

## REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 11 February 2020

Report of:

The Director, Environment & City Management

Title: Future of Northbrook Approach

Is this a Key Decision?

No

\* One that affects finances over £1m or significantly affects two or more wards. If this is a key decision then the item must be on the appropriate forward plan of key decisions.

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

1.1 Early in 2019 Exeter City Council considered proposals to dispose of the North Brook Approach Golf Course. Following large scale support for the area to remain a publically accessible greenspace, the council made a commitment not to dispose of the site nor to build on it.

1.2 This report recommends a partnership between the City Council and Devon Wildlife Trust, to consult with local residents and community groups on a vision for the area as a 'Wild Arboretum'. This will transform the area into a tree studded park, enriched with wildflowers, newly planted trees (including a community orchard) together with new wetlands, ponds and pools to enhance biodiversity.

1.3 The proposals for the partnership and consultation are included in Appendix 1.

2. Recommendations:

That Executive approves the proposal for a joint partnership between Exeter City Council and Devon Wildlife Trust to consult on the future of North Brook Approach.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 The Northbrook Approach site occupies a crucial strategic location which links two of the city's most significant greenspaces, Ludwell and Riverside. The site performs a critical function for the movement of wildlife and it also represents a potential natural infrastructure connection for people to move between parks and could provide traffic-free routes into the Quayside areas, Marsh Barton and the city centre beyond.

3.2 A wide range of organisations have indicated their interest in the future of the land. A joint approach by Exeter City Council and Devon Wildlife Trust will ensure that communities are placed at the heart of future decisions regarding this important space.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

The consultation exercise would involve input from officers in both the Exeter City Council Communications Team and from Devon Wildlife Trust staff for the online and social media aspects. Additional representation from both organisations would be required at a range of community events.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

There are no additional financial implications arising specifically from this report, however any proposals that arise from the consultation may require financial consideration. As such any proposals would require a further report to Council, prior to their implementation.

6. What are the legal aspects?  
None identified.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:  
This report raises no issues from the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:  
The detailed report 'Northbrook Approach and Riverside and the Ludwell Valley Parks, Joint Proposal for the Future' is attached to this paper as appendix 1. The proposed consultation approach is included as appendix 2.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

9.1 The strategic location of Northbrook Approach means that enhancing the biodiversity and green infrastructure of the site contributes strongly three of our key priorities in the 2018 -2021 strategy and the principles contained within the Liveable Exeter Garden Villages vision. They are:

9.2 Tackling Congestion and Accessibility. The potential for this site to link up existing green, traffic free travel routes, provides opportunities for people to move into the Quayside, Marsh Barton, the City Centre and the wider city. Making sustainable green travel options more attractive and accessible can only help to promote alternatives to car use.

9.3 Building Great Neighbourhoods. The quality of the local environment directly impacts the quality of life for residents. While Exeter has always ranked very highly as a great place to live in comparison with other cities in the UK, this site offers a great opportunity to further enhance our natural environment and open up the green space to greater public use. The proposal for an 'ideas and learning hub' also offers immediate opportunities for environmental education.

9.4 Promoting Active and Healthy Lifestyles. The link that Northbrook provides between Riverside and Ludwell Valley Park provides a great opportunity to enhance facilities to encourage people to walk and cycle. The green link will open up the possibility of longer recreational walking and cycling routes and the enhancement of the greenspace will encourage more people to visit and enjoy it.

9.5 The importance of the Northbrook Approach and the links with Ludwell and Riverside Valley Parks must also be viewed in the context of the Liveable Exeter Garden Villages vision. The higher density development with a reduced reliance on the use of the private car means that the quality of our green spaces and the active and green travel links they provide, gain even greater significance. Northbrook provides the strategic link to enable greater connectivity between our greenspaces.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?  
No risks identified as a result of undertaking a joint consultation on the future of Northbrook Approach area.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 In recommending this proposal no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because Public and Community consultation will be undertaken in advance of any development

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

12.1 This proposal will contribute to our ambitions to increase biodiversity and to become carbon neutral by 2030 in the following ways...

- By linking up existing, traffic free travel routes, which provides opportunities for people to move into the Quayside, Marsh Barton, the City Centre and the wider city. This will help to make sustainable green travel options more attractive and accessible and help to promote alternatives to car use;
- By increasing biodiversity including enhanced tree planting, a community orchard and wild flower planting; and
- By restoring the Northbrook to a more natural state to reduce flood risk and improve the aquatic environment.

13. Are there any other options?

Exeter City Council could undertake a public consultation on its own but considering our long term relationship with Devon Wildlife Trust around their management of the Valley Parks and their considerable experience with community engagement and enhancing biodiversity, that would seem to be a missed opportunity.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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