

Report of the Assistant Director (Communities, Culture & Public Realm)

Review of the Management of Chapman's Pond

Summary

1. This report proposes transferring the management of the Chapman's Pond site to the Friends of Chapman's Pond on a trial basis to improve the long-term care of the site.

Recommendations

2. The Executive Member is asked to agree to grant the Friends of Chapman's Pond a three year lease to manage the site.

Reason: To ensure that site continues to improve as a desirable place for recreation and its management remains sustainable.

Background

3. Chapman's Pond is a 2.6 ha site off Moor Lane in Dringhouses. The pond itself covers roughly a third of the site with other habitats including woodland and meadow (See Annex). It is managed by the Council with the assistance of the Friends of Chapman's Pond. The Friends are a long running group and have over the years carried out practical maintenance tasks and conservation enhancements. They have also assisted with fund raising, in particular for the circular path in 2011/12 and, for the last three years, in partnership with Love to Eat Café, a summer fair has taken place on site.
4. The pond is one several fishing waters owned by the Council including parts of the Rivers Ouse and Foss in the City centre, the Railway Pond off Tadcaster Road and Rawcliffe Lake. The latter two sites have been managed by the local angling clubs for several years, which includes the ability to levy a charge and patrol the site with fishery bailiffs.

5. Fishing at Chapman's Pond has never been managed either by the Council or the Friends. No fees have been charged for use and, as the site is open 24/7, fishing can take place at any time of the day. Lack of fishery management has at times enabled anti-social behaviour to occur whilst poor angling practices have contributed to poor fish health.
6. Following a large number of fish deaths in 2015 a group of anglers got together and formed a volunteer bailiff service to help monitor problems at the pond and to encourage and educate anglers to fish properly. This has been very successful, resulting in both a reduction in anti-social behaviour and site improvements. Many of the volunteer bailiffs have been trained as part of the Angling Trust's volunteer bailiff programme. See:
<http://www.anglingtrust.net/page.asp?section=930>
7. Over the winter of 2015/16 discussions took place with the Friends of Chapman's Pond and anglers about how best to continue this good work. This included testing the idea of taking a lease for the site and introducing a charge for fishing to fund the site improvements. The anglers have now joined the Friends, setting up a fishing section. The Friends now wish to take on the management of the entire site.
8. For fishing to both thrive and to be sustainable the view of the Friends and the Council is that better facilities, organisation and management are required. Initiatives in-hand or envisaged include:
 - a) At the suggestion of the Environment Agency and with the support of the anglers the Council closed the pond during this year's spawning period resulting in a huge reduction in the number of fish deaths compared to last year. The anglers helped enforce the closure and monitor fish health.
 - b) Better facilities start with better fishing pegs. Work to improve these has begun with a successful grant awarded by the Angling Trust to replace 4 of the existing pegs. The ward team have also granted money to replace the old boundary fence, install bike racks and provide water monitoring equipment.
 - c) Better organisation would include the creation of an integrated coaching programme to bring juniors into the sport, develop talent and support recreational members. The Angling Trust have provided funding for 2 volunteers to become angling trust trained coaches and informal family friendly sessions are planned.

- d) Better management will require the Friends to be a robust group with a vision for the future that incorporates all the uses of the site. Granting the Friends a greater role will demonstrate to the wider community that local residents have a role in the management of the site and helpfully will increase their membership. The Friends are fully constituted, hold insurance and have a bank account.
- e) Whilst the Friends have successfully been awarded money for improvements more funding is required for both the ongoing day to day care and further site improvements. The Friends have asked that anglers are now charged to fish with the income this generates being used for these purposes. The suggested charges would be £3 per day or £15 per year for adults, £1 a day or £5 a year for 13 – 16 years olds and free for under 12s. This level of charging is comparable with the nearby Railway Pond. Any increase in future years would be agreed by officers in line with the above prices.

Consultation

- 9. Consultation has been carried out with a wide range of local stakeholders. The Friends and local ward team are in support of a lease and the introduction of pay to fish arrangements. The police support the scheme as a way to help reduce anti-social behaviour problems. The Environment Agency support it as it will help them to monitor those who are fishing without a valid rod licence.

Options

- 10. Two options are available:
 - a) To grant the Friends of Chapman's Pond a three year lease at a peppercorn rent allowing them to manage the site and charge for fishing.
 - b) Not to grant the Friends a lease and continue with the site being managed by City of York Council.

Analysis

- 11. Option a) would place the asset in community control on a trial basis and support the principle of volunteers assisting with the care of the city's open spaces. It would bring the pond into line with other Council sports assets that are managed by the community including tennis, football, rugby, cricket and bowls. Should the trial be a success then a longer term arrangement can be explored in the future.

12. All day to day management and maintenance (except responsibilities for trees and waste bin emptying) would be transferred to the Friends. This would save on both ad hoc day-to-day costs and staff time, allowing that staff time to be redirected to supporting and developing other community groups. All funds raised through fishing would be used to improve the site, with accounts available for inspection.
13. The fishing would be better managed with volunteer bailiffs able to check that anglers have rod licences which is a legal requirement for anyone over 12 fishing in the UK. At the moment the volunteers bailiffs can't check people fishing have a rod licence.
14. Option b) This would retain the site for management by City of York Council. The volunteer and site management would continue to take up staff time and no income would be raised from angling for future site improvements and care.

Implications

15. **Financial Implications:** There are no immediate financial implications but it should be noted that under a lease the costs of site improvements such as fishing peg repairs and tree management will be borne by the Friends. As the lease will be at a peppercorn rent there will be no income to the Council but, equally, no loss of revenue.
16. **Property implications:** Option a) will provide a trial to find the best solution in terms of long term asset management.
17. **Equalities:** An initial Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) screening highlighted potential issues of access for those on limited income. The introduction of a charge may be detrimental to those on low income. As the proposed charges are in line with the nearby Railway Pond this is not thought to be unreasonable.
18. **Crime and Disorder:** Since the introduction of the volunteer bailiff scheme residents surrounding the site have noticed a marked reduction in anti-social behaviour. It is hoped that the increased site presence and management will continue this trend. Should charging be introduced it will be possible to stop those fishing illegally without a rod licence as the bailiffs will be able to check the angler has a valid rod licence before they sell a ticket.
19. The report has no additional implications relating to: Human Resources, Legal or Information Technology.

Council Plan

20. The proposals in this report are in line with the Council Plan priorities that ensure valued community facilities are protected and the Council works with other organisations to deliver the best services for residents.

Risk Management

21. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified with the proposals contained in this report are that the Friends withdraw from any future lease and hands the site back to the Council. This may damage the Council's reputation. The level of risk is assessed as "Very Low". This means that periodic monitoring is required of the operation of the new arrangements.

Annex – Plan of Site

Contact Details

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Jenny Cairns Environment and Community Officer - Communities and Equalities	Report Approved	✓	Date 10 August 2016
Specialist Implications Officers:			
Wards Affected: Dringhouses and Woodthorpe		All	
For further information please contact the author of the report			

Background Papers: EIA screening held by Dave Meigh