

CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 15 November 2022

Title: Update from Park Ranger

Contact Officer: Park Ranger - Carl Whitehead

Background

The Park Ranger has been in post for 18 weeks, he has come from Oxford City Council carrying out a similar role. He has 30+ years' experience of working in the green sector and looks forward to developing several projects both within the Country Park and around the town.

Current Situation

The Country Park has not had a Ranger for several years, and this has led to reactionary maintenance overall and this, while maintaining user safety (removing fallen trees/branches, maintaining the pathway, and ensuring the bins/signage/life rings are all in place) has not included development and implementation of processes to improve/enhance the biodiversity of the habitats and promote confidence in user satisfaction. There are two meadows within the park that have had almost no management for 15 years for one and 28 years for the other. This has led to a reduction of diversity in the plant species and a build up of a thick "thatch" which has choked the lower growing species and prevented them from growing. The lake itself has, overall has been self-regulating but has several elements that need dealing with

The Ranger has already had the meadows flailed to breakdown the thatch and have a 3–5-year plan to bring them back to their optimal diversity. He has installed fencing along the Windrush in areas that are close to the footpath to prevent falling into the water. He has installed 60m of bank stabilisation to protect the lakes edges from deterioration and in the process of reviewing and replacing broken and unsuitable furniture around the lake and meadows. The Ranger has begun to develop a plan to improve the entrance as you come onto the site from avenue Two

On Saturday 20 August the Park Ranger held an event at the Lake in order to engage with users and begin to raise awareness of the fact the Council now has a Park Ranger. He has also carried out some recruitment of volunteers and will continue to do so.

Future Projects

With the 2023/24 (and beyond) budget in mind, the Ranger has compiled a list of potential projects the Committee might like to consider putting forward for funding. This is detailed in the attached appendices.

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 regarding its facilities and services it operates.

The work the Ranger has carried out and proposes to carry out in the future will only greatly improve the environmental benefits for the Council and in the wider context

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. The main risk in carrying out the work to the Country Park is one of poor communication of the need to carry out the work and benefits that it will create in increased biodiversity and greater public enjoyment

Financial implications

This work has and will in the future have a financial implication and there will need to an on-going agreement that an appropriate budget will need to be needed to create and maintain the habitats and infrastructure required to make this park reach its full potential

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following the future projects in the attached appendix for inclusion in the 2023/24 and beyond budget.