

REPORT FROM: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES MANAGER

TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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Report Author: David Walker
Tel. No: 01282 661746
E-mail: David.walker@pendle.gov.uk

ALKINCOATS LOCAL NATURE RESERVE EXTENSION

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform members of the desire of the Friends of Alkincoats Local Nature Reserve (LNR) to further extend the LNR into fields owned by the Council.

RECOMMENDATION

That the friends group works in partnership with the Council's Greenspaces Manager to seek funding opportunities to cover any associated costs the extension of the nature reserve would create.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) The allocation of the land will result in the loss of income from an annual grazing tenancy.
- (2) The extension of the reserve will require allocation of increased budgets in order to facilitate the repair and maintenance of the site.

ISSUE

1. Alkincoats Local Nature Reserve (LNR) was designated in October 2006. The meetings of Colne and District Area Committee on 12th March 2015, 7th January 2016 and 9th August 2018 granted permissions to extend the LNR to its current boundaries (marked red on the map in appendix 1).
2. A great deal of work has been carried out by the Friends of Alkincoats LNR to improve all the footpaths through the site, creation of ponds and wetland areas and tree planting. This has been funded through a variety of streams including from the groups own money, grants and donations.
3. The group continues to be supported by the Council.

4. The group have approached the Council with a wish to extend the reserve further into the two fields to the south of the existing reserve (marked green on the map in appendix 1.
5. In response to the request a report was presented to the Colne & District Committee on 7th October 2021. The report detailed the financial implications, should the extension be granted, which included the loss of income from an annual grazing tenancy and the need for increased budget allocations in order to facilitate the repair and maintenance of the site.
6. The fields are currently on a grazing license to a local farmer. The extension would mean a potential loss of income in the region of £900 from license fees. Grazing licenses run for a 360 day period and are generally renewed on an annual basis.
7. Currently the annual repair and maintenance budget for the site is £1,000 per annum with the budget only able to cover basic maintenance.
8. Within the report to the Colne and District Committee It was proposed that an extension to the LNR would require an increase in the maintenance budget of £4000 taking the total to around £5,000 to cover basic maintenance on the site.
9. Within the same report the Principal Environment Officer additionally recommended a budget of £10,000 be provided in order to ensure full and proper maintenance of the site could be carried out. It was understood that these costs would apply if the site was to be kept in the same way as the current nature reserve, with paths, gates, fences, walls etc.
10. The Principal Environment Officer further suggested that should the extension be granted, that the area be retained and developed into species rich grassland which may facilitate winter grazing over 5 months of the year which would reduce the loss of income. This would be subject to finding an appropriate tenant should the current farmer not wish to continue to use the land.
11. During the meeting it was suggested that the site be rewilded, without public access, in which case the maintenance costs could be lower
12. After consideration Members agreed that the report, together with further information on the financial implications of the proposal, be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee for decision

DISCUSSION

13. In the past, the maintenance of the LNR was carried out the Environmental Action Group. The loss of this service has resulted in the maintenance of the site being outsourced to contractors with some assistance from the Council's Landscape Maintenance Team. Due to the site being extended the cost of maintenance has increased and therefore maintenance standards are lower as the budget is no longer sufficient to cover the site's needs.
14. As previously reported the annual repair and maintenance budget for the existing site is £1,000 per annum and essentially covers very basic maintenance. There are no grants available to support long term maintenance of sites.
15. Capital funding for one off projects to create habitats etc. can be sourced through grant funding. Pendle's officer resource that has dealt with parks, LNR's and other greenspaces has reduced over recent years to create financial savings allowing the Council to continue to deliver higher priority services. Due to the reduced level of available resources Officers would require the assistance of the LNR Group to complete bids for grant funding.

16. It is with these points in mind that it can be seen that there is little Council resource for further extension to Alkincoats LNR and therefore a closer working relationship with the friends group would be required in order to pursue grant funding and cover long term maintenance needs should Members be mindful to agree to the extension taking place.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy:

Approving the extension of the local nature reserve would be in accordance with the Replacement Pendle Local Plan and be supported by Policy ENV1 in the Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy (December 2015) which seeks to protect biodiversity (paragraph 8.41); create and/or restore habitats (paragraph 8.39); and designate new areas for their conservation value (paragraph 8.42).

Financial:

As set out in the report.

Legal:

If an extension is granted, the area would need to be added to the rest of the nature reserve by agreement and formally designated as such through the local nature reserve process. A new agreement with the grazing licence holder will also be required should winter grazing be taken as a management option.

Risk Management:

None arising directly from the report.

Health and Safety:

None arising directly from the report.

Sustainability:

Improved sustainable management of Council-owned land.

Community Safety:

None arising directly from the report.

Equality and Diversity:

None arising directly from the report.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Alkincoats LNR Plan with proposed extension.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS