one cost has been identified for the North Dorset Trailway, this cost is modest set against the social benefit that the facility provides. The Trailways provide safe access off-road into Dorset's countryside and contribute to improved health and wellbeing.
- Sites such as Jellyfields and Wanderwell Quarry could be leased to the local community, but currently the benefit of retaining such sites for access to a pool of local volunteers outweighs the very limited costs of retaining direct management.
- Part of the land at Okeford Hill (c.5ha) provides no social value as it has no public access, although it costs nothing to manage.

The Committee is invited to:

- Consider recommendations for each of the 31 sites, based on their financial performance, and environmental and social values
- Note the opportunities for asset enhancement, and that progress will be reviewed at future Country Parks Liaison Panel meetings
- Support the development of business case for a North Dorset Countryside Centre to be brought to the Country Parks Liaison Panel in due course
- Support a review of sites we manage on behalf of other organisations to be brought to the Country Parks Liaison Panel in advance of LGR
- Approve the Senior Estates Surveyor (Rural Practice) to enquire with neighbouring landowners at Okeford Hill about possible purchase of the scrub/grassland area without public access

Please see attached table.