

CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY SUB COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 18th March 2020
Title: Lake and Country Park Management Plan
Contact Officer: Operations and Estates Officer – John Hickman

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is to inform Councillors of the current position regarding the Lake and Country Park management plan. Previously the council employed a Park Ranger who was specifically employed to maintain the Lake and Country Park including volunteer groups, schools etc. This position was made redundant in 2004.

CURRENT POSITION

At the last meeting the following recommendation was agreed:

Minute 434 (3) that management of the Lake and Country Park should be managed in terms of biodiversity and not developed for further leisure pursuits – but retaining fishing rights.

Minute 435 that the vision for the Lake and Country Park places biodiversity at the heart of the management process and that the Town Council works alongside its partners to provide expert advice to achieve an improvement in this.

The council now needs to establish a clear management plan for the Officers and its Contractors/Volunteers to work to. The Lake and Country Park are currently managed in a minimal way with minimal grass/hedge cutting and maintenance work to the footpaths, fences and gates.

Continental Landscapes provided a Lake and Country Park Initial Management plan in January 2017 for council's consideration. In readiness for a direction on maintaining this asset in 2018/19 Council set a £10,000 budget for maintenance work within any management plan drawn up, these monies are held in the council's reserves.

Currently there are groups wanting to plant trees but without a clear vision and management plan for these areas it is difficult to look for suitable areas for these projects.

There is no longer animal grazing on the hay meadow and the meadow is no longer cut annually for hay. This area is not cut at all except for the public footpath and 1m either side of the hogging path the side of the river.

The Wet Meadow area also receives no maintenance other than the cutting of the grass to the Public footpath across the field.

In the last year council has installed two new disabled Fishing platforms and agreed to a commercial company fishing the lake for Crayfish.

There is minimal grass cutting at the Lake and country park 1m either side of footpaths and a few areas kept short for amenity use.

Hedges are only maintained in order to keep footpaths and fishing swims clear.

Footpaths where provided are maintained with crushed limestone by the works team when funds are available, and the works team have time permitting.

The Operations and Estates Officer has several second-hand benches available that the works team are going to fit in replacement and addition to those already present. There are also 2 x second hand aluminium picnic benches that will be installed on the far side of the lake for amenity use.

The works team will also be replacing all the litter bins within the lake and country park of which there are only 5 for the current site with council's new style recycling bins.

There are also only 5 dog bins for the entire site.

The banks of both the river, lake and Emma's Dyke are all suffering from bank erosion and it is quite severe in some areas encroaching right up to the footpaths some of which have already required to be moved away from the river edge. Bank erosion on the lake at the bottom end also affects the fishing swims washing away the area the fishermen use at the banks edge.

Flooding at the lake in severe wet weather also causes issues with the footpaths washing out the fine materials within the limestone gravel that binds the larger stones in the gravel together allowing the paths to break up and the stones to dissipate.

Notice boards at the lake and country park are also in the main either missing/damaged/dilapidated.

Fences and gates have not been fully maintained and are only basically maintained and are in poor condition.

There is also the recent issue of sewage waste being released into Colwell Brook and Emma's Dyke that still needs to be dealt with. The Operations and Estates Officer estimates

this will require 250m of fencing post/rail and wire, two small warning notices and approximately 1,000m of hedging to prevent accidental access into the dyke going forward.

LAKE AND COUNTRY PARK VISION

In order for Officers to develop a suitable management plan, these areas each need clear instruction from council as to what the councils is intended vision for each area is.

Lake

- Lake reservation area.
- Lake amenity use area.
- Wildflower areas.
- Teaching Area, nature observation area bird hides etc.

Wet Meadow

- Wet Meadow reservation area.
- Wet Meadow tree planting area.
- Wet Meadow Grazing.
- Wet Meadow Wildflower areas.

Hay Meadow

- Hay Meadow Grazing.
- Hay Meadow grass cutting.
- Hay Meadow tree planting area.
- Hay Meadow amenity area.
- Hay Meadow tree planting area.
- Hay Meadow Wildflower area.

Rail Embankment and Small Area Next to Bypass.

- Rail embankment access bridges to Cogges and Station Lane, open for access or closed to access.
- Small area between rail embankment and bypass tree planting.
- Small area between rail embankment and bypass grazing.
- Small area between rail embankment and bypass grass cutting.
- Small area between rail embankment and bypass wildflower area.

Council should not agree any tree planting in any areas of the lake and country park until a vision and management plan is agreed, areas suitable for tree planting will form part of the management plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

RISK

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Until a clear management plan is established the financial implications are unknown. A sum of £10,000 is held in council reserves for maintenance works required from the management plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to note the report and consider elaborating the vision for the Lake & Country Park under the headings above, to establish a clear management plan for the future.