



Notes on completion

Summary

Name of your organisation

Ashford Borough Council

Project title

In no more than 15 words, please choose a title which you think best describes your project. This will be seen externally, on our website and by our decision makers so please ensure that you choose a title that you are happy for a wide range of people to see.

Victoria Park & Watercress Fields

Reference number

PP-16-08463

Project summary

In no more than 150 words, summarise your project. We will use this text to tell people about your project, including our decision takers.

Victoria Park and Watercress Fields is Ashford's largest and most central municipal park. Although valued as an open space, the park currently fails to play a meaningful role in the social life and fabric of the town or enhance the character, identity and vitality of the South Ashford community.

The park is severely underused principally due its limited facilities, activities, movement patterns, and lack of physical connection with the high rise blocks and housing facing on to Watercress Fields, and moreover because it doesn't currently make best-use of its built, natural and cultural heritage and connect people to place.

Ashford is going through a period of tremendous renewal and expansion – this project will unlock the heritage of the site; provide training and education opportunities; help reverse degradation; and develop into a sustainably managed 21st century park that welcomes the new generation of people arriving in the area.

Have you received any advice from us before making your application?

Yes

Please tell us who you received advice from.

Bridget Keegan & Judith Curruthers

Is this your first application to the Heritage Lottery Fund?

No

Please tell us the reference number and project title of your most recent application.

HG-15-06400

Section one: Your organisation

1a Address of your organisation:

Address line 1 Ashford Borough Council

Address line 2 Civic Centre

Address line 3 Tannery Lane

Town / city Ashford

County Kent

Postcode TN23 1PL

1b Is the address of your project the same as the address in 1a?

Yes

Local Authority within which the project will take place

Ashford

Constituency within which the project will take place

Ashford

1c Details of main contact person

Name

Chris Dixon

Position

Arts & Cultural Industries Manager

Is the address of the main contact person the same as the address in 1a?

Yes

Daytime phone number, including area code

01233 330 352

Alternative phone number

07899928235

Email address

chris.dixon@ashford.gov.uk

1d Describe your organisation's main purpose and regular activities

Ashford Borough Council (ABC), in Kent, is a Local Authority delivering a new 5 year corporate plan (refer 9) that aims to support the growth agenda, ensuring quality homes; healthy and active neighbourhoods; an exciting business, leisure, tourism and heritage offer and an attractive environment with quality parks and open spaces.

This project is seen as an important corporate element in safeguarding and conserving our local heritage and areas of outstanding landscape quality such as Victoria Park, which is acknowledged as a strategic park in the new Local Plan (to be adopted Autumn 2017). Officers have been working on how the impact of housing and commercial growth (1,500 new homes) immediately around the Park will effect its use.

An adopted Land Management Improvement Plan stressed the need for action and in 2015 a masterplanning exercise was started for Victoria Park (refer summary of 11). A survey for the Grade II* listed Hubert Fountain was conducted (refer 3. Survey and Inspection Report). A new in-house grounds maintenance service, named Aspire, was rolled out last year, allowing ABC the flexibility and control to improve the quality, presentation and maintenance of the Park. We have a tourism service that promotes and celebrates our heritage and produces visitor guides, working with tourism business to develop and strengthen the offer.

How many people does your organisation employ?

465

1e The legal status of your organisation**Please select one of the following:**

Local authority

If your organisation is any of the following, please provide the details shown:

Company - give registration number

Registered Charity in England, Scotland or Wales - give registration number

Charity recognised by HM Revenue and Customs in Northern Ireland - give reference number

1f Has your organisation undertaken a similar project in size and scope in the last 5 years?

Yes

Please provide brief details

In ABC's Cultural Services, we undertake community facility and place-making projects of all sizes, that have all been through scoping, masterplanning, community engagement, consultation and planning exercises, prior to implementation. Recently these include: creation of Bridgefield Park (£820k); Repton Community Building and landscaping (£2.2m); Spearpoint Sports Pavilion (1m); and Conningbrook Lakes Country Park (£670k).

1g Will your project be delivered by a partnership?

No

1h Are you VAT registered?

Yes

Please provide your VAT number

202 3252 27

Section two: The heritage

In this section tell us about the heritage your project focuses on and why it is valued.

2a What is the heritage your project focuses upon?

This project responds to the need to develop, promote and safeguard Ashford's heritage at a time of significant growth. Ashford, a Priority Development Hotspot Area for HLF, has the highest number of designated heritage assets in East Kent (2,522), yet the lowest Overall Heritage Index rating (bottom 29%). This means that we are currently not making best use of our heritage assets and connecting people to place. Victoria Park and Watercress Fields provides a golden opportunity to address this disparity – the park has a pivotal role to play in reconnecting people with Ashford's history, the local area and built, cultural and natural heritage of the site.

Victoria Park is a 7.3ha traditional Victorian urban park, opened in 1899. It was sold to the Council in 1898 by the Jemmett Brothers (a significant local land owner) and developed into Ashford's strategic urban park by the Council. The park has a combination of built, cultural and natural heritage which this projects aims to promote, link and embed.

- Built heritage:

Until 1898 the land was used for both arable and pastoral farming. Following its acquisition the park was laid out by George Bunyard and Co. of Maidstone, a renowned nursery in Kent at the time, who also supplied the Royal Botanic Gardens. No drawings or plans of the original design have been discovered during research; however when finalised in 1899, the park included a series of curved and axial tree lined walks, shrubberies, river planting, a bandstand, recreation ground, shelter and changing rooms and became a key place within the town to play sports matches and host public events. It was also enclosed by iron fencing, of which only one set of gates on Jemmett Road survive. Its completion coincided with the emergence of the first residents of the now expansive South Ashford community that surround the park on Jemmett Road.

Since then the park has expanded to include Watercress Fields; a monumental French cast iron fountain; and later additions such as a woodland 'secret' garden, children's play areas and sports and recreational hub and buildings. In terms of broad areas the site is comprised of the following character areas: 1. The Victorian Park (registered Park and Garden), 2. The Secret Garden, 3. Play and Recreation area, 4. Adventure Play area, 5. Watercress Fields, and 6. The River Corridor.

It is bounded to the south by the Leacon Road industrial estate, the east half of which will be developed to provide 450 homes, (mainly 1-2 beds), and Ashford town centre, Eurostar and High Speed 1 lines lies 10 minutes' walk to the north.

The primary built heritage elements are as follows: The Hubert Fountain (Grade 2* listed) and associated piazza walls and steps (Grade 2 listed); the Victorian designed landscape (Registered Park & Garden), the tree lined walks and lost metal railings; and the Secret Garden.

The Hubert Fountain:

The Hubert Fountain is Grade II* listed cast iron fountain cast by the world renowned French foundry, Val d'Osne. It was first displayed at the 1862 International Exhibition in Kensington, then purchased by John Earl-Drax for his home in the grounds of Olantigh Towers, Wye, before being sold to George Harper and gifted to the council, of which he was Chairman in 1912, as a generous act of Edwardian philanthropy. The fountain is rare and the finest of only three cast iron ornamental fountains in England in the Beaux Arts style.

Aside from its status as a listed structure, the fountain also has a number of other functions as a flagship gateway feature between the town centre and park; a point of focus for community gatherings and commemorations; and the story of Edwardian philanthropy and death of George Harper, who suffered from mental illness and took his own life shortly after gifting the fountain.

The Victorian designed landscape:

Although the Victorian park character area has undergone a number of changes, specifically the loss of shrubberies, railings, river plantings and structures (bandstand, shelter and changing rooms); the overall layout and landscape structure is largely intact. However, the commemorative trees planted to celebrate Ashford's local champions were felled wholesale in the 60s and a number of tree lined avenues are nearing

the end of their natural lives and will require successional planting and plugging gaps where trees have already been lost.

The Secret Garden:

Is a later addition to the park. Some refurbishment took place in the 1990's. It is characterised by faux sandstone outcrops, (possibly Pulhamite), a small pond and winding path, set within woodland. It was originally intended as a sensory garden.

- **Cultural Heritage:**

The park has a rich history of cattle market heritage as the main droving route into the town since 1243. It is still an important site in terms of linking areas in the south of Ashford to the town centre and other parts of the Green Corridor.

The Watercress Field character area derives its name from its history of watercress growing. In the 19th century, watercress was grown commercially in the chalk stream and transported to London markets. Historical maps show a Watercress Farm located nearby. At its western end are still the remains of an old fording point dating from before the area was built up. The ditches, now lost, were a strong characteristic of the agricultural field pattern for growing watercress.

- **Natural Heritage:**

The Great Stour river is 40 miles long and runs through the Weald, via Ashford to Canterbury and Sandwich. The river within the park has a natural profile with many meanders and wide margins of vegetation that support a diverse range of riverside plant species, including cuckoo flower and alder. The chalk stream itself, an internationally rare habitat with potential for excellent water quality due to the natural filtering through the chalk beds of the Downs, supports a rich mix of flora and fauna, including water voles and white-clawed crayfish.

The river corridor is designated as a nature reserve and forms part of the Ashford Green Corridor, linking south Ashford with the countryside and town centre. The Great Stour is also closely linked to our industrial heritage and has played a significant part in shaping our environment.

2b Is your heritage considered to be at risk? If so, please tell us in what way.

- Built heritage at risk:

The Hubert Fountain:

The deterioration of the Grade 2* listed Hubert Fountain is documented in the independent survey and inspection report (refer 3.) Despite routine maintenance, the report revealed that the fountain has suffered from vandalism through graffiti and physical damage, as well as minor operational/mechanical issues and water damage. The cast iron goods are now beginning to corrode as a result of the paint and waterproofing system nearing the end of its practical life, since it was last repainted in 2007.

The design quality, rarity and authenticity afforded by its listed status; the pivotal role it plays as a landscape device in the context of the park; its cultural significance; and future pressures as a result of Ashford's expanding population, provide persuasive reasons for its restoration and safeguarding.

The designed landscape:

Parts of the designed landscape, such as the bandstand, shelter and changing rooms, are lost and not considered practical or relevant to reinstate. The lost commemorative trees and a number of historic tree lined walks are nearing the end of their natural lives and will need to be properly investigated and assessed prior to formulating a strategy for replanting.

The Secret Garden:

Until recently, following works by Aspire, our in-house grounds maintenance team, the garden was entirely overgrown and inaccessible. The works uncovered a path, pond and Pulhamite type outcrops. Subsequently, it has emerged that the space was originally conceived as a sensory garden. Further work is required to evaluate the design and future direction of the garden, without which it would likely fall back into decline.

- Cultural and natural heritage at risk:

The natural and cultural heritage is at risk of being lost due to the lack of interpretation on site and the consequent low level of local awareness and understanding of its significance. As highlighted in the RSA Heritage Index rating, Ashford is not making best use of its heritage assets by connecting people with place. The restoration of the park provides an opportunity to address this through a range of initiatives, including physical interventions and activities – examples of this include conveying the site's arable and pastoral origins; its connection to the market as a droving route; the cultivation of watercress; its life stories, especially that of George Harper, (his background, becoming an elected member, philanthropy, mental illness and celebration and memory); and our environmental responsibility and stewardship to ensure our natural heritage is protected and enjoyed.

2c Does your project involve work to physical heritage, such as buildings, collections, landscapes or habitats?

Yes

Tell us the name of the building(s), collections, landscape or habitat area

Victoria Park & Watercress Fields; the Hubert Fountain (Grade II* listed); Fountain Steps & Balustrades (Grade II)

Does your organisation have the freehold of the building or land, or own outright the heritage items that your project focuses on?

Yes

Are there any legal conditions, restrictions or covenants associated with the heritage asset which may affect your project?

No

Has a condition survey been undertaken for the heritage asset in the last five years?

Yes

Does your organisation have, or are you planning to take out, a mortgage or other loans secured on the building or land, or heritage items?

No

Does a project partner have, or are planning to take out, a mortgage or other loans secured on the building or land, or heritage items?

No

For landscape projects, please provide an Ordnance Survey grid reference for your landscape.

TR 00534 42259

2d Does your project involve the acquisition of a building, land or heritage items?

No

Please tick any of the following that apply to your heritage:

**Accredited Museum, Gallery
or Archive**

**Designated or Significant
(Scotland) Collection**

**DCMS funded Museum,
Library, Gallery or Archive**

World Heritage Site

**Grade I or Grade A listed
building**

**Grade II* or Grade B listed
building** ☒

How many buildings of this type are included in your project?

1

**Grade II, Grade C or Grade
C(S) listed building**



How many buildings of this type are included in your project?

1

Local list

**Scheduled Ancient
Monument**

Registered historic ship

Conservation Area

Registered Battlefield

**Area of Outstanding Natural
Beauty (AONB) or National
Scenic Area (NSA)**

National Park

National Nature Reserve

Ramsar site

**Regionally Important
Geological and
Geomorphological Site
(RIGS)**

**Special Area of Conservation
(SAC) or e-SAC**

**Special Protection Areas
(SPA)**

Registered Park or Garden



Grade I listed Park or Garden

**Grade II* listed Park or
Garden**

**Grade II listed Park or
Garden**

If applicable, what is the registration or inventory number/s?

Section three: Your project

In this section, tell us about your project. Make sure you include all your planned activities, and capital works if applicable.

3a Describe what your project will do.

Delivery of this project will set a unique example of how an underused public park, now in a key strategic residential and business location, can respond to the significant change happening around it, and once again play that leading role, as it originally did, in Ashford's latest growth development.

- Activities:

Victoria Park and Watercress Fields is currently underused due to poor quality facilities, lack of activities and in part because the cycle path along the river allows people to bypass the park, acting as a thoroughfare with few opportunities or reasons for people to venture into the park interior. The high rise block of flats and residential area south of Watercress Fields is not served by formal paths and the industrial estate to the north is severed from the park by the river.

A stakeholder and community workshop in 2015 reported very few positive comments - the pervading tone of views of the park was 'average, underused, unloved and tatty'. The capital works and activities will work hand-in-hand to address these short-comings and ensure a wider range of people and greater numbers visit the parks to enjoy the heritage and natural environment.

Whilst capital improvements will by default increase usage, the following activities are aimed at widening the range of audiences; creating new learning opportunities (formal and informal); supporting the site's different user groups to take a greater role; involve new and existing volunteers; and provide people with skills and training:

- Volunteers Compound:

Creation of a volunteers/community compound with storage and compound building, recycling facilities, growing space and office space; including development of a programme and environment conducive for volunteering in partnership with the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP), Aspire, Uprising Youth and Community and other local community engagement groups.

It is anticipated that activities for volunteers will primarily be focused on ecological and recreational improvement works to the river corridor, community orchard and proposed Nuttery, the secret garden, small scale urban agriculture and composting and recycling.

Despite the current lack of activity and low-level usage, there is precedent for successful community engagement of the park, and existing volunteer groups and targeted activities do exist, successful examples are KSCP who are involved with the orchard and Green Corridor and Uprising who run programmes for young people not in education, employment or training, currently primarily targeted at the Council's high rise flats that face on to Watercress Fields. However much more work should be supported and providing a volunteer home within the park is key.

- Developing an active Friends Group/Forum:

Developing an active and representative 'Friends of Victoria Park' group during the development phase will be an important first step for this project. The group will develop activities, membership and advocacy supported by the Council.

- Partnering and collaboration:

We will develop a partnering approach with local organisations and groups, spearheaded by Aspire for maintaining the park and raising standards to achieve Green Flag status; create learning opportunities and empower users to play a greater role and take ownership of their local park. This will achieve a wide range of outcomes including:

Provide people with skills and training, including opportunities for apprenticeships and internships with local

organisations and partners - Aspire run a six month Land Management Internship focusing on maintenance, management, pricing-up and practical skills; similarly KSCP offer a three month Conservation Internship; Ashford Training provide training for volunteers as a step towards paid work in collaboration with education providers - Singleton TCV, Revelation Ashford and Ashford college; and the Council has links with Hadlow College, Brook Agricultural College and Ashford College.

Reduce the maintenance burden on ABC and promote a sense of community ownership through volunteering, sustainable management and intelligent design.

Forge connections and strengthen local groups such as KSCP and Uprising to develop fundraising and communication skills, and a website to enable a coordinated and broad programme of activities to develop, including the chance for 'time-to-time' volunteers to participate.

Reach individuals and minority groups (people with mental health/learning difficulties, refugees, non-English speakers, and those on the margins of the community who aren't currently using and benefiting from the park).

Recruit, train and support a team of 'Victoria Park' volunteer community researchers who will act as advocates for the project, identify communities and individuals to participate in specific projects, support involvement from hard to reach communities and undertake DBS checks where required.

- Working with local schools:

There are two primary schools located very close to the park along with an early year's nursery on site that bring activity into the park.

Schools are uniquely placed to advocate to a wide demographic of families in the community and activities will be focused on broadening, particularly primary age pupils understanding of their heritage, the environment, restoration and repair work. Engaging schools and young people in this way will bring new audiences to the park, greater activity, promote the need to look after our heritage, and reduce the reported high vandalism and truancy levels.

- Capital Works:

Repair and restore the landscape and built features:

The Hubert Fountain & Piazza:

The fountain has undergone a number of repairs since its acquisition in 1912 and whilst still operational and receiving regular maintenance and repair, it requires replacement of some parts and repainting to prevent further deterioration (beyond annual repairs) and address the visual appearance and vandalism. The sequence of repairs since 1912 is as follows:

1977 - Fully repaired for the Silver Jubilee by the Council, having not been operational since 1939.

1998 - Overhaul of the fountain following successful HLF grant (£367,000), including construction of new pump room, mechanical and electrical upgrades, lighting, restoration of all cast iron goods, rendered basin and repainting.

2007 – Repaint due to the 98' paint system failing.

The proposed repairs therefore are as follows: partial dismantling of the fountain down to the central plinth; repair of the cast iron goods; anticorrosion treatment and repainting. The lower pool will also require repair, including waterproofing and rendering.

Historic England's listing states that the Hubert Fountain is the finest example in the country of a cast iron fountain by a French foundry due to its design, rarity, maker and unaltered condition. However, it is not Grade 1 listed like its sister fountain (The Ross Fountain at Edinburgh Castle), due to its setting.

The works to the piazza therefore focus on improving the fountains setting and creating a public space commensurate with this key entrance and gathering point. This will require the removal of inappropriate tree planting, resurfacing works, new steps/seating terraces, signage and interpretation and improved relationship with the river.

Tree lined walks:

Based on a tree survey and arboriculture report, conservation management plan and other background research to be carried out in the development phase, a strategy will be formulated for replanting the tree lined walks nearing the end of their natural lives and the lost commemorative trees.

The Secret Garden:

Recent clearance works by Aspire revealed a number of Pulhamite-type outcrops, a path, steps, seats and pond – the space was originally conceived as a sensory garden. The existing built features provide a good framework for developing this idea further and opportunities for working with volunteers and especially minority groups or individuals that would specifically benefit from a sensory garden.

Car parking:

The existing park car park is currently primarily used by bowls centre members and commuters. A planning application has recently been submitted by the bowls centre to construct a new car park to the west, exclusively for the use of its members. This coupled with tighter parking controls will return the car park to park users. The proposals include for minor rationalisation of the car park and resurfacing works to increase capacity, accessibility and connectivity with the park.

Repairing boundaries and furniture:

The majority of the park boundaries are either formed by rear garden fences or bounded by the river. The Jemmett Road boundary was historically the only fenced frontage to the park. However, as is the case with many Victorian parks, the railings were removed and melted down during WW2, leaving only a grand set of Victorian iron gates. The proposals allow for reinstatement of railings to improve the park frontage and heritage status. It will provide a controlled boundary to make running events more feasible, such as the annual Create Music Festival, which is one of the biggest free music festivals in Kent, attracting over 13,000 people throughout the day.

There is currently a distinct lack of furniture - signage, interpretation and particularly seating and therefore opportunities to meet people, linger, engage, etc. are few. A new comprehensive furniture strategy will be developed to address this.

Improving access for all, including people with disabilities:

Currently, entrances into the park lack any discernible markers or surface treatments to announce arrival, orientate or welcome park users.

There are currently eight existing entrance points. Five additional fully accessible entrances are planned as part of the proposals, including a new entrance bridge to connect the new residential area with the park and a new path linking the Watercress Fields high rise flats and residential area with the heart of the park. Currently this area is not served by any formal paths. All twelve entrances will be improved by consistent treatment of paved thresholds, signage and interpretation and rationalisation of entrances where required. New signage, interpretation and park- wide branding will also help to provide identity and clear arrival/departure points.

Similarly, the bridges and culverts are important crossing points into the park and between character areas. However, the crossings are currently in poor condition and not legible as bridges, entrance points or gateways. The existing railings to these crossings would be replaced throughout by a single railing style and colour to provide legibility and consistency.

• Community facilities:

Children's nursery and public toilets:

The existing park building is not fit-for-purpose and fails to address the park positively on any elevation. The proposals allow for demolition of the toilet block, and refurbishment and extension of the nursery wing to create a multi-use community building.

Currently, the indoor bowls centre at the far end of the park run a café for bowls club members only. Tea and coffee are available to the park users via a servery hatch but due to the limited offer and distance from the heart of the park, draw is limited.

We want the community to have access to better facilities and a wider range of people to use the park. By

extending and refurbishing the existing building we will create a building with sufficient capacity to provide a new café and toilets, plus a new multi-use space with facilities to support the nursery, volunteering, training, and education programmes. The space will be hired out for events and functions to generate income to reinvest in the park.

Volunteer compound:

In order to stimulate interest and encourage a broad level of community participation the volunteers' yard or compound will need to provide a base and environment that makes it easy for people to meet, work together, and encourage others to participate. The yard will include a secure structure for tool storage and small inside space to gather and shelter in bad weather. It will also provide a desk space for staff and activity coordinators. The yard will be designed to include recycling and composting facilities and growing space.

Children's Formal Playground:

The location and relationship of the existing children's formal playground to the park is disjointed and obscure. The play facilities require replacement. Its play value is limited for both the adjacent nursery and local community that demands up to date and challenging features. In response to South Ashford's young family demographic and the clear need to increase activity and make the park relevant to people's lives, a new relocated children's playground is proposed adjacent to the grand axis and hub.

Children's Adventure Playground:

The adventure play area, that is intended to provide a physical challenge for young people, will be improved and upgraded with minimal capital expenditure through: scrub and tree clearance, improve and align connections to the new housing development bridge planned for the park; reinstatement of ditches to recall the historic arable landscape pattern. This will also help to integrate the adventure play area into the heritage and physical links of the park, provide a framework for future improvements and alleviate the drainage problems associated with this low lying area by the river.

Creating and improving habitats:

Victoria Park sits within the borough's Green Corridor and has a number of overlapping functions for wildlife, recreation and education. Although tensions exist between these functions, there is broad consensus that the park must make better use of this crucial resource. The project will explore how the park could better address and interact with the river corridor, whilst also improving biodiversity and water quality. Two broad concepts will be tested during the development stage with specialist input from ecologists and hydrological engineers: 1 – strategic interventions along its course, such as the creation of an eco-island, dipping platforms and seating areas in strategic locations and 2 – different management regimes to the river banks, (the park side bank would be managed as a chalk grassland or wet meadow depending on site conditions, and the northern bank as scrub and marginal vegetation). It is anticipated that this work would be carried out in collaboration with the EA and KSCP and undertaken by volunteers.

- Limited new landscape:

The Grand Axis:

The proposed Hub and Grand Axis build on the geometries and structure of the Victorian park. The Grand Axis is the extension to the tree lined avenue that terminates in the Hubert Fountain – it functions as a hub and fulcrum to the community building and new relocated children's formal playground.

The space will strengthen the connection between the fountain entrance and centre of the park and encourage greater through-movement. The space will also be used for outdoor café seating, free wi-fi connection and community events, including an outdoor mobile library and meeting place for book clubs.

3b Explain what need and opportunity your project will address

Despite the scarcity of open space; demographic (young families); connection to the Green Corridor; proximity to the town centre with International connections; and broad range of character areas – the park remains underused. This is for the following reasons and will be addressed through the project:

- Lack of facilities;
- Lack of activities and opportunities for the community to meet and participate;
- Lack of interpretation and awareness of the parks heritage;
- Lack of connection between the park and housing (mostly affordable) facing on to Watercress Fields;

- Lack of opportunities/reasons to venture off main through routes;

This project, combined with the other major regeneration projects underway in Ashford, provides both an imperative and unique opportunity to dramatically improve the quality of the environment and people's lives in the area.

- Features at risk and under threat:

The Hubert Fountain:

There are a number of interconnected issues that will be addressed by the project in relation to the fountain:

The paint system is nearing the end of its practical life and has been damaged due to vandalism. To protect this important Grade 2* listed structure and prevent its further deterioration it will need to be repainted.

Although routine maintenance and annual repair is being undertaken, there is an opportunity as part of the restoration works to develop Aspire's expertise and understanding of the fountain. The Management & Maintenance Plan (MMP) will be developed to ensure the fountain works are better understood, and accordingly better managed and maintained.

Aligned to its restoration are also opportunities for enhancing its setting and communicating to park users the many interconnected stories behind the fountain, including the Beaux Arts movement, the Val d'Ose foundry, its listing, the International Exhibition and the story of George Harper.

Management of trees:

The integrity of a landscapes' structure is often overlooked and not considered until legibility is lost – whilst not critically compromised within Victoria Park, both a short and long-term strategy should be developed for dealing with the ageing tree population, particularly to the curved tree lined walks. In places, the palate is bland and more colour throughout the year will help attract people to enjoy the park.

- Organisational Issues and Opportunities :

Management and Maintenance:

Since 2016 the management and maintenance of ABCs open spaces and parks has been brought in-house, under Aspire. The project provides a clear opportunity to develop the proposals in close collaboration with Aspire, to ensure that the works and maintenance tasks are understood, agreed and properly managed prior to developing and finalising the parks MMP.

Friends Group / volunteering / community participation:

Currently, there is no active Friends Group or meaningful joined up community participation, other than the work KSCP are involved with to the river corridor and community orchard. The excitement and buzz this project is creating, provides a great opportunity to engage and motivate the community to form a Friends Group, organise events, crowdfund, volunteer and generally get involved in their local park.

What is the current maintenance and management budget?

£85,749 per annum

- How people engage with heritage now:

Due to the lack of interpretation, activities and engagement within the park, it is clear from informal conversations with park users and stakeholders, that people are unaware of the site's heritage. This picture is reflected across Ashford according to the RSA's heritage index rating, and the borough's recently written Heritage Strategy. There are numerous opportunities to address this through on-site interpretation and formal and informal activities (oral history projects, working with schools, events, conservation and land management internships and website).

- Social, economic and environmental needs:

The Victoria Ward is the most deprived Ward in Ashford and together with neighbouring Stanhope Ward falls within the 10% most deprived in the country. Correspondingly, this ward has a higher than national average profile of heart, respiratory, cancer and mental health issues, particularly people suffering with depression.

The project will look to work closely with the local doctors surgery, community, particularly minority groups and individuals, to help combat these issues and inequalities, and promote greater well-being.

3c Why is it essential for the project to go ahead now?

Ashford is currently experiencing a period of tremendous regeneration and expansion and accordingly has recognised the urgent need to increase capacity and particularly the quality of its parks and open spaces to meet the additional demand. Without this, problems associated with social deprivation (lack of opportunities, social inequality, health and well-being) will be compounded and perpetuated, particularly in the Victoria Ward in which the park sits and has the potential to play such a transformative role.

Aside from ad-hoc work and typical park maintenance there has been little structural investment in the park over the last few decades. This application, that builds on the adopted Visioning & Masterplanning Exercise carried out in 2015, presents a golden opportunity to restore and upgrade the park and deliver the step-change required to meet the needs of both the existing and new community settling in Ashford. The strategic value of the project and application has been recognised and secured unanimous support from the council cabinet. It is crucial that this momentum is capitalised on whilst there is political will and the right climate.

- Availability of developer funding:

Victoria Park is situated adjacent to five new housing and commercial developments, about to start construction. In negotiation, we have made the commitment to pool and allocate S106 funding from these developments for this project, and be used as part match funding for this application. We have also agreed that if any of these schemes do not go ahead, progress only in part, or with delayed draw down of funds, security will be provided through ABC forward funding. If this application fails to secure a grant from the HLF the funds could potentially be diverted away from the park altogether, or spent on elements that would not bring about substantive changes - a very rare opportunity would be lost.

3d Why do you need Lottery funding?

Whilst the above has identified positive reasons for doing the project now, our current financial strategy for the next 5 years is to generate income as central government grants reduce (they expect local authority's to be independent of them by 2019/20). This means that housing and economic growth is a key driver for our investment. This will allow us to be in a fit position to maintain, repair and continue to invest in and promote heritage in the future. We have a repairs and renewals fund which is oversubscribed, hence Lottery and partnership funding is crucial in our ability to both sustain ourselves and maintain key heritage, cultural and community assets.

3e What work and/or consultation have you undertaken to prepare for this project and why?

There has been a long development process to ensure we can provide a clear and appropriate application. Two pieces of strategy work has been instrumental in starting to plan for this project, these are a) the Land Management Improvement Plan (2014), that identified the need for renewal at Victoria Park and the Hubert Fountain, and b) ABC's Corporate Plan (2015) that prioritised tourism and heritage alongside parks and open space.

These strategies prioritised the creation of a long term Management & Masterplan for Victoria Park and the need to improve maintenance. In March 2015, we hosted a workshop with some key stakeholders to describe the site, produce a SWOT analysis, identify what work has taken place, and what people would like to achieve in the future. In November 2015 we held a Victoria Park and Watercress Fields workshop with Members, officers and partners to create a zonal plan of key landscape character areas throughout the Park, future uses, constraints and opportunities, management issues, events and activities. Partners involved and consulted with include: Kent County Council, Environment Agency, Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership, South East Museums and the Conservation Volunteers. It was at these consultations the concept of different zones within the park was born.

In response to wider consultation of the emerging concept masterplan, a Local Champion Steering Group has been formed, and together with the commissioned Community Engagement Manager, we identified key areas of work to be delivered culminating in the outline Activity Engagement Plan (refer 4.). A pilot event to encourage further consultation (Mr Harper's Birthday Picnic in July - now an annual event) enabled officers

and volunteers to survey audiences about usage of Victoria Park and aspirations which helped form the concept masterplan for the Park and its constituent Zones. This survey will be extended in much greater depth to a much larger sample in our development phase to agree the design specification and community activity programme for each zone.

Outline aspirations for each one have been identified:

Heritage Zone:

Provide a strong entrance and focal point from the Town Centre such as new signage and reordered pathways.

Refurbish and better manage and maintain the Hubert Fountain.

Delineate a “sense of place” by defining the boundary of the park with heritage fencing.

Create better spaces for performance, entertainment, events and cultural activities.

Upgrade the Secret Garden to provide a space of high horticultural quality.

Sport and Recreation Zone:

Agree any new desired sport and recreational facilities to provide an all-round customer offer including improved café, toilets, formal play, car parking, and pathways that encourage exercise.

Upgrade and reposition play facilities in this area.

Lack of places to meet and focus for volunteering and friends groups.

Watercress Fields and Recreation Zone:

Refurbish and expand the “Active” play offer to include bike ramps challenging play facilities.

Enhance paths and pedestrian routes into and through Victoria Park.

Extend the successful community orchard.

Riverside Zone:

Provide new access points, wetland sites and river enhancements.

3f How are you planning to promote and acknowledge National Lottery players' contribution to your project through HLF funding?

Communications and Marketing will be led by ABC's Communications & Marketing Team. We have already identified the need for some support from an experienced Ashford based design consultancy to create core visual identity assets, including all required acknowledgements of the National Lottery contribution. The team and consultants will:

Keep existing park users (public, staff, tenants, parents, festival groups, residents) informed of the vision, funding in place, proposed changes and any potential of disruption.

Ensure the project receives positive coverage in international, national, regional and local press, as well as relevant trade titles, that in turn generates civic pride.

Illustrate how this project links to, and will have a positive impact on South Ashford, the town centre, alongside other town centre regeneration initiatives.

Ensure all providers and stakeholders promote and acknowledge National Lottery contribution.

Section four: Project outcomes

In this section, tell us about the difference that your project will make for heritage, people and communities.

4a What difference will your project make for heritage?

- Better managed:

Our project will deliver a step-change in the way heritage features in the park are promoted, managed and maintained. The MMP will be embedded and implemented by Aspire, our new in-house grounds maintenance team. The MMP will also be implemented by the new Friends Group supported by key stakeholders and other partners.

The MMP will be geared towards the park achieving and sustaining a Green Flag Award and developing a sustainable park model.

Our project will create a sustainable future for the park with increased opportunities to generate income from the community space, hosting events and festivals and increased activities in the hub. This income will be reinvested in the parks maintenance and facilities.

Conservation and MMPs will be prepared during the development phase alongside the development of the masterplan proposals and heritage conservation works. This will plan for long-term and coordinated conservation of built heritage, landscape elements and features of ecological value.

Volunteers will learn new skills in park maintenance, horticulture and habitat creation, which will be embedded in the MMP, which will explain and describe the important links to the history of the park. They will also act as advocates for the park and its heritage.

- Better condition:

The landscape setting to and the condition of the Grade II* Listed Fountain will be enhanced and easier to maintain and manage to a higher standard than its current state.

With an increase of activities and community involvement / sense of ownership, the Park and Watercress Fields will suffer from less vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

- Better interpreted and explained:

Working in partnership with Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership, the project will create a new interpretation style for the site.

This interpretation style will be implemented across Ashford, including the Town Centre and from Ashford International Station.

The interpretation will help reveal the heritage across the site including elements such as the Hubert Fountain, the Victorian designed landscape and the natural landscape of The Great Stour river.

The project includes developing and implementing specific interpretation walks and talks that will focus on things like the landscape history, biodiversity, the history of Mr Harper and other key philanthropists in Ashford. Talks will also be available on podcasts. In addition there will be an onsite heritage trail and tree trail for visitors.

- Heritage will be identified / recorded:

A new collection of history will be uncovered from archives, stories, images and artefacts discovered and recorded from people.

A set of oral histories and a documentary film will be created, promoted and shared online. This history will include information about the park landscape before and during its development, public use of the park and memories of it, local industry at the time of the Hubert Fountain's creation, the way people lived and worked

when the park was created.

The information will be collected at Ashford Museum and be available online.

Visitors will appreciate the hidden heritage being revealed through this project.

4b What difference will your project make for people?

People will have developed skills:

- Volunteers will have:

Gained skills to enable them to take part in the renovation and ongoing maintenance of the landscape through the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership.

Been trained by Ashford Museum and have developed skill in oral history and heritage research.

Developed skills in working as a cohesive community.

- ABC staff (including interns and apprenticeships) will have;

Gained the relevant practical skills and experience to enable them to take part in the ongoing maintenance and management of the site.

Increased confidence in developing audience participation and community engagement.

Developed skills to work with volunteers more effectively.

- People will have learnt about heritage:

Visitors will have engaged with and learnt about the history of the park.

Through the walks and talks visitors will get a sense of how the Park has been developed over the years and its connection to the growth of the town and local community.

New interpretation and activities will help visitors understand the park history and its relevance to the community today. Children and young people will have learnt about their local history through the extended schools programme.

Over the lifetime of the project we aim to attract 4000 school children to the park, learning about the history of the park suitable to KS2.

Teachers will gain knowledge in delivering local history, geography and art lessons that incorporate Victoria Park Heritage.

Families already familiar with the Park will be encouraged to discover and interact with its history.

People who are already engaged with the Great River Stour will be encouraged to discover and interact more with the adjoining Victoria Park and its heritage.

Hard to reach groups will be targeted and actively engaged during the development phase.

- People will have volunteered time:

Existing volunteers working on the River Stour through the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership will be encouraged to be involved in both Victoria Park with Watercress Fields.

Opportunities to volunteer will increase with 10 heritage volunteers, 10 conservation biodiversity volunteers, 8 research and archiving volunteers and 5 events and guided tour volunteers.

Volunteers will have grown in confidence and developed skills through training opportunities delivered by relevant professionals. This will include heritage horticulture and historical research and archiving.

4c What difference will your project make for communities?

- The local area will be a better place to live/ work and visit by:

Injecting life and activity into an important park that currently does not meet the needs and aspirations of the growing and evolving community. The park will be a more attractive and enjoyable destination to spend time in and engage with.

Creating opportunities for meaningful community involvement in the Park's management, maintenance, promotion and interpretation.

Improving existing audience's engagement with an understanding of the site's unique heritage and at the same time reach out to new audiences not previously engaged.

Providing needed quality open space with a community ward that currently has one the highest rates of Mental Health issues in young people, in Kent.

Increasing opportunities for events and activities led by different communities and target groups.

- Negative environmental impacts will be reduced by:

Consolidation and improvement of waste management methods will lead to an increase in composting and recycling of green waste for reuse in the park.

Specification for the works will require that all interventions and mechanical and electrical installations be thermally efficient and resilient to the changing climate.

Making pedestrian access available at a number of locations in the park and improvements to the path network and creating the Grand Axis will ensure that this is safe and easy.

Recognising the importance of the National Cycle Route 18 that goes through the park and will provide an extra reason for people to use this cycle route.

Improving drainage through Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) across the Park will help reduce negative impact on adjoining water course (River Stour).

Grey water harvesting will be incorporated into the volunteers compound buildings.

- More people and a wider range of people will have engaged with heritage by:

Increasing the number of regular users of the park.

Increasing the number of volunteers involved in the management and maintenance of the site.

Actively engaging with target minority groups throughout the development and delivery phase.

Involving the local community, including local schools, in preparing the oral history research and tasks.

Establishing a Friends Group who play an important role in the long term sustainability and heritage value of the park.

4d What are the main groups of people that will benefit from your project?

- Local communities suffering deprivation:

Victoria ward is the most deprived ward in Ashford and together with neighbouring Stanhope Wards falls within the 10% most deprived in the country. The project will look to work closely with the existing local community, providing opportunities for engagement and participation. The physical enhancement to the park will provide a greater sense of community / civic pride and demonstrate that this deprived community deserves better local facilities and will enable them to better connect to the heritage of the park.

- New local communities:

The new housing, many high rise with no gardens, will bring significant growth in population to the local area and subsequent impact on the park. The project will focus on social cohesion between the new community and the existing.

- People with health and wellbeing issues:

The 2 local GP practices closest to the site report serious high levels of depression amongst their young patients. The project will work with local health services to promote outdoor activities and volunteering, both known to improve both physical and mental well-being, also using the beacon of the fountain and the story of Mr Harper, as inspiration.

- Target (Hard to reach) groups:

The project includes undertaking an extensive survey that will identify reasons as to why people aren't engaging in heritage and culture, and provide information, support and access to participating and volunteering. These will be our target groups that will have a different level of intervention to help them participate.

- Current users:

The project will encourage existing users to increase their use and sense of pride for the park.

- Community Champions:

The project will help establish specific champions from across the community. These will include Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership, Ashford Oaks Primary School, Victoria Park Day Nursery, Ashford Uprising Youth and Community / Aspire, Ashford Museum and Ashford Volunteer Centre.

4e Does your project involve heritage that attracts visitors?

Yes

How many visitors did you receive in the last financial year?

139500

How many visitors a year do you expect on completion of your project?

460350