

**Activity & Interpretation Plan**

**Victoria Park & Watercress Fields**

**Ashford**



1. **Introduction**

We are starting work on our second-round application to the Heritage Lottery Fund Parks for People programme for Victoria Park and Watercress Fields in Ashford, Kent. To help us develop our project and support our second round bid we would like to appoint an experienced activity and interpretation planning team to work with us to research and prepare Ashford Borough Council’s activity plan, including developing interpretation themes and a framework for project evaluation.

This brief sets out our requirements, how interested practices should tender, the deadline for responses, and how the tender will be evaluated.

1. **Background Information**

Victoria Park and Watercress Fields are Ashford’s largest and most central municipal park, set in a riverside location within 10 minutes’ walk of Ashford town centre. Although valued as an open space, the park currently fails to play a meaningful role in the social life and fabric of the town and does not enhance the character, identity and vitality of the south Ashford community.

Opened in 1899, the park now includes the grade-II\* listed Hubert Fountain, tree lined walks, a secret garden, play spaces, sports facilities, a community building, the Great Stour river, bridges, a community orchard, the open areas of Watercress Fields, and also forms an important part of the Ashford Green Corridor and pedestrian and cycle route between the town centre and south Ashford communities. The Great Stour river is designated as a Local Wildlife Site, because it is largely natural in character and supports a wide range of submerged, emergent and marginal aquatic plants.

The park faces a number of issues including the quality of facilities, few activities, movement patterns, lack of physical connection with the surrounding high-rise blocks and other housing facing Watercress Fields, and poor links to the town centre. The site also fails to make best use of its built, natural and cultural heritage and does little to connect people to place.

Both the area immediately surrounding the park and the wider town are going through a period of tremendous renewal and expansion - there is significant housing development planned and taking place along the northern boundary of the park and towards the town centre.

This project will assist in unlocking the heritage potential of the site and help to ensure it can meet the needs of existing and future park users. It will provide training and education opportunities and create a sustainably managed park that welcomes the new generation of people arriving in the area.

This project is an exciting opportunity to deliver the Council’s Five Year Corporate Plan, Priorities 3 & 4:

* Active & Creative Ashford: “Planned improvement to key public space and parks – Victoria Park”
* Attractive Ashford – Environment, Countryside, and Tourism & Heritage: “To safeguard and conserve our local heritage and areas of outstanding landscape”

The project will also be key in delivering aspects of the recently produced Open Space Strategy and Green Corridor Plan (incorporated into the strategy at appendix 3) – available from our website: <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/the-environment/parks-and-open-spaces/open-space-strategy/>. It will also help to improve links to the town centre, in terms of encouraging more people to visit and use the park, creating physical links, better interpretation, and with the opportunity of tandem events between park and town.

The plans submitted to HLF in February 2017 focused on the need to:

* Respond effectively to the pressure of housing growth around the park and reduce the likely associated environmental impacts in the immediate area.
* Create an attractive destination promoting and celebrating flagship open spaces, existing heritage and addressing lost heritage features.
* Instil local civic pride and ownership to the public realm.
* Support the hosting of high quality events, using the trusted local brand of the ‘Create Music Festival’ and others, providing a positive platform for groups, clubs, artists and organisations.
* Encourage engagement from a range of partners that provide ongoing activities for the park in the longer term.
* Fulfilling the Council’s obligation to maintain Victoria Park in optimum condition.
* Ensure the park fulfils its function as a community hub and place for recreational activity including meeting spaces and physical activity.

Community engagement is a core element of the project. Engaging existing and potential visitors in the project will help to foster community cohesion, ensure the capital works and activities address community needs, and help to develop an increased sense of ownership of the park and its facilities.

We recently created an in-house grounds maintenance service called Aspire Landscape Management. They have already delivered a significant improvement in the quality of maintenance standards at Victoria Park and Watercress Fields. The successful tenderer will be expected to work closely with Aspire to ensure that proposals can be effectively managed and maintained and to help ensure that we secure and retain a Green Flag award.

More information is available in the appendix, including:

* Round one application form
* Visioning and Masterplanning Report, December 2015
* Design Report, February 2017
* Condition survey of fountain

The site is approximately 21ha in size and located on Jemmett Road, Ashford, TN23 4QD, grid reference TR 00537 42262.

1. **Our requirements**

The Activity and Interpretation Plan is an essential component of the development phase of our project. It is the key document for helping us to understand existing and potential audiences, how we can increase their engagement with the heritage of the park and what activities we will deliver during our project.

The general approach, format and layout of the plan should be informed principally by the latest HLF Parks for People activity planning and interpretation guidance, available on the HLF website. The content of the plan, and the consultation that informs it, should build on the relationships and community engagement work already carried out.

We expect the successful tenderer to:

1. Review the baseline data we have already gathered in terms of our organisation, audiences and activities, and using market intelligence and consultation build on the work already carried out
2. Guide project and long-term decisions about engaging people including target audiences
3. Undertake a detailed activity planning exercise and create an action plan for the project, with costed proposals
4. Establish interpretation themes, topics and objectives
5. Establish and create a framework to help us evaluate the project, including approaches to data collection

We currently have the following delivery phase budgets allocated from the HLF bid Stage 1:

* Activities £175,000
* Interpretation £70,000
* Evaluation £16,000

We are very keen to ensure that the plan is a useful tool that will help to shape our decision making and future work, rather than a very lengthy and potentially inaccessible document. It is very important that the final plan is accessible to the public and staff, so the language and format used must be clear, concise and where possible jargon-free.

1. **Programme**

A draft plan should be prepared by the end of April 2018. The final plan and evaluation framework should be completed by the end of July 2018. We expect to submit our round 2 bid to HLF in September 2018. Our overall project programme is:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Who** | **When** |
| Specialist surveys | Client & PM | Late 2017 |
| Conservation Plan | Tbc | January – April 2018 |
| Activity Plan | Tbc | January – April 2018 |
| Public consultation event 1 | Tbc | April 2018 |
| Design work | Tbc | March – August 2018 |
| Public consultation event 2 | Tbc | July 2018 |
| Planning & Listed Building application | Tbc | August – September 2018 |
| Management and Maintenance Plan | Tbc | July - August 2018 |
| Prepare second round application | Client & PM | September 2018 |

1. **Wider project team**

The successful tenderer will be expected to work collaboratively with other members of the project team in developing our second-round application to HLF. Other key members of the team will be:

* ABC Client Officer
* Consultant Project Manager
* Consultant Community Engagement Officer
* Consultant producing Conservation Plan and Management & Maintenance Plan
* Consultant design team including landscape architect, architect, engineers and QS

We will be appointing all the team members mentioned above directly.

We will consider tenders for both the Activity and Interpretation Plan and the Community Engagement Officer from the same organisation.

1. **Community Engagement and Consultation**

The successful tenderer will be expected to lead on public and stakeholder consultation to inform the activity and interpretation plan. Key external stakeholders and potential delivery partners include:

* Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership
* Oaks Primary Schools
* Victoria Park Day Nursery
* Aspire (Ashford’s in-house grounds maintenance service)
* Ashford Museum
* Ashford Volunteer Centre
* Uprising Youth and Community
* South Ashford Community Forum

Relatively limited public engagement has taken place and there is not a friends group for the park. To address this, we will be directly appointing a community engagement specialist separately from the activity and interpretation plan commission. During the development phase the community engagement consultant will:

* Create and support the friends group
* Organise and promote two significant public consultation events in April and July 2018
* Organise and manage project communication
* Undertake baseline data collection specific to park use
* Potentially run pilot projects and events

The successful tenderer will be expected to work closely with the community engagement specialist and contribute to the public consultation events as part of developing the plan. Once appointed, we will work with the successful tenderer to plan stakeholder and public engagement in the development of the plan in more detail.

1. **Project Outputs**

* Draft(s) and final Activity and Interpretation Plan, with costings, including evaluation framework

Draft and final outputs should generally be provided to us electronically in PDF format.

Ashford Borough Council will retain copyright of all the material produced in the context of this commission and will have the right to reproduce any material provided and distribute the material in part or whole to any organisation or individual it determines, at no extra cost. The lead consultant should clear the copyright for any illustrations or other material used. The outputs may be made publicly available.

1. **Insurance**

The successful tenderer will be expected to provide evidence of current Professional Indemnity Insurance (no less than £5m).

1. **Data protection**

The successful tenderer will be expected to work closely with Ashford Borough Council’s Data Protection Officer to ensure all data is collected in accordance with governing rules and regulations.

1. **Tender process**

**Tender programme**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Date** |
| Tender issued | 20 November 2017 |
| Tender returns due | 6 December 2017 |
| Tender evaluation | 7 December |
| Interviews | w/c 18 December |
| Kick off meeting | w/c 8 January 2018 |

**Tender submission**

To be considered for this project, you will need to submit:

1. A method statement on no more than three sides of A4, that sets out your approach to
   1. Researching and producing the plan
   2. Engaging stakeholders and the public
   3. Explains any sub-consultants and expertise/suitability and/or additional surveys that may be needed to inform the plan
2. A programme setting out key tasks, how long you expect them to take and demonstrating how you can deliver within our programme (two sides of A4).
3. Examples of similar projects where you produced activity and interpretation plans (e.g. HLF-funded, historic parks, similar budget; no more than three sides of A4).
4. A fee proposal in relation to the programme and key tasks, as well as any additional allowances you feel may be necessary to achieve the end result. Please provide a day rates for additional tasks if needed (one side of A4).

**Tender evaluation**

Your tender submission will be evaluated as follows:

* 70% of your score will be based on the quality of your tender submission (i.e. your response to question 1 (weighted 30%), 2 (weighted 10%) and 3 (weighted 30%).
* 30% of your score will be based on your fee proposal (question 4) where the lowest price will score 30% and higher prices will score less as a percentage of the lowest price

Your response to questions 1, 2 and 3 will be marked using the following scale:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Judgement** |
| **0** | Statement is unsuitable and / or suggests unacceptable risk |
| **2** | Statement fails to meet requirements in a significant way |
| **4** | Statement fails to meet requirements in some way |
| **6** | Statement meets all the requirements (“par”) |
| **8** | Statement exceeds requirements and adds some value |
| **10** | Statement exceeds requirements and adds significant value |