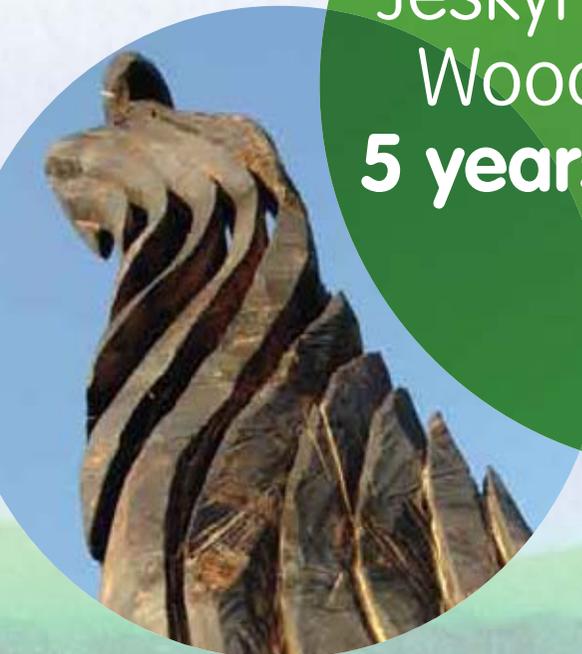




Planning a sustainable future for Jeskyns

your views
count



Jeskyns Community
Woodland will be
5 years old this year.

In this changing economic climate, how can we best secure a bright and sustainable future for Jeskyns?

Page	Contents
3	Background
4	How can we meet this challenge at Jeskyns?
4	The Consultation Process
5	The Options in further detail
5-8	Option 1
9-14	Option 2
15	The next steps

Background

In 2007 with funding from the then Government's Sustainable Communities Fund, the Forestry Commission created a brand new Community Woodland called Jeskyns, near Gravesend in north Kent.

Five years on, under the management of Forestry Commission, England, Jeskyns is now a vibrant space providing significant environmental benefit to the area and welcoming 200,000 visitors every year.

The Forestry Commission is an organisation built on the commitment and experience of people who really know and care about trees and the many habitats that thrive alongside them. For years we have made sure forests benefit people, the economy and the environment, and worked very hard at getting this balance right.

Now in 2012, as part of the Forestry Commission's contribution to savings required by government, it now needs to review the way it works and generates income. The Government has laid out new challenges for the Forestry Commission to meet growing public wishes, to improve its efficiency, to protect, improve and expand England's woodlands, and to focus on those tasks which only Government should do.

To keep managing your woodlands and the facilities within them means changing what we do and how we do it. We need the help, experience and ideas from all of our visitors and partners to do this. You can now become more involved in the decision making of how you can get the most from your local woodland and deliver the benefits of the natural environment.

Our focus for the next four years is to work with you and other partners including other government bodies, private businesses, charities, voluntary groups and communities in order to:

- **protect woodlands and increase their resilience;**
- **improve woodlands to enhance benefits;** and
- **expand woodlands by promoting and incentivising planting and natural regeneration of trees, woods and forests with the right trees in the right places.**

Jeskyns along with other Forestry Commission sites must play a part in contributing to the savings and delivering these key objectives. This inevitably presents a number of challenges but also great opportunities.

We need the views and ideas of the local community to help decide the most appropriate and most beneficial way to meet these challenges and exploit those opportunities at Jeskyns.

How can we meet this challenge at Jeskyns?

At its simplest level, improved efficiency could be achieved by reducing the amount of maintenance services currently undertaken at Jeskyns. e.g. grass cutting frequency, litter picking, dog waste bin provision, 24 hour security service etc - **OPTION 1**

It could also be achieved by reducing the amount of resource led services such as the dedicated full time Ranger post or the community engagement activities such as events and educational sessions currently provided by the Ranger.

Alternatively, income generating schemes such as concession space hire, event area hire or car parking charges could be introduced - **OPTION 2**

Of course, it is unlikely that just one option will meet all requirements and it is therefore anticipated that a mixture of the above will likely be the most feasible outcome.

This document sets out details for each option proposed and prompts the reader to consider the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats presented by each one.

The main aim of this consultation is to seek your views on where the balance between income generation and service reduction should lie.

Based on the responses to this consultation, the details of all options would then be subject to a further deliberation with our partners and stakeholders.

The Consultation Process

This document forms the detailed background to the consultation and sets out where savings could be made, and what the income generating schemes may look like.

Consultees are asked to fill out one of two questionnaires depending upon whether they are representing themselves as individuals or as a group/organisation. These can be downloaded via the Jeskyns website, www.forestry.gov.uk/jeskyns

Once the consultation has closed, the Forestry Commission will be analysing and reviewing the responses made. The results will be published within a report, which will be made freely available to the public. Within the report, the Forestry Commission will also detail the decisions that have been taken based on the consultation responses, and the reasons behind those decisions.

The consultation will run until the 20th April 2012.





The Options in further detail

Option 1 - A reduction in the number of services currently undertaken/provided at Jeskyns

The operational work at Jeskyns is predominantly managed through contractors. This has allowed the Forestry Commission to utilise specialist skills and equipment at a price that has remained competitive.

Alongside this, the volunteer workforce developed at Jeskyns has proved to be a very valuable resource, but their scope is limited due to their size and skills. We therefore cannot rely on a volunteer workforce to undertake the majority of work at Jeskyns.

Reducing the amount of services the FC currently pays to have undertaken at Jeskyns would perhaps be the simplest and most straightforward way of improving efficiency. Examples of typical services include:

- **Managing vegetation**
- **Maintenance and repairs to infrastructure**
- **Provision and emptying of dog bins**
- **Litter picking**
- **Site security and car park gate locking and unlocking.**
- **Provision of Ranger led activities**

However, when considering this option, one needs to be mindful of the following points:

- **What impact would the reduction of any of these services have upon visitors to Jeskyns and the local community?**
- **Are there alternatives to cutting/reducing services such as the following?**
- **Reduction of which services would have the least or the most detrimental impact?**

The tables on the following pages provide further detail about each of these services and suggests points for consideration.



Managing vegetation



Infrastructure such as benches

Option 1 - Reducing Services

Current Service

Details

Points for consideration

Vegetation management

- Grass cutting
 - Hedge trimming
 - Weed control
 - Tree establishment
- Maintaining less vegetation may result in a site that looks "less tidy", "less welcoming" and "less cared for" by some. How important is this?
 - Reducing the control of certain weeds such as Ragwort may have a detrimental impact upon neighbouring landowners.
 - Less vegetation maintenance may actually have a positive impact upon bio-diversity value in some areas.

Infrastructure maintenance

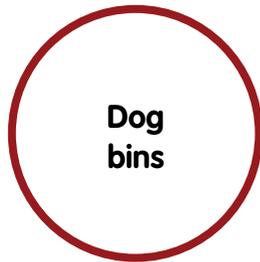
- Paths
 - Benches
 - Play areas
 - Gates
 - Fences
- Obviously current infrastructure needs to be maintained to a safe standard for visitors.
 - However, it might mean that damaged infrastructure that cannot be cheaply repaired may be removed instead.
 - How will this affect the visitor experience at Jeskyns?
 - Will it mean that certain groups are more excluded than others?

Option 1 - Reducing Services

Current Service

Details

Points for consideration



Dog bins

- 14 dog bins across site
 - All emptied twice weekly
 - Waste disposed of by specialist contractor
- Emptying of the bins and disposing of the dog waste is an expensive operation.
 - Could our visitors make do with fewer dog bins?
 - Would they be willing to carry their dog waste a little bit further?



Litter picking

- Current policy is to encourage visitors to take their waste home with them.
 - High use areas currently litter picked twice weekly by specialist contractor.
 - Site Ranger and volunteers undertake litter picking in between times.
- Can we make do with less frequent litter picking?
 - Could we develop a larger volunteer litter-picking scheme?
 - Installing litter bins would be costly and would increase our waste disposal costs.



Dog bins



Litter picking



Site security



Ranger led activities

Option 1 - Reducing Services

Current Service

Details

Points for consideration

Site security and gate locking

- A contractor currently supplies a 24hr security response service
- Car park is currently locked at night and opened in the morning by contractor
- Is this security response service necessary?
- Would it be an issue if the car park were not locked at night?
- Due to varying daylight hours, it is not feasible for the current Ranger position to be responsible for all locking and opening.

Community engagement activities

- Public events e.g. Jeskyns Discovery Day
- Environmental sessions e.g. pond dipping
- Educational sessions for schools e.g. Meopham School land based studies sessions
- How important to the community and the success of Jeskyns are these type of Ranger led activities?

Option 2 - Generating Income

Even in times of austerity, there are always opportunities for growth and investment and we are keen to consider ideas for income generation at Jeskyns.

Obviously the benefit of creating income-generating schemes would be that fewer on site services would need to be cut or reduced to meet the required efficiencies.

In fact in some cases, facilities or services could even be improved as a result of a scheme.

Some examples of possible income generating schemes have been offered here, however it should be noted that these are suggestions only for consultation. If the Forestry Commission decides to progress down this route, listening to the ideas and proposals from the local community will be critical to ensuring that the optimum solution is found.

All proposals would also be subject to the statutory requirements such as consultation with the Local Planning Authority.

We want to understand your views, both positive and negative, on some of the options open to us.

We have offered some examples of possible income generating schemes here:

a: Refreshments

d: Area Rental (non-exclusive)

b: Car Parking Charges

e: Area Rental (exclusive)

c: Building Retail

Please note, we emphasise that these are only suggestions to get you thinking.

There would be many challenges in delivering any of these, not least the need for statutory processes such as consultation with the Local Planning Authority.

Option 2 - Generating Income

a: Rental of space for vendor to sell refreshments in car park.

This could be as basic as a mobile catering unit or a little more sophisticated in the form of a simple building. This is likely to be a popular proposal as somewhere to “have a cup of tea” at Jeskyns is a regular request from visitors.

Many other local and regional sites generate modest incomes from similar set-ups, but great care needs to be paid to the financial viability of any such scheme, especially as some initial financial investment into related infrastructure will likely be required.

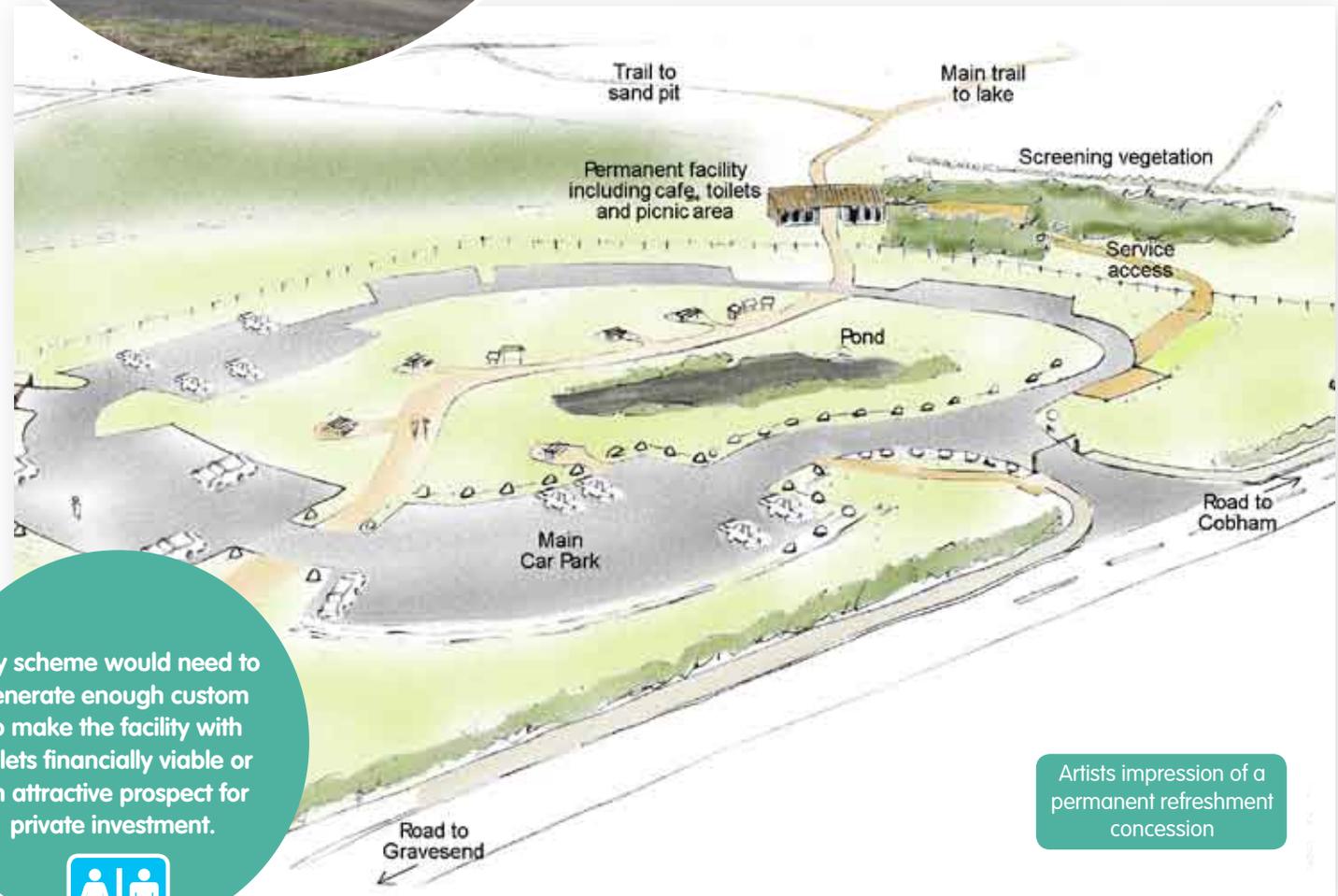
Toilet facilities would need to be provided alongside any refreshment unit. It is anticipated that their provision would be welcomed, however they are expensive to install and maintain. Therefore, costs would need to be very carefully analysed and this option could only be delivered if the added financial burden could be met at the outset and into the future.



Example of permanent concession



Temporary concession



Artists impression of a permanent refreshment concession

Any scheme would need to generate enough custom to make the facility with toilets financially viable or an attractive prospect for private investment.



Example of temporary concession



Car parking meter

Could introducing parking charges help pay for the installation and maintenance of toilets?



b: Introduction of car parking charges.

Obviously, not many people like the idea of paying for something that they have enjoyed for free for the last five years. However, parking charges would likely generate enough income to not only reduce costs without reducing too many services but could also provide enough funds to enable investment into other facilities such as toilets.

Levies could be a charge per visit with the option of purchasing an annual pass that would enable unlimited parking at Jeskyns. Various payment options are available including cash pay and display, text payment, credit card, season ticket and other options.

Careful consideration would need to be given to how to discourage inconsiderate parking outside of the site by those seeking to avoid the parking fee and this would require close consultation with the local community, council and Highways Authority.

Costs for installation of the system, security, enforcement and maintenance would need to be carefully factored into any business plan.

On the positive side, the introduction of parking charges may encourage more visitors to travel to site via more environmentally sustainable methods other than the car.



Annual parking pass

Option 2 - Generating Income

C: Rental of farm building spaces.

There are a number of farm buildings located in the former farm yard area of Jeskyns that would lend themselves to storage or workshop type uses.

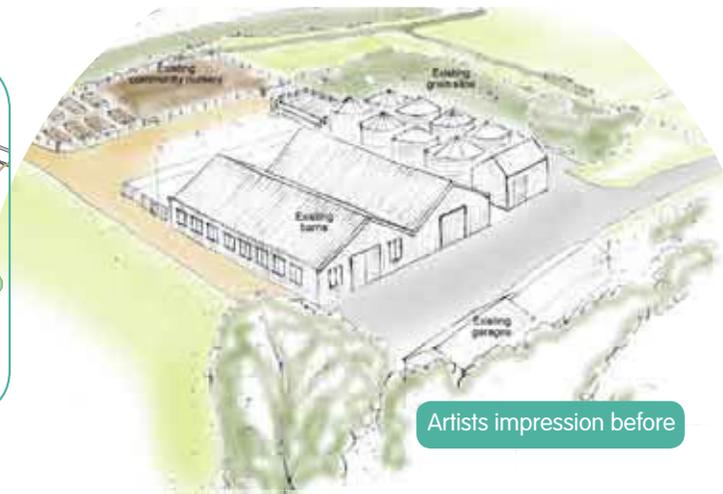
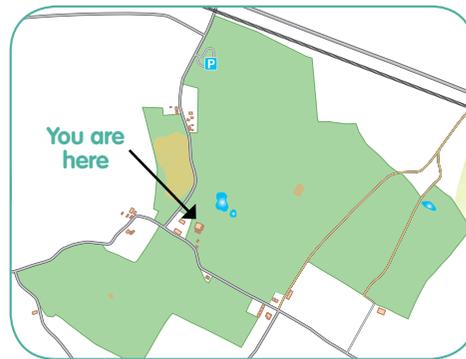
It may be possible to generate some income from their rental to agricultural, environmental or land based organisations. However, the use would have to be in keeping with their setting.

Perhaps the farmyard could become a hub of workshops for woodland enterprise schemes and craft businesses, or perhaps a shared office venue/workshop for charitable and non-profit countryside organisations.

However, rental of these spaces alone is unlikely to meet the necessary efficiencies and therefore this option would definitely need to be considered alongside other income generating proposals or service cuts.

Also the current services provided to the farmyard are limited to electricity and water. Costs for the installation of other services such as data cables, toilets, telephones and wastewater drainage if required would need to be investigated.

Alongside this, consideration would need to be given to minimise disturbance to neighbouring properties and to address the issue of the existing restrictive vehicular access in to the farm yard area.



Segway



Climbing wall



GoApe!



Cycle hire



d: Rental of area on site for organised activities - non-exclusive use.

Many other Forestry Commission sites such as Bedgebury, High Lodge and Westonbirt rent out space in their forests for carefully selected parties to deliver outdoor pursuit type activities on site.

Examples of this include Go Ape! (high wire adventure trail), Forest Segway, orienteering and cycle hire.

Any such areas would not exclude general visitors, but instead would use areas of the site to enable various activities alongside other regular visitors. For example, visitors hiring bikes from a cycle hire concession for example would be using them around the whole of the site, alongside other visitors.

Careful consideration would need to be given to the type of activities so as not to negatively impact on the overall aims and objectives of Jeskyns and to minimise the potential for conflict between different types of visitor.

This option would need to be delivered in conjunction with other income generating proposals or service cuts, as it is unlikely to generate sufficient income alone to meet the required efficiencies.

e: Rental of an area on site for organised activities - exclusive use.

This could involve the use of a space on site for exclusive use by a third party, for example a seasonal craft fair or sponsored activity.

It could also be an area set-aside for regular exclusive use by organisations looking for outdoor training areas such as dog agility groups or bike skills training.

Either option would mean that the area would be excluded to general visitors whilst they were in use.

Setting aside an area for regular exclusive use may require some initial financial investment for basic modification such as draining or levelling.



This option would also need to be delivered in conjunction with other income generating proposals or service cuts to meet the required efficiencies.

Craft fair



Farmers market



The next steps

There is no doubt that Jeskyns is facing some challenging times and some perhaps-difficult decisions need to be made. However there are also great opportunities for growth and improvement.

We recognise how important it is that the local community is involved in making these decisions to ensure Jeskyns has a bright and sustainable future. We therefore urge you to participate.

There are two ways in which you can help in this decision process depending upon who you are representing:

1. If you are representing a group or organisation then please complete the **"stakeholder consultation questionnaire"**.
2. If you are an individual, representing your own personal views as a site visitor or local resident, then please complete the **"Individual Consultation questionnaire"**.

Both documents can be downloaded via www.forestry.gov.uk/jeskyns

If you would prefer paper copies of either questionnaire, just contact us. Details on reverse.

Closing date for return of questionnaires is 20th April 2012.

We plan to feedback the results of the consultation process during May 2012.

Further information can be found at: www.forestry.gov.uk/jeskyns



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