

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

North Area Council Meeting:
16th September 2019
Agenda Item: 5

Report of North Area Council
Manager

Fleets Nature Park

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides the Area Council with an update regarding the Fleets Nature Park project.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. **The North Area Council should note the background to the Fleets Nature Park.**
- 2.2. **That members confirm if they will make a significant financial contribution to the project.**

3. Background

- 3.1. The Fleets area is the “missing link” in the chain of Barnsley’s beautiful greenspace along the river Dearne corridor. This area is important from a wildlife perspective and joins, enhances and protects important habitats within The Dearne Valley Green Heart Nature Improvement Area referred to in the Local Plan. The reputation of the Dearne Valley is growing both regionally and nationally due to the richness of the local wildlife. Appendix 1 provides an image of the area of interest.
- 3.2. Although it has huge potential as a recreational area, in its current form the Fleets area is a deterrent for local people and visitors to Barnsley wishing to explore the river corridor and its bridleways and pathways. It has become overgrown and attracted anti-social behaviour.
- 3.3. The area is naturally a wetland, hence it’s industrial heritage, having previously been occupied by Star Paper Mill. This means that it is a unique habitat which is vital for supporting local biodiversity. Amongst others, the Fleets provides a home for Willow Tits and a bat colony who feed over the wetlands, both of which are rare species and are of a keen interest to experts in terms of conservation. The condition and use of the Fleets has a direct impact on this.
- 3.4. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has a vision to create an educational space that can be enjoyed by the whole community.
- 3.5. In April 2018 a Sec 106 application was submitted to enable a three year programme of clearing and renovation work to be delivered at The Fleets.

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust secured Sec 106 funding totalling £81,966.74 that can be used to address capital expenditure on site.

- 3.6. Sec 106 monies cannot be used to fund staff costs and the start of the project was reliant on Yorkshire Wildlife Trust securing external funding. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust were successful in securing funding for the first year of the project. Work on site commenced in April 2019.
- 3.7. It is hoped that by improving the Fleets Area, the increased, consistent activity in the area will deter those currently responsible for anti-social behaviour from frequenting the area and it will therefore allow residents of the Hartington Drive, Honeywell Close and surrounding areas a safe neighbourhood to take regular exercise and enjoy the greenspace and wildlife. This will help to improve both physical and mental health and wellbeing as well as becoming a possible draw for more visitors to the Barnsley area.
- 3.8. The project provides an opportunity to engage local stakeholder including ASDA, Barnsley College and the private owner of The Fleets Fishing Dam.
- 3.9. It will enable the area to act as a gateway to Dearne Valley Country Park to the east and Wilthorpe Canal to the west. Work in this area is important, not only for creating natural walks and drawing in visitors from these other sites, but it is also vital for the wildlife, as they use these natural courses to feed and travel between habitats.
- 3.10. It is also hoped that more people will be inspired to participate in volunteering and take responsibility for the ongoing care and maintenance of the area after the initial funding period has concluded.

4. Summary of what Yorkshire Wildlife Trust aim to achieve at The Fleets:

- a) An integrated public greenspace that enhances the health and wellbeing opportunities for local residents
- b) Creation of a community orchard adjacent to the residential area (promoting health and wellbeing agenda, Healthy eating, Incredible Edible etc)
- c) Creation of a wildflower meadow adjacent to residential area
- d) Opening up of the current treeline to expose more isolated sections of the Fleets and thereby deterring future anti-social behaviour
- e) A network of footpaths to allow local residents and visitors to enjoy the area
- f) Integration of the sites and its local communities into the wider footpath and bridleway system (promoting active travel, Health and wellbeing safer routes to schools etc.)
- g) A significant area of priority wildlife habitats (including the nationally threatened wet-woodland)
- h) Gateway site onto the fantastic interconnected river corridor of the Dearne and Barnsley Canal

5. Risks

- 5.1. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has secured funding to address salary costs until March 2020. If there is a break in revenue funding this would mean loss of continuity for the project and could significantly stall improvement to the area.
- 5.2. A lack of consistent attention to the conservation and improvement of the area may have a negative impact on the rare species (e.g. Willow Tit) that make home in the wet woodland of the Fleets

6. Opportunities

- 6.1. BMBC's Biodiversity and Parks officers do not have the capacity to undertake work on the scale that is required at The Fleets. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust are a reputable local charity who possess the knowledge and the expertise to tackle a project of this size, building community interest and generating a legacy from the work that they deliver. Every effort should be made to ensure that they stay on site now that work has commenced, giving the project the best possible chance of success

7. How can the North Area Council provide support?

- 7.1. On the 24th July 2019 the North Area Councillors received a briefing from Yorkshire Wildlife officers about how project has progressed since the launch in April. The Briefing was attended by Cllrs Leech, Cllr T Cave, Cllr Charlesworth, Cllr Hunt, Cllr Lofts, Cllr Pickering and Cllr Tattersall.
- 7.2. Members could clearly see the value of The Fleets area as a community asset and an opportunity to benefit the health and wellbeing of the local community.
- 7.3. Members could also see that the locality could be a draw for 'eco-tourism'. This is relevant to the local community and to visitors who could easily access the site via cycle routes or by train due to the proximity from Barnsley railway station.
- 7.4. At the end of the briefing Members indicated that they will recommend the project for financial support from the North Area Council for staffing costs. This would be complimentary to the Sec 106 monies already secured and enable the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Team to confirm their programme of planned activities and interventions beyond March 2020.

8. Next Steps

- 8.1. Members are asked to confirm if they will make a significant financial contribution to the project. It is recommended that the Area Council consider funding a Living Landscape Delivery Assistants position.

Officer Contact:
Rosie Adams

Tel. No:
01226 773583

Date:
04/09/2019

Appendix 1: The Fleets – Area of interest

