

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 6 September 2022

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 18 October 2022

Report of: Director, Net Zero Exeter and City Management

Title: Northbrook Wild Arboretum: Project Initiation and Funding

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

The purpose of this report outline the stages to commence the development of the wild arboretum project and the funding required, as approved in principle by Executive in October 2021.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That Executive approve in principle the stages required to develop the Northbrook Wild Arboretum in partnership with Devon Wildlife Trust; and RECOMMEND

2.2 RECOMMEND to Council the allocation of £288,583 in total towards the project made up of £222,615 from a mixture of the Community Infrastructure Levy funding or S106 if available, and contributions of £65,968 from partners.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 In spring 2021 a public consultation overwhelmingly supported the concept that Northbrook Park should be developed to prioritise wildlife improvements and maintained as a peaceful and tranquil community space. The concept for the 'wild arboretum' achieved 96% support. The details of the consultation were reported in the Executive report of October 2021. This next stage report sets out the steps required to deliver the vision for this important green space.

3.2 The park provides a strategic green link between two of our most important green spaces and performs a critical function for the movement of wildlife. It represents a natural green infrastructure connection for people to move between parks and traffic free routes into the Quayside, Marsh Barton and the City Centre beyond.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources

4.1 Developing these proposals in further detail will require input from officers in both Exeter City Council Public and Green Spaces teams, our engineering team and from Devon Wild Life Trust.

4.2 Funding for the project is required from CIL and / or available S106. The notional amounts for the project have previously been discussed at the CIL Management Board and accounted for but this report seeks formal approval of the CIL contribution.

4.3 The headline funding breakdown is as follows:

Reason	Value
Project Delivery	£184,637
Commuted sum for maintenance (4 years)	£103,946
Total	£288,583
Contributions	-£65,968
Total ask from CIL / S106	£222,615

A more detailed project breakdown is included in appendix 1.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 The proposal is noted. The project, if approved will be added to the capital programme and the relevant amount of CIL (or section 106) will be ring-fenced for this purpose. The funding for maintenance will also be set aside. It is unclear from the report whether there will be an ongoing financial commitment for the Council at the end of the four-year period and Councillors should be aware that they may be adding in further, unfunded financial commitments for the future, which may result in reductions being required.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 There will be an interim management agreement required between DWT and ECC for the development stages of the project. Once complete the park will be incorporated in the existing DWT lease for the valley parks on concurrent terms. This would seem to offer a simple solution to the management of the park.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer. However, early contact should be made with Legal Services as the project progresses, so that work can progress on the interim management agreement in a timely fashion.

John Street (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

8. Report details:

8.1 The report 'Northbrook Park Proposal Delivery Update' is attached to this paper as appendix 1. It details the work completed since the last report, including the contributions and commitments from important partners such as DCC. It also sets out a phased approach for project delivery. These programmed phases tie in with the best times for

environmental work but they are not entirely consecutive and there is some overlap between them. The phases are:

8.2 Phase 1: Development: Partners agree the budget and outline project plan as well as management agreements. The project is developed in detail with other partners. An Interim Management Agreement is put in place (for at least four years), and the integration into the existing valley park lease are agreed.

8.3 Phase 2: Tactical delivery: Some smaller-scale tree planting and access works are agreed to generate community support and engagement. Includes a short-term agreement on use of the building for outreach activities.

8.4 Phase 3: Infrastructure delivery: Major access routes, paths, and other infrastructure improvements are delivered around the main park site.

8.5 Phase 4: Habitats delivery: Programme of habitat enhancements (involving local communities).

8.6 Phase 5: Management / ongoing development: This phase includes the transition from the initial capital project to DWT managing the site (under the Interim Agreement). Linked projects around the long term use of the building and the Northbrook stream will continue as separate strands.

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 to three of our key priorities in the Corporate Strategy and the principles contained within the vision for Liveable Exeter. 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 our residents. Exeter has always ranked very highly as a great place to live and this site offers a great opportunity to further enhance our natural environment and open up the green space to greater public use.

9.4 Promoting Active and Healthy Lifestyles. The link that Northbrook provides between Riverside and Ludwell Valley Park provides a great opportunity to enhance walking and cycling infrastructure. 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.

9.6 Planting the right trees in the right place can also aid carbon sequestration and whilst there is an inevitable gap between planting and effective carbon absorption, planting for the future is still the right thing to do. The proposals will also increase and enhance the biodiversity of what is currently a pleasantly green but not particularly ecologically rich site.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

There are no significant risks to this proposal providing that the funding can be allocated to deliver the proposals.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

12.1 The proposals to enhance Northbrook Park have been warmly supported by those who took part in the consultation. Should those proposals be developed they 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 to large parts of the City which will make sustainable, green travel options more attractive and accessible;
- The proposed tree planting will improve carbon sequestration and may offer opportunities for a degree of Carbon Offsetting.

- By increasing biodiversity on the site, including a community orchard and wild flower planting; and
- By rewilding the Northbrook to improve the aquatic environment.

13. Are there any other options?

13.1 There have been a number of suggestions over the last couple of years for this site but only one which has received such overwhelming support from the public consultation. The council committed some time ago that this would remain a public green space and one which will contribute towards a number of our corporate goals and we therefore recommend that the project is progressed as proposed.

Director, Net Zero Exeter and City Management, David Bartram

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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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