



## Policy and Resources Committee - 8 October 2018

### Signing of the Lease for Twywell Hills and Dales

#### Purpose of report

To request Members give delegated authority to sign a lease with the Land Trust for the management of Twywell Hills and Dales.

#### Attachments

Appendix 1 – Site Map

#### 1.0 Background

- 1.1 Twywell Hills and Dales is a former ironstone quarry recognised as being an important area for nature conservation, heritage and amenity value. The site was purchased from British Steel in 1994 and is wholly owned by ENC. It is approximately 54 hectares in size and comprises three distinct areas. On the site is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) identified in 1989, known as the Gullet. The Woodland Trust operates one part of the site for us on a 399 year lease, which commenced in 1997. The remainder of the site is temporarily being managed by ourselves and Rockingham Forest Trust (RFT). The map at appendix 1 shows the relevant parts of the site.
- 1.2 Historically the part of the site which is the subject of this report (it does not include the Woodland Trust element) has been managed through service level agreements with the Wildlife Trust (WLT) and Rockingham Forest Trust. In the last two years the management of the site has been difficult due to erection of fencing to manage the conflict between dog walkers, livestock and the SSSI requirements. As a result of this the WLT no longer wished to manage the site.

#### 2.0 Land Trust Lease

- 2.1 The Land Trust is a charity that is committed to the long term sustainable management of open space to community benefit. On this basis and due to their expertise in managing difficult sites in terms of the SSSI requirements and balancing the community enjoyment of sites, the Land Trust were asked last year to help us identify future options for the management of Twywell Hills and Dales. They produced a report which detailed a series of options which was presented to Finance Sub Committee in December 2017. This included a costed management plan of the site which detailed funding requirements for the site going forward.
- 2.3 At the same meeting in December 2017, members agreed the following vision for Twywell Hills and Dales.

*We would like Twywell Hills and Dales to be a valued resource for our communities and visitors that provide opportunities for people to bond with nature, undertake active recreation, and understand our heritage. We want people to connect with the Hills and Dales and as a result enhance the quality of life for both current and future generations.*

- 2.3 A high level action plan was agreed and progress is reported on this as detailed below:-

Actions	Progress
To address growing shrub in SSSI areas through grazing and/or hand clearance.	Completed for 2017 lease will address for 2018

To work with the external funding manager to identify funding opportunities for the site	Completed
Vision developed for the site	Completed
Communications plan developed with key partners	Completed
Twywell Hills and Dales friends group established	Initial meetings have taken place and group being established
Report to Policy and Resources Committee – following Finance Sub Committee consideration	Completed
Procurement advice established based on agreed preferred management option.	Completed
Identify best mechanism to manage Twywell;- i.e. management agreements, leases, long term leases	Completed
Revised detailed action plan developed	Once lease signed will be done in conjunction with the Land Trust

2.4 The Sub Committee through recommendation to Policy and Resources asked that one organisation be sought to operate the site on a longer term lease arrangement. Procurement advice was obtained on this basis and potential organisations were approached to gauge interest in the site. The Land Trust were the only ones interested and as such procurement and legal advice was that we could go ahead and lease directly with them. On this basis District Law have been utilised to give us legal advice and draft a lease to ensure the site is managed effectively over the next 125 years.

2.5 A draft lease has been produced and subject to some minor changes we should be in a position to sign this by the beginning of November. It is important that the site is managed from November onwards as this is when the site maintenance needs to be undertaken to comply with the SSSI requirements.

### **3.0 Equality and Diversity Implications**

3.1 An equalities impact assessment has been completed and was considered as part of the Finance Sub Committee in December 2017.

### **4.0 Legal Implications**

4.1 There are legal requirements placed on us with respect to managing the site particularly the Gullet which is a SSSI. Natural England oversee the standards associated with SSSI and are able to prosecute or take over the land themselves and recharge any costs incurred back to the land owner. We have met with Natural England and they would like to work with us to improve the site in the long term, although they are concerned about its current state.

### **5.0 Risk Management**

5.1 There are financial and reputational risks associated with the management of the site, as well as the legal implication identified above. This site has been entered onto the Councils risk register. To limit the risk, officers have been working with the community, our partners and Natural England to try to manage the current situation.

5.2 If the site continues to be managed utilising the current approach we are at serious risk of non compliance with the SSSI minimum standards.

### **6.0 Resource and Financial Implications**

6.1 We currently pay £10,000 a year to RFT to manage the site. In addition, there is a discretionary annual charge of £1993 per annum for the Woodland Trust – although this has never been collected.

- 6.2 The required revenue costs to manage the site going forward are £46,000 a year. In addition to this, there is a capital investment of £53,500 over the next 5 years. These figures were approved by Council in January 2018 via the Finance Sub Committee and as such have been built into the budget and capital programme accordingly.
- 6.3 The costs of the site as indicated above have increased this is due to the lack of investment over the past few years and the increased use of the site. The immediate area of concern is the SSSI and the need to manage this in a sustainable way. The increased resource will include amongst other things ;-
- Management of the SSSI
  - Introduction of a dog ambassador scheme
  - Establishment of a Friends of Group
  - A part time staff resource on the site

## 7.0 Constitutional implications

7.1 There are no constitutional implications arising directly from this report.

## 8.0 Implications for our Customers

8.1 Our communities have already communicated to us about how important this site is to them through public meetings, involvement of the MP and petitions. It is a real asset and may people utilise it for their health and wellbeing. To not invest in the site would have negative implications for our customers.

## 9.0 Corporate Outcomes

9.1 The investment will contribute to the achievement of the following corporate outcomes:


- **A good quality of life:** through providing quality open spaces which are sustainable, clean, safe and healthy and encourage visitors to our district.
- **Effective Management:** To ensure we meet the SSSI requirements of the site and manage the space in an effective way to ensure all users can benefit.

## 10.0 Recommendation






10.1 The Committee is asked to resolve to recommend to full council:











- a. That the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee, be delegated to sign the lease with the Land Trust to manage Twywell Hills and Dales for the next 125 years.

*(Reason: To ensure legal compliance with SSSI standards whilst providing well-managed open spaces for our communities)*

<b>Legal</b>	Power: <i>Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981</i>				
	Other considerations: N/A				
<b>Background Papers:</b> Land Trust Report – Dec 2017, Finance Sub Report December 2017					
<b>Person Originating Report:</b> <i>Julia Smith, Head of Customer and Community Services,</i> ☎ 01832 742066 ✉ <a href="mailto:jsmith@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk">jsmith@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk</a>					
<b>Date: 25 September 2018</b>					
<b>CFO</b>		<b>MO</b>		<b>CX</b>	

Public Footpaths to Twywell ¼ mile

-  Meadow
-  Woodland
-  Ridge
-  Scrub
-  Pond

-  Whitestones Trail (easy walking)
-  Gullet & Woodland Trail (moderately difficult walking)
-  Alternative Trail (difficult walking)
-  Riders' Route
-  Connecting Rights of way
-  Steps
-  Boardwalk
-  Bridlegate
-  Kissing Gate
-  Viewpoint

