



To: Executive Councillor for Public Places:
Councillor Andrea Reiner
Report by: Head of Streets & Open Spaces: Toni Ainley
Relevant scrutiny committee: Environment 11th June 2013
Wards affected: Cherry Hinton

Amendment of demised area of the existing Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust lease at West Pit Local Nature Reserve and Limekiln Close Local Nature Reserve, Cherry Hinton

Non Key Decision

1. Executive summary

The Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire (BCN) Wildlife Trust have an existing single lease hold of two adjacent City Council owned Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) in Cherry Hinton, known as Limekiln Close LNR and West Pit LNR. The BCN Wildlife Trust have requested release from the leased area covering West Pit LNR due to perceived risks associated with the chalk face of the pit edge and the Caravan Club Site, also leased from the Council, at the base of the pit. There is a one month termination period on the existing lease. Officers propose a change of demised area and a new twenty five year lease to the BCN Wildlife Trust covering Limekiln Close LNR only.

The management of the West Pit LNR will revert back to the City Council under the Streets & Open Spaces Asset Management team who manage the other City Local Nature Reserves. Officers propose to initially close an informal footpath at West Pit along the edge of the chalk face whilst safety assessments and remedial works are undertaken. Public access to the LNR will remain from the layby at the top of Limekiln Hill.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended:

To approve the change of demise area and new twenty five year lease of Limekiln Local Nature Reserve to the BCN Wildlife Trust.

To instruct officers to undertake risk assessments for continued public access to the chalk slopes at West Pit and propose suitable future management and access to the Local Nature Reserve.

3. Background

The BCN Wildlife Trust have leased and managed these two adjacent City Council owned Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) in Cherry Hinton since the 1950's. In addition they have recently purchased the adjacent, larger East Pit which has also been designated an LNR. East Pit and West Pit are also designated as nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) for the rare chalk habitats and species they hold.

The Caravan Club have a thirty year lease for the base of West Pit for primarily caravans and motorhomes, generating a significant annual income to the authority.

The BCN Wildlife Trust management of the bare chalk slopes at their recently acquired East Pit has highlighted the potential risks associated with similar faces of the West Pit and the Caravan Club site below. Due to this perceived risk and the fact that the habitats are of lower value in this heavily wooded area the BCN Wildlife Trust have requested a change in their demised area to cover continued management of Limekiln Close LNR only.

Officers propose to initially close an informal, non-statutory footpath at West Pit LNR, which tracks along the edge of the chalk face whilst safety assessments and remedial works are undertaken. The temporary closure of the footpath will be from the date of the lease termination (June 2013) until a tree survey of the route, geological assessment and access audit has been completed and any necessary works undertaken.

The path proposed for temporary closure, shown in appendices two takes a winding route along the base and up the slope of the chalk face of West Pit. The face is heavily wooded and there are steep sections and exposed chalk faces. The route has a number of steps that are in need of upgrading. There are three points of public access, two are via the entrance to the caravan club site in the base of the pit, and here it is not sign posted from the road. The other is the main sign posted entrance to the West Pit LNR at the top of the hill. This entrance will remain open for people to enjoy the view of the City and the rare fragment of chalk grassland found at this point.

4. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

The BCN Wildlife Trust has agreed to cover the nominal costs associated with revision of the existing lease.

There is nil rent on the existing BCN Wildlife Trust lease and therefore no income loss associated with the recommendation.

An assessment of the chalk face stability and condition of tree stock will be required to determine current and future risks to site users and the Caravan Club site below. This is likely to result in a phased programme of tree works over several winter seasons. Officers will make appropriate future budget bids for these programmed works.

(b) Staffing Implications

The management of West Pit LNR will incur increased officer time within the Streets & Open Spaces Asset Management Team. The BCN Wildlife Trust will continue to assist with the management of the rare chalk grassland at the top of the West Pit LNR for which the site is designated as a SSSI. This will initially be via their City Greenways project which has secured Sustainable City Funding for 2013 – 14.

(c) Equal Opportunities Implications

Public access will remain to the species rich grassland at the top of the site. The path closure and redial works, whilst not making the slope accessible to all, will ultimately increase safety and ease of passage for site users.

(d) Environmental Implications

The site will remain managed as a Local Nature Reserve in line with the existing BCN Wildlife Trust management plan. The aim being to retain the important habitats and species on the site, prioritising species for which the site was designated a SSSI.

(e) Procurement

Not applicable

(f) **Consultation and communication**

Officers have consulted the BCN Wildlife Trust and the operators of the Caravan Club site to date. The informal public path proposed for temporary closure at West Pit is used primarily by Caravan Club site users and is in poor condition. If a permanent closure is proposed following safety assessments then ward councillors will be consulted and site notices displayed.

Should major works to the chalk slopes be proposed then approval from Natural England will be required for works within a SSSI.

5. Background papers

These background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Existing BCN Lease for West Pit and Limekiln Close 1992 (Ref: CLOLO15)

6. Appendices

**Map of Cherry Hinton Chalk Pits LNRs,
including East Pit LNR, West Pit LNR and Limekiln Close LNR**

**Sketch map of West Pit LNR showing route of non-statutory footpath,
proposed for temporary closure and upgrade.**

Equality Impact Assessment

7. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

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