

CABINET

19 SEPTEMBER 2007

WINNALL MOORS PROJECT

REPORT OF HEAD OF ESTATES

Contact Officer: Tony Langridge Tel No: 01962 848528 X 2528

RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Winnall Moors is a designated site of European importance for nature conservation as part of the River Itchen Special Area of Conservation [SAC]. The River Itchen is also of national importance as one of the few whole rivers to be notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest [SSSI]. As local authority for the area and as owners of part of the area, the Council has a great interest in and responsibility for its good management.

The Council is in the process of renewing the lease of its section of the Moor to the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. This report considers the new lease and how the Council can support the Trust's application for Heritage Lottery Fund support for the improvement and management of the area.

RECOMMENDATION:

That, in advance of consideration of the 2008/09 budget, the Council commits to providing matching funds of £10,000 per annum for the Winnall Moors Heritage Lottery Project over five years, starting from the 2008-09 financial year to be added to the capital programme (considered elsewhere on this agenda).

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#### DETAIL:

##### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Winnall Moors is a unique 64 hectare (158 acre) area of the Itchen chalk river valley, close to the heart of the city of Winchester. The area is outlined on the appendix with the Council's ownership hatched. Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust [The Trust] own the majority of the Moor, the most recent purchase being in 2006. The Trust has been managing the Council's land in the area on its behalf since 1984, in accordance with the terms of a 21 year lease and the terms of a rolling management plan.
- 1.2 As local authority and land owner the Council has a statutory duty to ensure that the site is subject to appropriate management plans supporting habitats and associated species. The Council's recently adopted Biodiversity Action Plan makes specific reference to Winnall Moors and the need for pro active management.
- 1.3 Winnall Moors is a high quality nature conservation site which has historical, archaeological as well as recreational significance. The Trust fully recognise the importance of the site and have commissioned a number of important studies of the Moor to support an application for Heritage Lottery funding in order to implement future management and improvements. Their application which is due to be submitted in September 2007, proposes £1 million of works and activities over a five year period from 2008.

##### 2 Council Land & Lease

- 2.1 The lease of the Council owned section of the Moor is being renewed under delegated authority and a new 40 year lease at a peppercorn rent is being granted on similar terms to the previous lease. The lease provides for management in accordance with a Management Plan but does not include a specific requirement for the Council to fund the Trust to make improvements to the land or to undertake more pro active management. A successful lottery bid will put in place both the finance and mechanism for making significant improvements.
- 2.2 The 40 year lease period has been agreed in order to meet the Lottery requirements of having a long term secure lease in advance of the submission of a funding application. The lease contains a break clause in favour of the Council, should it require the land for other purposes in connection with its powers and duties as a local authority.
- 2.3 In the event that the Lottery bid is successful, the funding that flows will be spent over the whole Moors area, including the Council land, and would be regulated via a detailed delivery plan. If the bid is not successful, in part or as a whole, there will still

be the Management Plan linked to the lease but its outputs will be more modest and dependant upon the resources the parties can direct to it. As noted above, the land is designated a SSSI and SAC which bring with it statutory responsibilities which fall on the Council as land owner.

### 3 Lottery Bid and Proposed Works

3.1 Discussions the Trust has had with the Heritage Lottery Fund [HLF] have suggested that they are very enthusiastic about the project. The Trust has secured over £100,000 of matching funding from elsewhere, funds that would be lost if the project failed to obtain Lottery Funds. A figure of £50,000 or 5% of the total has been suggested as the Council's contribution, spread over five years. With major benefits accruing from the project to the people of Winchester and an increasingly competitive market for Lottery funds, a failure by the local authority to support a project would put the application at a significant disadvantage. The Council as land owner will also significantly benefit from having close involvement with the project.

3.2 The following is a summary of the proposed works and cost headings;

- River restoration
- Restoration of flood plain water levels
- Fence removal and replacement
- Reed and fen restoration
- Woodland and scrub management
- Fisheries management
- Ecological surveying
- Publicity and interpretation
- Programmed visits and activities
- Volunteer programme
- Project officers and staff time

3.3 The importance of Winnall Moors is recognised in the Council's Local Biodiversity Action Plan [BAP] as it contains priority habitats and species. Completion of the Winnall Moors project would deliver desirable elements of the BAP in a partnership with other members of the Winchester District Natural Environment Forum.

### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

#### 4 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

4.1 The project seeks to protect, preserve and enhance the high quality environment and to encouraging biodiversity. The strong emphasis on improving access to the land through local partnerships will increase participation in cultural activities and the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

#### 5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 The matching funding request is for a total of £50,000 spread over 5 years starting from April 2008. As a significant element of the works relates to the improvement of the land it is proposed that this sum is added to the capital programme. The Council investment would help to secure approximately £950,000 of other external funding to the project.

- 5.2 It is noted in the report that the Trust is prepared to extend the lease area to cover an area on the fringe of the moor, outside of the lottery bid area. If this is subsequently agreed the Trust may require any additional costs to be met but these are likely to be modest and, depending upon timing, containable within existing budgets.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Winnall Moors Audience Development Plan - June 2007

Habitat Improvement and Management Proposals for Winnall Moors Wildlife Reserve - May 2007

Winchester Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2007

APPENDICES:

Winnall Moors Reserve map