

Subject:	Waterhall Wilding		
Date of Meeting:	22nd June 2021		
Report of:	Executive Director of Economy Environment and Culture		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Robert Walker	Tel: 01273 294349
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE.**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 At the Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee (TECC) of 24th September 2020, it was determined that the former Waterhall Golf Club site should be transferred to the control of Cityparks conservation service with a view to 'wilding the site'.
- 1.2 Waterhall has now transferred to the management of Cityparks and therefore sits under Environment Transport and Sustainability Committee for the purpose of monitoring and decision making.
- 1.3 The report updates the committee on progress on the wilding project at Waterhall
- 1.4 The report also set out the findings of a high-level feasibility study in relation to the relocation of the clubhouse.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That committee notes the progress of the Waterhall Wilding Project
- 2.2 That committee agrees to take no further action in relation to the relocating of the former clubhouse.
- 2.3 That committee agrees to officers exploring the option of refurbishment of the existing clubhouse to provide a visitor centre, education space and café with limited vehicle access as set out in 3.9 and 3.10 of the report.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Relocation of the Clubhouse**

- 3.1 At the 24th of September TECC committee the committee decided to bring the management of Waterhall in-house, and also agreed the following:

That a feasibility study be undertaken for the removal of the clubhouse to facilitate the rewilding of this open, high, inter visible Downscape and its replacement by a new building near the site of the old Waterhall Farm and cottages, which might be used as a café, farm shop, rewilding project offices or similar

- 3.2 A full feasibility study would involve detailed surveys and assessments to determine construction and demolition costs. This would in itself come at a significant cost – estimated to be in the region of £0.010m
- 3.3 Therefore, an initial high level cost appraisal has been conducted. This methodology is a desktop assessment using typical building and demolition costs based on the size and nature of the building but does not take into account any site- specific issues.
- 3.4 The high-level estimate is that this would cost £1.915m. The report is attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.5 A more detailed feasibility study would require procurement of a consultant and as above is estimated to cost in the region of £0.010m.
- 3.6 There is currently no identified source of funding for the full feasibility study or for the estimated cost of demolishing the existing building and replacing it elsewhere.
- 3.7 In addition to the financial cost of relocation there will be a significant carbon cost to demolition and rebuild. Without a full survey and detailed plans, it is not possible to estimate the actual carbon cost. However, “The Whole life carbon assessment for the built environment”¹ estimates that 32 to 47% of a buildings whole life carbon emission come from its construction
- 3.8 Due to the high financial and carbon costs and the lack of identified budget the relocation of the clubhouse is not recommended.
- 3.9 An alternative option, subject to planning permission being obtained, would be to use the existing building for a café and visitor centre with provision of a space to be used for education. The views from the existing location would make this a popular destination and help generate income to fund the cost of any refurbishment required. This option could be further explored by officers when capacity allows by building this into the Waterhall Wilding work programme.
- 3.10 The possible use of the clubhouse as an education space has been put to Children Young Peoples and Skills committee “A longer-term prospect is the further exploration of how the council’s own sites can be utilised as an environmental education hub. The Wilding Waterhall project would be an ideal opportunity to consider what additional capital works could be undertaken to give environmental education a physical hub that would be accessible to many children and young people. It is proposed that further feasibility work is undertaken to consider what is feasible and how that may be financed. In addition, the reduction in pupil numbers is meaning a proportion of school buildings could be available to host an environmental education hub.”

- 3.11 In order to promote sustainable travel and improve the landscape view the access road could be retained for deliveries, plant access and disabled visitors only, while other visitors would be required to access the site and visitor centre or café on foot or by bicycle. The carpark size could be accordingly reduced and the impact of the access road and remaining carpark could be reduced by planting.

Waterhall Funding and Management Plan

- 3.12 A Countryside Stewardship Application has been submitted This is for £0.008m per year for 10 years plus £0.011m in the first year towards the cost of fencing and water supplies. The cost of creating chalk grassland on the fairways has also been included (to be confirmed but which will be fully funded if awarded).
- 3.13 Basic Payment Scheme entitlement has been purchased (the purchase cost will be covered by the first year's payment). This is agricultural subsidy paid by central government and is a decreasing annual sum as the payment is being phased out is anticipated to be worth around £0.006m per year over the next 4 years.
- 3.14 This Countryside Stewardship and Basic Payment Scheme payments will cover the basic grazing costs of the site.
- 3.15 The National Heritage Lottery Fund Changing Chalk bid is progressing, and the stage 2 bid has been submitted. If successful, this will cover the cost of education and outreach work. This is anticipated to be worth £0.036m per year over 4 years
- 3.16 We also intend to bid to the National Park for assistance with water and fencing costs in line with the funding proposal original submitted with our bid to TECC committee
- 3.17 A meeting has been held with interested parties (including several ecologists) to set up detailed baseline monitoring this year covering invertebrates, breeding birds and plants. Preliminary soil carbon recordings have also been completed.
- 3.18 An outline five year management plan has been produced and the first meeting of a management advisory group chaired by Cllr Jamie Lloyd and comprising representatives from interested organisations, local wildlife experts and ecologists held. This is in Appendix 2
- 3.19 Additional funding was allocated by the council for a ranger with specific responsibility for Waterhall and this officer is now in post.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 Officers could prepare a specification and get quotations for a full feasibility study but in the order to do this £0.010m funding would need to be allocated.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 A management advisory group formed from representatives of conservation organisations, community groups, councillors and individuals with specialist knowledge has been formed under the chair of a ward Cllr and this group have been involved in reviewing the outline management plan for the site. The plan was drawn up with input from most of the groups prior to the formal forming of the advisory group.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Without a potential funding source and in view of concerns over the carbon footprint of demolishing the clubhouse and building a new building elsewhere it is likely that any money spent on a detailed feasibility study will be wasted
- 6.2 To date application for the funding in the project proposal put forward to TEC Committee is proceeding well and an outline management plan has been developed and submitted to the advisory group.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The recommendation to take no further action in relation to the relocating of the former clubhouse will result in estimated expenditure of £0.010m not being incurred. The alternative option of undertaking a full feasibility study would result in this cost being met from within the services budget and any significant variation to budget would be reported as part of the council's monthly budget monitoring process. Should the alternative be considered, results from the feasibility study would be brought back to a future committee for a decision on how to progress as well as funding options.
- 7.2 The recommendation of exploring options of refurbishment of the existing clubhouse would be contained within existing Cityparks budgets and options brought back to a future committee for a decision.

Finance Officer Consulted: John Lack

Date: 10/6/21

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 As noted in the report, a change of use of the clubhouse to a café and visitor centre would require planning permission.

Lawyer Consulted: Hillary Woodward

Date: 01/6/21

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 Both the existing and possible alternative site for the building are difficult to access for less able members of the public who can not drive there. Parking is currently very limited at the existing site but there is the potential to open up parking for disabled drivers. On the alternative site parking is easy when not clashing with sporting events.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 Correct management of the site has the potential to protect and enhance the wildlife on site, the site has some particularly rich chalk grassland areas and enhancing these will make a significant contribution to the council's response to the biodiversity emergency.

Health Implications:

- 7.5 As well as preserving and enhancing wildlife Waterhall is being managed in a way to encourage visitors to explore the site in doing so this is likely to improve both their physical and mental health

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Waterhall Golf Club Feasibility Budget
2. Wilding Waterhall Outline Management Plan

Background Documents:

None

ⁱ <https://www.rics.org/globalassets/rics-website/media/upholding-professional-standards/sector-standards/building-surveying/whole-life-carbon-assessment-for-the-built-environment-1st-edition-rics.pdf>

