

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Communities, Housing and Infrastructure
DATE	27 August 2015
DIRECTOR	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT	Seaton Park Wetland Project Scoping Study Report
REPORT NUMBER	CHI/15/205
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the Seaton Park Wetland Scoping Study Report plus agree the suggested design option for the wetland and the total estimated expenditure required to implement the project.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the committee: -

- a) Agrees the main contents of the report;
- b) Agrees the recommended wetland design option; and
- c) Agrees the total estimated expenditure of the project.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost to implement the project has been estimated at £89,518. £50,000 has already been secured from the Environmental Services budget and the remaining amount is being sought from existing Environmental Policy budgets and external sources. In kind contributions involving time and labour for planting are also available from council services including the Countryside Ranger Service as well as the external group, The Friends of Seaton Park.

Although maintenance post construction will be slightly different to that currently seen at the park, these costs are anticipated not to be any higher than the costs required for the current maintenance regime, and will, therefore, be covered under existing budgets.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

This project is helping to implement the Council's Nature Conservation Strategy 2010-2015 which was created to enable the Council to meet various legal requirements to conserve natural heritage, including the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 which places a legal duty on local authorities to further the conservation of biodiversity, enhance natural features and protect wildlife. If this project does not go ahead, the Council will not be able to fully implement the strategy and, therefore, will be unable to meet its statutory obligations.

This project will also help to implement the Open Space Strategy in which its main aim is to ensure the city has enough accessible and good quality open space and includes the need to 'protect, enhance and value our environment for current and future generations.'

The Scottish Government's Land Use Strategy is a key commitment of Section 44 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 which places climate change duties on public bodies in Scotland. The aim of the Land Use Strategy is to get the best sustainable use from our land and in relation to climate change requirements. Furthermore, under part 4 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, local authorities are required to act in the best way calculated to meet the statutory Adaption Programme. In 2014 Climate Resilient Scotland, the Scottish Adaptation Programme was approved and has an overarching objective for the natural environment of a Scotland with a productive, healthy and diverse natural environment which is able to adapt to change. Suggested measures include encouraging local authorities to implement natural flood management solutions and build in a level of protection that could over the years mitigate future impacts of climate change. The implementation of a managed wetland in an area that regularly floods within the park will ensure that this makes the best use of this area by creating an area with more interest for visitors, improves biodiversity and is ready for future climate change.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

5.1 Introduction

The Scoping Study for the wetland at Seaton Park was conducted in response to the need to tackle an area of the park that regularly floods making the site unusable for visitors and users of the park. The Council has for some time tried to find a solution to the flooding issues, mainly through regular drainage of the site which has been ineffective and costly. The areas in question are situated at the formal entrance to the park to either side of the road (to the east of the site).

The idea of the wetland at Seaton Park was inspired by the recent success of the East Tullos Burn Environment Improvements Project at St. Fitticks Park where flooding (which was one of a number of problems) was alleviated with the inclusion of wetlands to manage

water levels from the burn, as well as improved access and increased biodiversity.

5.2 Scoping Study

In January 2015, local companies Cbec Eco Engineering Ltd in partnership with Walking the Talk, were contracted to investigate and design sustainable wetland options for the area of the park susceptible to flooding. The scoping study included full stakeholder engagement and a public consultation exercise which helped to establish what the local communities and visitors to the area wanted to see in the design.

In April 2015, the scoping study report was produced with recommendations for the preferred design option. This was based on the views of the public and stakeholders, constraints and opportunities as well as the understanding of the hydrology and topography on the site.

Full costings for the implementation of the design were also provided, along with a short and long-term management plan for the site once construction was completed.

There were 4 primary design options of which the most popular one would be selected, and these were: -

1. Very wet – to maintain the park as it currently is with wet areas to both the north and south of the road;
2. Quite wet – draining the area around the sports pitch to the north side of the road, but maintaining much of the wet area to the south;
3. Quite dry – draining all of the north side and reducing the wet area on the south; and
4. Very dry – draining the entire area.

A further 3 sub options were provided which could all potentially be included in the design. There was also a 4th option which was 'none of the above'. The sub options were: -

1. The addition of wetland plants;
2. The addition of enhanced topography to give the appearance of 'lumps and bumps';
3. The addition of a viewing platform; and
4. None of the above.

5.3 Results & Recommendations

There were 556 responses at the end of the consultation phase, and the following Table 1 contains the results: -

Table 1

Primary Design Options				Sub Options			
Very Wet	Quite Wet	Quite Dry	Very Dry	Plants	Lumps and Bumps	Viewing Platform	None of the Above
190	247	79	40	287	147	210	27

After selecting their chosen primary design, each respondent could select more than one sub option, therefore, the total for the sub options is greater than 556.

The community consultation revealed a preference for the 'Quite Wet' option. This equates to draining the area around the sports pitch to the north side of the road, but maintaining much of the wet area to the south (refer to Appendix C of the Scoping Study Final Report for basic visualisation of the 'Quite Wet' area without planting, and Figure 18, page 39 for the wetland design plan). There was also a preference for the addition of a viewing platform (refer to Figure 13 of page 30 in the Scoping Study Final Report for location and visualisations of how the platform could look).

Appropriate wetland planting was also preferred within the south side wetland area (refer to Figure 12, page 26 of the Scoping Study Final Report for the planting plan). The planting will help to increase biodiversity as well as visual amenity, and will also be structured in a way that will discourage children and dogs from entering areas of deeper water. The area to the north will be used for team sports and any damaged grassland will be replanted with standard improved grassland mix. All plant species will be native to north east Scotland giving them the best chance of survival in the local climate.

To facilitate the drying out of the sports pitch to the north, a new drainage system has been recommended to replace the old clay drainage network. This old system is known to have failed at certain locations and is beyond economical repair. To avoid completely draining the area of the proposed wetland on the south side of the road, the drainage network will only be installed and re-established in the area to the north of the road.

Approximately 90 metres of path were under water and vehicle damage was evident in the shallow water. Recommendations include replacing the whole section of path with new drainage to intercept the seepage from the slope (refer to Figure 15, page 33 of the Scoping Study Final Report to view the location and extent of path repairs). Further drainage recommendations have been made to protect the length of the path and reduce flood risk, including the installation of offset screens at pipe entrances to prevent blockages from debris such as fallen leaves.

5.4 Management Plan

The design of wetland is such that it will require low maintenance, however, the maintenance will involve some specialist attention involving cross services – i.e. Environmental Services and the Countryside Ranger Service who have the experience of monitoring and maintaining sites with biodiversity interest. Some time will be required for the plants to establish before any maintenance is required, and many species of plants will not require any maintenance at all. The recommendation is to monitor every five years for the growth of emergent plants.

Annual maintenance will be required for the drainage system to ensure that it is free of blockages and preventing any future flooding. The paths will not require any further maintenance than is currently offered, however, the new viewing platform will require regular safety checks to ensure that it continues to be safe for its intended use.

5.5 Next Steps

External funding is being sought and the Council's procurement process will be initiated towards the end of 2015 in a bid to find the appropriate contractor to implement the design. The works are expected to begin in spring 2016 and completed by mid-summer 2016.

6. IMPACT

This project will help the Council meet the Smarter City Vision, in particular: -

Smarter Environment – 'we will provide a clean, safe and attractive streetscape and promote biodiversity and nature conservation. We will encourage wider access to green space in our streets, parks and countryside.'

This project will also help the Council meet an underlying principle of the Single Outcome Agreement: -

Environmental Sustainability – 'Aberdeen is an energy efficient city, with high quality open spaces, a natural environment and low levels of pollution and waste.'

Within the 5 year Corporate Business Plan, the project will help the Council meet the strategic priority, Smarter Environment – Natural Resources – 'sustaining the environment by maximising the use of low-carbon technology in our infrastructure and housing. Managing our waste and promoting our streetscape and green space.' The specific aims is to 'protect and enhance our high-quality, natural and built environment'.

This project offers opportunities of cross service working with Environmental Services and the Countryside Ranger Service during construction and after construction. Environmental Services currently manage and maintain the site, and this will continue with the help of the Countryside Ranger Service once the project is complete.

The delivery of this project will deliver the aspirations of the local community who highlighted the issues and contributed to identifying the solution.

The project will have direct and indirect positive impacts on the quality of life for the citizens of Aberdeen. The project has been borne out of the adopted Aberdeen City Council Nature Conservation Strategy

2010-2015 where an 'Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment' has already been conducted. A further assessment is, therefore, not required as part of this report.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 states that 'it is the duty of every public body and office-holder, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions.' Missing the opportunity to implement this project places the Council at risk of not meeting this and other associated legal obligations. Failure to implement this project will also mean that the flooding issues at Seaton Park will not be addressed leaving areas of the park unusable as well as placing the park in a vulnerable position for dealing with future climate change.

The full amount of funding has still to be secured, therefore, there is a risk that there will not be enough funding in time for the project to be implemented in spring next year (2016). This is the best time for project implementation based on the best time of year for planting and allowing the plants to establish. If there is a delay in securing all funding, this will result in the project having to start the following spring in 2017.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Seaton Wetland Scoping Study Final Report – April 2015

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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