

REPORT TITLE: ST GILES HILL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

13 MARCH 2023

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Kelsie Learney – Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency

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PURPOSE

This report presents an update of the St Giles Hill Park Management Plan (see Appendix 1), setting out planned and aspirational actions for the five-year period from 2023 to 2028 that will bring about outcomes including:

- Increased biodiversity
- Carbon sequestration
- Improved public access and utility
- Increased community engagement
- Improved information about the park's heritage.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the St Giles Hill Management Plan 2023-2028 be endorsed.

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

- 1.1 Tackling the Climate Emergency and Creating a Greener District
- 1.2 This Plan complements a suite of plans developed in response to the climate emergency declared by Winchester City Council in June 2019, including the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan (CNAP) 2019.
- 1.3 The principles and policies set out in this Plan also support the council's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2021. Woodland and trees are one of the priority habitats identified in the BAP and many of the key species within the BAP rely on woods and trees to survive.
- 1.4 Vibrant Local Economy
- 1.5 St Giles Hill park is a distinctive asset which boasts views across the district, including Winchester Cathedral and St Catherine's Hill. The Plan enhances the appeal of St Giles Hill and adds to the attraction of Winchester as a destination for visitors to the city.
- 1.6 The Plan promotes the creation of new cultural and creative spaces, for example the options of including stone-carved memorial steps utilising local craftsmen.
- 1.7 Living Well
- 1.8 St Giles Hill park encourages greater participation in physical and cultural activities with access to green space to enjoy nature and exercise, whilst still in the heart of the city and appreciate the cultural significance of the site.
- 1.9 The Plan aims to ensure that St Giles Hill park remains an attractive public space where people feel safe and secure.
- 1.10 Your Services, Your Voice
- 1.11 Encouraging the involvement of volunteers in the management of the park, creating a role for voluntary groups in carrying out basic maintenance work.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 The tree management work set out in section 1 of the Plan has been assessed and planned in accordance with the approved Tree Strategy and can be delivered within the existing budget allocation for tree work.
- 2.2 The day-to-day management regime detailed in section 2 of the Plan will be delivered through the existing budget for the grounds maintenance contract with IdVerde.
- 2.3 The short-term deliverable improvements shown in section 3 of the Plan includes aspects of work for which budget already exists. Those coded green or amber in the traffic-light system in Table 3 are planned and scheduled, for example tree works that will be delivered as part of the funded programme in accordance with the Tree Strategy. The only item in section 3 for which budget is yet to be

approved is the bank stabilisation works referred to at 3.21 and identified as essential, which is intended to be undertaken by the Estates team using the Asset Management Plan capital budget funded by the property reserve. No additional budget is being requested for this work.

- 2.4 As described in the Plan, the aspirational and far-reaching improvement options set out in section 4 are ideas that have yet to be assessed for feasibility, need, demand or cost. Should any of the ideas be deemed viable then a detailed proposal will be developed and brought forward for consideration and funding at that time.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 If any of the aspirational projects identified in section 4 of the Plan are brought forward, this will be undertaken in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and the council's Contract Procedure Rules with support from the Legal and Procurement teams as required.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The management work detailed in the Plan forms part of the council's Natural Environment and Recreation Team (NERT) work programme and monitoring of the routine maintenance delivered through the IdVerde contract is part of the core work of the Environmental Services team.
- 4.2 Additional capacity could be created, if a volunteer group is established as described in section 5 of the Plan.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The management work detailed in the Plan ensures that the park is maintained to a good standard and that the health and safety of park users is ensured.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 The Town Forum Informal Policy Group for parks and recreation has been involved in the updating of the Plan since 2020.
- 6.2 Local residents have made suggestions that form the basis of section 4 of the Plan via liaison with one of the local members.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The St Giles Hill Management Plan sets out how the park shall be managed to ensure a robust, resilient and diverse range of green space is available as an asset for the city. The Plan revolves around the management of the park's fantastic tree stock (in line with the Tree Strategy) with actions being in place to make-safe any trees which need work (and monitor and report on this) and also to replace trees which have to be removed due to issues such as ash dieback. Our tree stock plays an important role in carbon sequestration in the district so the range of ages and species is important to tackle the climate emergency and create a greener district. The management plan covers how our grassland will

be managed with emphasis on species-rich grassland creation and maintenance, in line with our Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and again, supports the council's priority in creating a greener district that tackles the climate emergency via carbon sequestration, flood alleviation and localised cooling. St Giles Hill park forms an important part of Winchester's green infrastructure and the links with other green spaces are integral to their successful management.

- 7.2 Ecosystem services directly and indirectly affect human wellbeing. Benefits including carbon storage, biodiversity, clean air, water storage and purification and recreation provision are all delivered via the Plan and the natural habitats at St Giles Hill park. Environmental assets as a whole provide benefits that enhance economic performance, offer new opportunities for investment and employment, and improve living standards and quality of life. Ecosystem services contribute to economic welfare through generation of income and wellbeing, and through prevention of damages that inflict costs on society.
- 7.3 The Plan is focussed on managing the park to benefit biodiversity and the benefits in terms of air quality, climate change and sustainability are discussed in the climate emergency section of this report (1.2).

8 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

- 8.1 An EqIA has been completed and is included as appendix 2 to this report. In summary, it identifies that the natural features of the site create access issues for certain people, but that the Plan includes actions to mitigate against this and therefore positively impacts on the affected people and groups.
- 8.2 If a volunteer group is formed, all equality, diversity and inclusion policies will need to be adhered to by the group in order to ensure full inclusivity.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 No data is held on park users, so the only data protection issues relate to interaction with members of the volunteer group and in relation to any future public consultation or engagement. Standard council procedures on storage, management and disposal of personal data in relation to enduring partnership working and consultation will be followed.
- 9.2 No detailed data protection impact assessment is required.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<u>Financial Exposure</u> Funding not available for aspirational projects.	The Plan is clear that there is no commitment to delivery of these projects and that a business case would need to be proven.	Aspirational projects could be made possible via fundraising.
<u>Exposure to challenge</u>		

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<u>Innovation</u>		
<u>Reputation</u> Standards of management are not maintained.	The Plan clearly defines management standards, which form part of the grounds maintenance contract.	Potential for additional capacity from volunteer work.
<u>Achievement of outcome</u> Plan actions not delivered.	The plan states achievable outcomes and clearly differentiates deliverable projects and longer-term projects. Progress will be reported back to Town Forum Informal Group.	
<u>Property</u>		
<u>Community Support</u> Failure to re-establish volunteer group. Breakdown of relationship with volunteer group	Clear dialogue with residents has clarified the essential processes required to re-establish a volunteer group. Terms of reference to be agreed for the group which set expectations and the basis for the relationship.	If established, a new volunteer group can strengthen community support and sense of ownership.
<u>Timescales</u>		
<u>Project capacity</u> Insufficient capacity in the tree team to co-ordinate tree works.	Built into work programme for 23/24.	

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

- 11.1 St Giles Hill park had a Management Plan which ran from 2015 – 2020 and delivered day-to-day management and maintenance of the park. The Plan lapsed over the pandemic period and is now in need of an update.
- 11.2 This same time period, from 2020, saw the Green Flag volunteer group cease working on St Giles Hill park due to their group leaders having concerns about liabilities of the group and individuals. There is currently renewed enthusiasm for volunteer involvement and a mechanism to formalise this with an understanding of the need for all liability and health & safety issues to be covered. If this is satisfactorily put in place, then basic maintenance tasks could be agreed with the council and undertaken by the volunteers.
- 11.3 The updated Plan, in appendix 1, runs from 2023 – 2028 and describes the management actions as:
- (i) Tree management
 - (ii) Day-to-day site management regime
 - (iii) Short-term deliverable improvements
 - (iv) Long-term aspirational projects
 - (v) A role for volunteers
- 11.4 Much of the essential work required over the five-year period of the Plan is instigated by tree work in relation to ash dieback. Tree surveys have been undertaken at the end of 2022 and this has informed us of the work required, in line with our Tree Strategy. In addition to detailing the existing state of approximately 800 trees on the site, the tree survey identifies a need for resurveys to be carried out in the future – in the case of some trees, biennially, in others on a three- or five-year rotation. Works on individual trees have been prescribed on a varying scale of urgency based on the potential risk posed.
- 11.5 This update to the Plan reflects a number of more forward thinking aims, but many of the actions (particularly in section 4) are unplanned and without budget.
- 11.6 The steep, wooded slopes and grassy summit of St. Giles Hill park provide a distinctive backdrop to Winchester's city centre. The park is prized by residents and visitors as a place for recreation, reflection, exercise and socialising, as well as for dog-walking and picnicking. The park attracts tourists as well as local residents and is a part of the district's green infrastructure in the middle of the city, delivering ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, flood alleviation, clean air, biodiversity and opportunity for recreation.

12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 12.1 The option of doing nothing is not viable due to the essential nature of the tree works in relation to ash dieback and the requirement to maintain the park as a safe environment for visitors. The council's Tree Strategy outlines the approach

the council must take in managing open space and trees and this approved strategy must be followed which will result in changes to the landscape of the park. The felling of diseased ash trees can present an opportunity to open up vistas across the district and allow us to maintain a robust, resilient tree stock that will thrive.

- 12.2 The option to not update the Plan was discounted, as it would leave future plans for the site uncertain and inhibit the ability to plan effectively for the necessary works.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Other Background Documents:-

[Winchester City Council Tree Strategy 2022](#)

[Biodiversity Action Plan 2021](#)

[Carbon Neutrality Action Plan 2020](#)

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: St Giles Hill Park Management Plan 2023 -2028

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment