Chester House Farm Progress report

1 Purpose of report

1.1 To keep members appraised of the latest progress on the project programme for Chester House Farm.

1.2 To request Members support for Northampton County Council’s next bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

1.3 To allow members of the Development Committee to request further information on specific issues and to take any necessary action as appropriate in line with the Wellingborough Chester House Farm Position Statement (2010).

2 Executive summary

2.1 This report seeks to provide an update to the Development Committee on the progression of Chester House Farm development scheme. Chester House Farm is a site of significant archaeological merit due to its Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman settlement remains. It also includes an example of 17th Century architecture in the Farmhouse, which is currently undergoing restoration following a fire. Northampton County Council (NCC) submitted a bid to the Heritage Lottery in December 2011, for support in developing the area as a visitor and education site. However, the Heritage Lottery was unable to award the scheme in this round of funding and NCC is currently adapting their plans and timetable in preparation for another Bid later this year.

3 Appendices

Appendix I - Briefing Note from Northampton County Council Chester House Farm (CHF) Project Board March 2012.

4 Proposed Action:

4.1 Note the progression of Chester House Farm Development Project as one of Wellingborough’s sites of significant cultural and historic merit.

4.2 Support future NCC applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund to deliver this project.
5 Background

5.1 Chester House Farm is 34 hectares of farm and former parkland which is currently owned by Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) and includes a 17th Century Farmhouse and outbuildings. The Farmhouse was unfortunately devastated by a fire in 2010 and NCC has since been working to restore it. The Farmhouse is being primarily renovated using funds from the properties insurance and NCC capital resources. However, it is the Project Board’s overall ambition to utilise Heritage Lottery Funding to sustain the remainder of the project. The historical significance of Chester House Farm site is internationally important and as such requires clear commitment to deliver a credible solution(s) for its future.

6 Discussion

6.1 To date, the Farmhouse has undergone numerous repairs since the fire. All the collapsed debris has been removed with items of historic interest currently laid out in one of the large barns. The surviving chimney stacks have been braced and protected with specially padded scaffolding. Extensive repairs have been carried out to the rear wall and single storey extension, including replacement windows and securing the roof timber.

6.2 In an effort to aid the conservation of the surrounding species rich grasslands, NCC have also secured an agreement with the Wildlife Trust to graze heritage breed cattle on the land, including the rental of some outbuildings to allow a year long presence.

6.3 The long term plan for the site is to provide access for visitors whilst preserving the important archaeological remains, make provisions for training and related educational facilities and offer conference and office space to provide continued revenue. Mace Consultancy has been appointed site project managers and designs are focussed on achieving a code 4 energy rating for all buildings and services throughout the site. Parking provisions and vehicle access are still being negotiated with Highways.

6.4 In December 2011, NCC submitted an extensive ‘round one’ application to the Heritage Lottery (HLF). Unfortunately, on this occasion, the HLF were not able to offer the project a place in the second round due to limited funding and fierce competition from other schemes. However, the HLF have urged NCC to resubmit the application for the next round of funding and have provided useful feedback to help increase the applications chance of success.

6.5 The Project Board is now planning the next steps to ensure continuation of the project. The following items have been identified as priorities:

(a) Agreement needs to be reached as to how best to move forward with the project timetable and especially what work can be continued now without jeopardising the case for funding. (Development work that goes beyond a certain stage cannot be funded at stage one.)

(b) NCC needs to decide in light of the HLF advice, how to progress the application for planning permission, the improvements to the access route down the lime avenue and further archaeological survey work, among other things.
(c) A revised funding profile needs to be written.

6.6 NCC is determined to continue with its plans to open up the site to public access and to develop it as a place with a unique heritage education and learning offer. A revised bid will be submitted, probably in July 2012.

7 Legal powers

7.1 Local Government Act 1972
7.2 Local Government Act 2000
7.3 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

8 Financial and value for money implications

8.1 The project is currently being delivered and funded by NCC and English Heritage; however financial support for a proposed visitor centre at the site is identified through the Stanton Cross S106 agreement and it has been agreed that this can be moved to Chester House Farm if a suitable Visitor Attraction can be provided. A further contribution may be sought from BCW to allow appropriate development to progress but as yet no such resources have been discussed as a significant contribution to the scheme is still being sought from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

9 Risk analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of risk</th>
<th>Consequences if realised</th>
<th>Likelihood of occurrence</th>
<th>Control measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HLF funding not awarded to the project</td>
<td>The scheme is does not deliver a visitor opportunity at the site</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>NCC has committed necessary funds to complete the restoration of the farmhouse, to ensure maintenance of the site can be sustained through rental revenue. Agreements with the Wildlife Trust are in place for land rental for Heritage ungulate breeds. This will ensure protection of the species rich grasslands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution from WEAST S106 not provided due to</td>
<td>Reduced financial support for Chester House Farm project and potentially no</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Stanton Cross CPO being undertaken to improve delivery of Stanton Cross</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
delays in delivering Stanton Cross. visitor/interpretation centre. development. S106 Officers to consider CHF for inclusion with other new developments agreements in the area. Recruitment of a Funding Officer.

10 **Implications for resources**

10.1 Internal and external resources needed throughout the plan delivery process. A better planned and costed delivery programme will enable greater potential to secure external funding. NCC has primary responsibility for financially sourcing the scheme.

11 **Implications for stronger and safer communities**

11.1 Contribution to potentially develop a community use, educational and employment use to meet the objectives within the local area agreement.

12 **Implications for equalities**

12.1 Equalities impacts are being reviewed by NCC

13 **Author and contact officer**

Steven Wood – Head of Planning and Local Development

14 **Consultees**

Alex Stevenson - Conservation & Design Officer
Sarah Bridges - Archive and Heritage Services Manager (NCC)
Dominic Lees – CHF Site Project Manager, Mace (for NCC)
Victoria Phillipson – Principal Planning and Regeneration Manager
Tracey Cave – Service Accountant
Amanda Johnson – Project Co-ordinator, Regeneration

15 **Background papers**


15.2 NCC Chester House Farm PM RAG report 05 (MACE). Chester House Farm Brief.

15.3 Project Board Member Briefing Note March 2012
Briefing note to members of Chester Farm Project Board

The County Council’s bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund March 2012

1. Background

In December 2011, the County Council submitted a bid for the sum of c£4 million to the Heritage Lottery Fund under their Heritage Grants programme. This programme is divided into two stages; a bid for the whole project is submitted but a smaller sum is sought for key development work before a more detailed bid is drawn up around project implementation. In this case, the stage 1 bid was for money to develop the project plans especially around the detailed education and learning activities programme, the interpretation ‘offer’ and the feasibility of the archaeological archives store being located on site. The hope was to do the further development work between April and October and to submit the stage two bid in October 2012.

2. Outcome and feedback

The Heritage Lottery Fund was not on this occasion able to award the Council funding towards the project. However the bid received very positive support and encouragement from the HLF Board and HLF officers. The HLF regional manager spoke to officers within 24 hours and relayed the feedback below.

- The HLF Board was very impressed by the Chester Farm project and the bid – members were supportive of all the Council’s aspirations and plans around the site.
- HLF was not able to support the bid at this point because of lack of funds.
- The NCC bid was in the ‘final cut’ from which Board members made their choice.
- The Board has invited NCC to resubmit the bid at the next opportunity.
- Competition was extremely fierce for the relatively small amount of money, as HLF officers had warned would be the case. Other strong applicants were on their second or third submission indicating the lack of resource available for good projects.
- The HLF has worked to address this by allocating increased resources to this category into the new financial year, so that good projects are not turned down.
- The level of commitment by the authority to revenue and capital funding for the project was identified as impressive and offering HLF good value for their (potential) investment.
- The Board was impressed that NCC wished to retain ownership of the site and the project until a secure and viable future for the site had been secured.
- HLF officers are very keen to work with the authority and the NCC officer team on the resubmission, so that the delay has the least impact on timescales and detailed plans.
- Emma Sayer, the HLF East Midlands Regional Manager, with an HLF Board member, wants to talk to senior officers and members about the support HLF officers can give to enable the project to move forward.
- The HLF officers presented strong arguments in support of this project at the Board meeting.
3. **Next steps**

Members of the officer team now need to have detailed discussions with HLF officers.

- Agreement needs to be reached as to how best to move forward with the project timetable and especially what work can be continued now without jeopardising the case for funding. (Development work that goes beyond a certain stage cannot be funded at stage one.)
- NCC needs to decide in light of the HLF advice, how to progress the application for planning permission, the improvements to the access route down the lime avenue and further archaeological survey work, among other things.
- A revised funding profile needs to be written.

NCC is determined to continue with its plans to open up the site to public access and to develop it as a place with a unique heritage education and learning offer. A revised bid will be submitted, probably in July 2012. Board members will be updated on the detail of this at a rescheduled meeting in late April or early May 2012.

Councillor Heather Smith
Sarah Bridges
30 March 2012