

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 10 OCTOBER 2023
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR (RESIDENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD)

SINGLERS MARSH LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2023-2033

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 It is a requirement for grant funding proposals and good practice to produce Landscape Management Plans for our nature reserves.
- 1.2 Each plan has a vision statement, outlining the overall goals and intentions of the site and its management.
- 1.3 A public consultation will be undertaken to see views of key stakeholders and the public on the draft plan for a period of 6 weeks. The draft plan will then be presented to Cabinet following the consultation feedback.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to consider approving a public consultation on the proposed Singlers Marsh Landscape Management Plan for 2023-2033 in Appendix A.
- 2.2 Once the consultation feedback has been received, the report and Singlers Marsh Landscape Management Plan for 2023-2033 will be resubmitted to Cabinet.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 Conservation management of the nature reserve has been supported since 1994 by Countryside Stewardship grant schemes in agreement with Natural England. Each grant scheme operates for a ten-year period, so the scheme was renewed in October 2003 and again in October 2013 when the council entered the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.
- 3.2 The Landscape Management Plan is produced to ensure the council's Nature Reserves are maintained in a strategic and planned way. The plans typically run for 10 years.
- 3.3 The previous management plan for Singlers Marsh is due to be renewed.
- 3.4 The new plans have been produced by our contractor (Maydencroft) working closely with the Council's Landscape Conservation Officer.
- 3.5 The plan gives a background to the sites, policy context, an analysis and evaluation of the sites, aims and objectives, action plans and a monitoring/review process. Key features of the Plan are:

- The context of the site both historically and within the current landscape

- The current habitats and wildlife provided by the site.
 - Policy context
 - Current and proposed management
 - Actions plan
- 3.6 The Landscape Management Plan will be available to Councillors, Officers, Volunteers and to the public.
- 3.7 Public consultation will be undertaken on the draft Landscape Management Plan for a period of 6 weeks. This will be open to the public and also shared with key stakeholders, such as the volunteer groups, parish council, Affinity Water and the Herts Wildlife Trust.
- 3.8 There will be a survey hosted on the Council's website and hard copies of the survey available if requested. The consultation will be promoted via the website, social media and direct emails.

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 Singler's Marsh was identified and selected as a Local Wildlife Site in 1997. It is also a Local Nature Reserve pursuant to section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.
- 4.2 In 2002 the site was the subject of an application for registration as a town and village green pursuant to section 15 of the Commons Act 2006. That application was refused by the Registration Authority, Hertfordshire County Council.
- 4.3 The site is currently the subject of two further applications, under section 15 of the Commons Act, to register it as a town and village green. Both of those applications have yet to be determined. Once they have been determined by the Registration Authority, the Management Plan will be reviewed in light of the determinations.
- 4.4 There is also legislation that is relevant to this Plan, and they are set out in page 17-18 of the Management Plan in Appendix A. Most notably, section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 states that every public body, including local authorities, must in exercising its functions, have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. Conserving biodiversity includes restoring or enhancing a species population or habitat.
- 4.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (DLUHC) sets out the national planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.
- 4.6 Some of the key messages from the NPPF which are of relevance to the site and its context include: conserving and enhancing the natural environment, minimise and net gain on biodiversity, and considering the impacts of climate change.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 The vision will be achieved through the Aims and Objectives and the implementation of the Action Plans. The Action Plans consist of a Capital Works Programme and Annual Maintenance and Monitoring schedule.

5.2 The Singlers Marsh Management Plan is managed through existing budgets and grant funding (from central Government).

6 Risk Management Implications

6.1 The main risks related to this the plan are: If some of the key actions are not undertaken there is a risk that some of the habitats may be affected which in turn could affect biodiversity on the site.

7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

8.1 There are no procurement implications arising from this Landscape Management Plan. The contractor who undertakes tree and landscape works was procured under contract through a tendering process in 2021.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

9.1 The appropriate management of the vegetation on site is likely to positively contribute to climate change mitigation.

10 Human Resources

10.1 The landscape management plan is managed from existing resources in the landscape and ecology team, and any tree or landscape works is undertaken by contractors and also volunteers.

11 Health & Wellbeing Implications

11.1 There is growing evidence to suggest that being in nature has positive effects on people's mental health. Studies have shown that green spaces can lower levels of stress and reduce rates of depression and anxiety, reduce cortisol levels and improve general well-being.

11.2 The proposed management plan looks to enhance access in and around the site and encourages use of the site by members of the public.

11 Communication and Engagement Implications

11.1 Some of the proposed works within the action plan will be undertaken with the help of our established volunteer groups. The involvement of these groups means that there is good communication with these groups.

11.2 The management plan will be made available to everyone so those wishing to understand the proposed works and the reasons they are being undertaken.

12 Link to Corporate Priorities

13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's corporate priorities of a commitment towards, Attractive and Accessible Green Spaces.

14 Equality and Diversity

14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Singlers Marsh Landscape Ecology Plan 2023-2033