

ITEM 8 Management of Abbotswood Area of Nature Conservation and Ecological Mitigation

Report of the Community and Leisure Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

- 1. That a new Countryside Officer post be established on a permanent basis to enable positive and effective management of the site.**
- 2. That a sum of up to £21,000 be vired from developer contributions to cover the revenue costs of this post in 2018/19, as set out in paragraph 8.**

SUMMARY:

- The Area for Nature Conservation and ecological mitigation on the Abbotswood development are in the process of being transferred to the Council to manage
- The report seeks authority for a new Countryside Officer post to manage this work, and an operational budget funded from developer contributions.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The report outlines the requirement for a new post to manage the Area of Nature Conservation (ANC) and ecological mitigation works on the Abbotswood development, Romsey. The post will be fully funded from contributions drawn from the development 08/00475/OUTS specifically for this purpose.

2 Background

- 2.1 Abbotswood is a development of over 750 houses located to the north of Romsey. As part of the ecological mitigation for the development, over half of the site has been set-aside for nature conservation on account of a number of notable species present but specifically, great crested newts. The Area for Nature Conservation (ANC) located on the west of the development covers an area of approximately 50 acres (20 hectares) with a further 15 acres (6 hectares) of woodland, hedges, ditches new planting and newt tunnels creating a complex mosaic of connected habitat throughout the development.
- 2.2 Developer contributions were secured within the S106 agreement which specifically allocate a resource for the management of the ANC and all linking habitats. The trigger for the release of this contribution for the ANC is 700 occupations which has now been met. This indexed sum of £639,879.51 for the ANC has been received and the transfer of the land is progressing. Additional areas of landscaping are being prepared for handover which will come with further funding.

- 2.3 To comply with our obligations within the S106 (to ensure the ecological mitigation fulfils its potential) it is proposed to create a new full time Countryside Officer post. This new officer will coordinate the management of all of the natural habitats on the development and work closely with the new and existing community using the site. This post will take the lead in the day to day management of the site to include all ecological habitat management works, surveys and site monitoring including drainage features.
- 2.4 The officer will be responsible for the development and implementation of a site management plan, creation of a friends group with the expectation and ambition that the site will be designated as a Local Nature Reserve within 5 years. This is consistent with the approach taken to the acquisition and management of other sites across Test Valley in recent history – such as Valley Park woodlands and Rooksbury Mill.
- 2.5 It is anticipated that this officer will form part of the team that supports the work on other countryside sites across the borough.

3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 3.1 The management of the areas set aside for nature conservation on the Abbotswood will contribute to delivering the corporate objectives of *Enjoy* the natural and built environment and *Contribute* to and be part of a strong community.

4 Consultations/Communications

- 4.1 Human Resources have been consulted on the recruitment of this post

5 Options

- 5.1 The options are considered as follows:
- 5.2 **Option 1** Create the new Countryside Officer post
- 5.3 **Option 2** – Do not create the post and manage work within the team

6 Option Appraisal

- 6.1 **Option 1 - Create the new Countryside Officer post.** The post is fully funded through the contributions secured specifically for the management of ecological mitigation on this development. The additional resource will enable the Council to ensure the site is in positive management and provide additional capacity to fully engage with residents as well as support the management of existing and new sites which come forward in the locality.
- 6.2 **Option 2 - Do not create the post and manage work within the team.** External funding has been secured specifically for the management of the ecological mitigation. Should these funds not be spent on this work the Council may be at risk from a challenge that we were not complying with our obligations within the legal agreement and could risk being asked to return the commuted sum.

6.3 On balance option 1 is considered lowest risk and is therefore recommended.

7 Risk Management

7.1 A risk assessment has been completed in accordance with the Council's Risk management process and the existing risk controls in place mean that no significant risks (Red or Amber) have been identified.

8 Resource Implications

8.1 It is intended to create the new permanent Countryside Officer post on Hay grade point six. It is anticipated that, if approved, the appointment will be made during early December 2018 at a total cost including on costs of £27,348 p.a. (£9,000 pro rata for the first year of appointment).

8.2 The revenue budget to facilitate the management of the ecological mitigation on Abbotswood will be £12,000 p.a.

8.3 The commuted sum for the ANC and sums collected for the wider ecological mitigation areas will cover the cost of the post and operational budget for a period of approximately twenty years. If Cabinet is minded to approve the establishment of this new post, an annual budget will be created by drawing down from these commuted sums to offset the cost.

9 Legal Implications

9.1 The Council has an obligation under the 2006 Natural Environment and Communities Act 2006 to ensure that biodiversity is considered in all decision making. Conserving biodiversity can include restoring or enhancing a population of habitat.

10 Equality Issues

10.1 None

11 Other Issues

11.1 **Sustainability and Addressing a Changing Climate.** The appropriate management of Abbotswood will see the long term protection and improvement of the ecological condition of the site.

11.2 **Wards/Communities Affected** - Abbotwood is located in Romsey Extra ward.

12 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

12.1 The report outlines the requirement for a new Countryside Officer post to manage the ANC and ecological mitigation on the Abbotswood development along with a revenue budget to facilitate practical management works.

12.2 External funding has been secured specifically for this management work from the Abbotswood development.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:	None	File Ref:	
(Portfolio: Community and Leisure) Councillor Ward			
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Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	12 September 2018