

# CHANDLER'S FORD AND HILTINGBURY LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 13 March 2019

## PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS TO THE MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF HILTINGBURY LAKES

Report of the Direct Services Manager and the Local Area Manager

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### Recommendations

It is recommended that

- (1) Developer contributions available to this Committee totalling £135,000 are allocated to projects to refurbish and enhance Hiltingbury Lakes.
  - (2) The projects be implemented and overseen by the Direct Services Manager
  - (3) The allocation of £125,000 of New Homes Bonus money to these projects be noted.
  - (4) The allocation of additional revenue funding to maintain the area, once works are completed, be noted; and
  - (5) The programmes of work be widely publicised to ensure awareness and in order to assist public understanding of the benefits and long-term outcome.
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### Summary

This report gives the outcome of a feasibility study into the care and management of Hiltingbury Lakes and provides options for future maintenance.

It gives a costed work programme and includes the necessity to provide a long term maintenance plan.

### Statutory Powers

The 'Localism Act 2011'

### Strategic Implications

1. **Green Borough** – This project will significantly improve the quality and functionality of this area of public open space, by making it more attractive to use by a wider range of people. In addition it will provide a more attractive environment that better provides for peoples recreational and social requirements.

2. **Healthy Community** - An improved and multifunctional area of greenspace will facilitate improved physical and mental health and well-being for local people, through the provision of works set out below, which will promote physical activity and mental well-being through contact with our natural environment.

## **Introduction**

3. This feasibility study was commissioned by the Chandler's Ford and Hiltingbury Local Area Committee, in order to plan the future care and maintenance of the much loved and valued local public amenity that is Hiltingbury Lakes.
4. There has been a call for improvements to be undertaken on the site. The water system is currently inadequate due to blockages and a failing weir. Areas of the site are overgrown and there is an over-abundance of invasive, non-native species such as cherry laurel, rhododendron and bamboo. Footpaths throughout the site have become overgrown and blocked and prevent access to areas of the site. There are reports of rats on site which has been attributed to the dead wood that exists in some areas; however any infestation is likely to be due to a number of factors for example a combination of visitors feeding the ducks and the lack of management of the habitat which is providing a natural harbourage for this pest.
5. The site has real potential to be of greater value to local residents, and to sustain a more desirable species of flora and fauna whilst being a welcoming place for recreational use.
6. In conducting this study a number of different approaches were taken as shown below:
  - Information was gathered from Countryside Management staff to understand what management plans and regimes were in place; to determine what works were carried out on site, and the aim of these works.
  - Discussions were held with local Councillors to understand locally expressed desires of residents and the history of the site, particularly in understanding the sense of 'place' the site has in the local community of Chandlers Ford and Hiltingbury.
  - A tree survey was carried out to identify any urgent tree works and to identify what significant tree species existed on site.
  - Finally, a survey of public opinion was undertaken, both on site via face-to-face engagement and also in the form of an online questionnaire. This gave local residents and users the opportunity to air their views about the site and the thoughts they had in respect of its future management and maintenance.

## Findings

7. It is clear from discussions with existing Land Management staff that the site has not had a formal management plan in place for a number of years, this has resulted in maintenance on the site being reactive, with staff often only dealing with individual problems or issues as they arise with no planned follow up to prevent similar instances in the future. This lack of planned management and maintenance has created an image of the site being neglected, with pathways overgrown, trees left to biodegrade where fallen, resulting in areas of the site becoming inaccessible. The waterways are in a state of disrepair with areas blocked by fallen and degrading trees and shrubs, which is restricting the flow of water between the lakes causing areas to become flooded and inaccessible.
8. Discussions with local Councillors helped to understand some of the history of the site, which dates back to previous land owners and how the site was seen as a valuable asset within the local community who would use it for fishing, walks and picnics on the open grass areas and generally spend recreational time enjoying this tranquil area. It was made clear that the area is that of woodland and lakes and that maintaining it as such must underpin all future actions.
9. The tree survey which was carried out identified a number of significant trees on site Oak, Beech and Pine. In the main the majority of these large well established trees are in good health and provide an excellent tree canopy for the site. However a number of other species exist on site such as Ash, Birch, Sycamore and Holly which appear in the main to be self-set trees with a reduced root structure. A number of these trees are the main cause of problems with regard to falling and blocking areas of the site, and to an extent are restricting light into areas of the site which would encourage the growth of more desirable species.
10. Through the surveys conducted we engaged with over 300 people, and found that generally they value the site and understand what a real asset it is to the local community and area. It is considered a lovely spot which people enjoy using, although they think more could be done to improve the site. Negative comments were mainly around overgrown and inaccessible areas, fallen trees, broken waterways, silted up lakes and muddy, narrow pathways, all of which create an impression of an area which is not maintained or cared for.
11. The majority of people engaged with use the site for walking their dogs, others use it for family outings, picnics, fishing and just enjoying the peace and quiet the site offers. Most people live within walking distance and have been visiting the site for several years.
12. Some of the things that people wanted to see change included: introduction of a café, surveillance cameras, a toilet for fishermen, an outdoor gym, a water fountain, a boardwalk, making the site more accessible, creating an area for picnics, installing more bins, getting rid of the rats, opening up the site for more wildlife and the introduction of interpretation boards to explain the history

of the site as well as what you can expect to see. Many of these suggestions have been incorporated into the proposals. Others were considered incompatible with the broad intentions of the site.

### **Options for Future Maintenance (including phasing)**

13. There is an option to take no action and to continue with the existing regime with little or no intervention. This option whilst requiring no investment or increase in existing maintenance budgets will lead to further deterioration of the site. Footpaths will become impassable and large swathes of the site will become inaccessible for the public. The trees on site are likely to become dangerous and present a future risk to anyone accessing the site. The biggest risk however will be in respect of the lakes and the waterways on site which will inevitably becoming silted and blocked. This is likely to have a detrimental impact on local residents as a result of flooding. For the above reasons this option is not recommended.

### **Removal of Invasive Species (Phase 1)**

14. Removal of invasive species: The majority of the laurel on site needs to be removed. This will enable light to reach the ground and encourage a more diverse ground flora to develop, also making the site less dark and oppressive. It will make the site more aesthetically pleasing and will open up some of the narrow, overgrown pathways that people mentioned in the survey. If the paths are more open it will allow more sunlight to reach the ground and help prevent waterlogging. In addition the mature trees on site which are currently being crowded by the laurel, will be allowed to grow develop fully.
15. Selective removal and reduction of the rhododendron and bracken along the boundary with Lake Road needs to be carried out. This will open up the view and the access to the lake, creating a larger more inviting open space with a vista of the lake.
16. The bamboo is an unnecessary addition to the site which should be removed. It is non-native and has limited wildlife value. It is a plant which is fast growing and requires intensive management intervention to keep it under control. Its removal will open the area up and create an environment which will allow more native species to grow and be managed in the future.

### **Improving the Water System (Phase 2)**

17. The flow of water through the site needs to be improved. Currently there is a significant amount of deadwood within the lake and the ponds which is creating blockages to the flow of water. It is also degrading within the water systems and is negatively impacting the quality of the water and desirable wildlife which we want to encourage. There is also a failing weir which is allowing water to be held in the higher lake. This will require a specialist wetland engineering solution. It is proposed that the works to the water system are carried out in phase two, following the completion of the removal of the

invasive species. This approach will provide improved access to the water systems. The necessary approvals will be sought from the Environment Agency.

### **Water Course between Lakes (Phase 2)**

18. The main water courses between the lakes have fallen into a state of disrepair. There is also a failed revetment on the bank of the water course which will require repair. It is proposed that these works are completed during phase two in order for the water system to work fully from the top lake through to the lower ponds.

### **Arboricultural Work (Phase 1)**

19. Work to remove the self-set trees and the minor works to the desirable tree stock will be carried out during phase one, this approach will ensure the best use of equipment and staff on site. The desirable tree stock will, depending on health, give consideration to the retention or planting of some Ash, if possible, in order to assist with countering Ash die back.

### **Interpretation and Information (Phase 3)**

20. There is a need to improve signage throughout the site with information about the history of the site and the flora and fauna. There is also a need for educational notices explaining why it is not helpful to feed bread to the ducks. This phase would also review provision of bins and benches.

### **Increase the Presence of Wildflowers (Phase 3)**

21. Phase 3 would include the planting of marginal plants at the edges of the lakes to help create more wild flowers and add to the pleasant aesthetics. The removal of laurel bushes, in phase 1 will create space and light for this planting to take hold and flourish. Species of wild flowers would be native to the UK and suited to existing in close proximity to water. The floating beds will be removed from the lakes. A significant element of this phase will be the introduction of a reed bed at the Hiltingbury Road end of the site. Its purpose will be to filter and improve the oxygenation of the water as it flows through the site.

### **Reinstatement and Introduction of Footpaths**

22. Repair and improve footpath system throughout the site, this work will be carried out upon completion of phases 1, 2 and 3. Generally the footpath network throughout the site has become unusable due to fallen trees and overgrowing invasive species. In order to ensure the site is accessible to all and safe to use in the future there is a need to reinstate the existing footpath network. The network will be in keeping with the woodland nature of the site, and will not over-urbanise it.

## Summary of Preferred Options

23. The summary of preferred options is:-

- Removal of non-native species items 12, 13, 14 and 17 these works would take approximately 14 weeks to complete at a cost of £95,000. This work will include removal of fallen and degrading trees. The commencement date for this works would be programmed for late summer 2019 in order to take advantage of dry ground conditions for equipment and vehicular access.
- Appoint specialist wetland engineer for water course repairs and improvements, 15 and 16. This work will be programmed to commence on the completion of phase one - estimated budget of £55,000.
- Planting of wild flowers and general improvement to planted areas including introduction of a reed bed, shown in item 19 to be carried out during winter 2020 - estimated £25,000.
- Repair and improve footpath system item 20, on completion of phases one, two and three - estimated at £75,000.
- Installation of interpretation boards, benches and litter bins item 18, this work would be part of the final phase and would be carried out in the spring of 2020, - estimated at £10,000.

## Future Maintenance

24. Costed maintenance regimes for the site will be created and in place when the above works are completed in order to prevent the site becoming unmanaged in the future. It is proposed that a site specific management plan is drawn up which will clearly set out the aims and objectives for the site in the future. The maintenance regime to achieve these objectives can then be agreed and delivered. The long term vision for the site is for it to be an asset for the local community. In order for this to be sustainable in the long term consideration will be given to possible partnerships including the organisation and setting up of a friends group for Hiltingbury Lakes, which would include volunteers to assist in the future maintenance.

## Financial Implications

25. The financial implications are as follows:-

- Developer contributions available to this Local Area Committee totalling £135,000 are allocated to this project.
- The allocation of £125,000 of New Homes Bonus money to this project.
- The Leader stated at the Budget Council meeting that the additional revenue costs would be added to the LAC budget from 2020/21.

- These funds have been allocated in the recently approved budget and will have no revenue impact.

## **Risk Assessment**

26. Taking no action at this time will create a number of risks:
- Further deterioration of the site, leading to reputational damage.
  - The site will become inaccessible for the public, the trees on site are likely to become dangerous and present a future risk to anyone accessing the site.
  - The lakes and water system will inevitably becoming silted and blocked; this is likely to have a detrimental impact on local residents as a result of flooding.

## **27. Equality and Diversity Implications**

The Equality Act is relevant to the decision in this report as the decision relates to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, or fostering good relations between different people in the following ways: The Council is committed to ensuring good quality parks and open spaces which is accessible to all. For this reason, all maintenance and management of Hiltingbury Lakes will be undertaken by the Direct Services team, which will involve regular inspections. This proposed work programme will result in an anticipated improvement for people with protected characteristic, particularly for age and disability; the proposed provision and improvement of accessible walk routes will have a positive impact on the elderly and those with reduced mobility being able to access the lakes through an improved network of footpaths. A full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been carried out, because while there are some equalities impacts, it is not proportionate to carry out a full EIA.

## **Conclusion**

28. Delivery of this project will have a significant environmental benefit within the local area and to the local community; the project will be delivered by the Direct Services unit who will provide progress reports to the Local Area Committee. This project will be prominent within the public realm and have a positive impact for users and residents within the Chandlers Ford and Hiltingbury Area.

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Appendices Attached: Nil

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D**

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

None.