

Future Management of Allestree Park

Purpose

- 1.1 To determine the arrangements for the future management of Allestree Park.

Recommendations

- 2.1 That Allestree Park be re-purposed and managed in the future to enhance biodiversity and help combat climate change whilst maintaining public access and helping to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Derby.
- 2.2 That the Council works with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, supported by Rewilding Britain and the University of Derby to develop and implement a rewilding project at Allestree Park.
- 2.3 That a full consultation exercise be carried out, informed by a consultation plan, to ensure that the details of the proposed rewilding of Allestree Park are co-created with key stakeholders and the people of Derby. This will establish detailed proposals for the future management of the Park, to then be considered by the Cabinet in due course.

Reasons

- 3.1 In 2019, Derby City Council declared a Climate Change Emergency, recognising the magnitude of the climate crisis in Derby and committing to play its part in preventing the most devastating impacts of climate change. Rewilding Allestree Park will place Derby as a leader in nature's recovery in an urban setting and demonstrate the commitment of the Council to taking urgent and direct action to address the Climate Crisis.
- 3.2 Climate change is driving nature's decline, and the loss of wild places leaves us ill-equipped to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to change. Responding to the climate crisis is not possible without creating more space for nature. This report proposes a rewilding approach at Allestree Park to help tackle these problems synergistically.
- 3.3 Allestree Park is the largest open space in Derby. It offers the perfect opportunity to kickstart the development of a wider, more connected Derby that is equipped to tackle the Climate Change Emergency.
- 3.4 To deliver several proposed benefits including:

- Support nature recovery in Derby by providing more space for nature-rich habitats and potential new species reintroductions
- Increase the city's carbon storage and sequestering capacity and contribute to the Council's carbon reduction targets
- Provide a "Natural Health Service" and facilitate more opportunities for Derby's residents to connect with nature
- Make Derby a more vibrant, green, and attractive place to live and visit.

Supporting information

- 4.1 Allestree Park consists of around 130 hectares (320 acres) in total, of which around 88 hectares is a designated Local Nature Reserve (LNR) surrounding the former golf course. It is the largest LNR in Derbyshire and was designated in 2002. The main habitats present within the LNR include parkland with veteran trees, a large area of woodland and other scattered areas of woodland, open standing water, semi-natural grassland, hedges and a stream with associated marshes. 25 hectares of the LNR have been entered into an agri-environmental scheme called Higher Level Stewardship where the landowner manages the land sensitively for nature. The scheme has been a huge success and received national recognition for the 'Grazing Comes to Town' project where each autumn/winter a low number of Highland cattle, belonging to Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, arrive to graze the wildflower meadows and improve their biodiversity.
- 4.2 In September 2019, Cabinet approved the sale of Allestree Hall and, as the sale of the Hall would affect the operation of Allestree Golf Course, it was subsequently decided in accordance with the report to close the golf course on 31 December 2020 and that the golf course be absorbed into the existing parkland.
- 4.3 In January 2021, Historic England (HE) notified the Council that they had received an application to assess Allestree Golf Course for inclusion on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. However, HE subsequently notified the Council in June 2021 that, after examining all the available records and other relevant information and having carefully considered the historic interest, Allestree Golf Course was not recommended for designation.
- 4.4 HE received comments from stakeholders including from The Friends of Allestree Park who expressed their hope that if the course is permanently closed, all or most of the resulting area would be added to the nature reserve, with much less mowing and the encouragement of flower-rich meadow and an increase in biodiversity, but open to all, thus adding to the richness of the park experience and to wildlife.

- 4.5 Like many local authorities, Derby City Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019. To achieve 'net zero', if the worst impacts of climate change are to be avoided, as well as reducing the amount of carbon being released into the atmosphere from homes, industry, transport etc, countries across the world will also need to find ways of capturing and storing carbon, both to help mitigate the impacts of climate change, but also to offset those areas of human activity where reducing carbon is more challenging.
- 4.6 Alongside the climate change agenda, there is also a growing recognition of the need to begin to restore natural habitats, increase biodiversity and provide space for nature to re-establish itself. With these issues in mind, putting nature at the heart of a green 'post-covid' recovery, can help drive locally led economic regeneration in a way that is good for nature, climate and people.
- 4.7 A key concept that has emerged in recent years is that of 'rewilding'. Re-wilding Britain, a UK Charity, define re-wilding as:
- "the large-scale restoration of ecosystems to the point where nature can take care of itself. Rewilding seeks to reinstate natural processes and, where appropriate, missing species – allowing them to shape the landscape and the habitats within.*
- Rewilding encourages a balance between people and the rest of nature so that we thrive together. It can provide opportunities for communities to diversify and create nature-based economies; for living systems to provide the ecological functions on which we all depend; and for people to reconnect with wild nature."*
- 4.8 Derbyshire Wildlife Trust have prepared "A Vision for the Urban Rewilding of Allestree Park" (provided in the appendices). Subject to the proposed consultation, rewilding could include, for example, the creation of new habitats through minimal intervention such as woodlands, grasslands, wetland and scrubland, the creation of community orchards and community growing and looking at reintroducing key species, such as water vole, harvest mouse and tree sparrow.
- 4.9 The next steps proposed include:
- the collation of ecological and environmental information;
 - baseline monitoring;
 - mapping of Natural Capital and habitat connectivity;
 - developing a management plan with key community stakeholders;
 - undertake feasibility studies for species reintroductions;
 - development of a full business case;
 - evaluation of any external funding opportunities.

4.10 Three broad options are initially suggested that could deliver the Vision; these are:

- **Passive Rewilding:** the simplest option involving leaving Allestree Park to turn into woodland in its own time, with woodland developing across the whole site within 25 years. This would lead to the loss of open grasslands and views of the city. Only minor infrastructure would be required.
- **Community Rewilding:** similar to the above but with higher levels of intervention, which in turn is more likely to secure external funding. Woodland would develop within similar timescales to the above option but would also involve keeping more of the site open due to grazing animals. The option would also include resources for proactively seeking funding for visitor infrastructure that may be required and on some commercial activities to generate income subject to consultation and sustainable business planning.
- **Commercial Rewilding:** could involve “Citizen Zoo” initiatives and the site would be fenced to allow the introduction of a small herd of red deer and white park cattle. Infrastructure may involve a wellbeing hub and café; in addition, there could be exemplary cycle infrastructure, with an accessible pathway, suitable for cycles and other wheeled users through trees to give good views across the city.

Public/stakeholder engagement

- 5.1 Key stakeholders currently involved with the management of Allestree Park, including Friends of Allestree Park and The Earl of Harrington’s Angling Club, have been consulted on the vision for the urban rewilding of Allestree Park.
- 5.2 A consultation plan will be created to ensure that the details of the proposed rewilding of Allestree Park are co-created with key stakeholders and the people of Derby.

Other options

- 6.1 To do nothing other than to continue with the current maintenance programme for the Park.
- 6.2 The preferred option is to progress plans for the rewilding of Allestree Park. This report outlines three indicative options requiring different levels of intervention for delivering the potential benefits. In advance of determining the most appropriate option, it is recommended that a consultation plan be created to ensure that the details of the proposed rewilding of Allestree Park are co-created with key stakeholders and the people of Derby.

Financial and value for money issues

- 7.1 The next stage, subject to Cabinet Approval, is to work with partners, stakeholders, and the public to develop and quantify the opportunities detailed in paragraph 4.10. The Council’s input into this scoping stage will be funded from existing budgets.

- 7.2 Whole life costing of the re-wilding, infrastructure investment and maintenance will be developed along with exploring opportunities for external funding and income generation to deliver the vision.
- 7.3 The Council will prioritise sustainability in its option appraisal to contribute as part of our response to the Climate Emergency.
- 7.4 An outline business case will be developed that will be appraised internally by the PMO Board as a Gateway 2 Review. Subject to this progressing a Full Business Case will be developed that will be brought back to a future Cabinet for consideration and approval.

Legal implications

- 8.1 The Council has been informed that an application has been submitted requesting the Secretary of State to use his powers under section 98 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 to direct the Council to dispose of the former Allestree Park Golf Course. Under the legislation the Secretary of State can require the Council to dispose of assets that are deemed to be:
 - empty or under-used; and
 - there are no plans to bring it back into use.

The Council has made representations to the Secretary of State stating that the former golf course has been incorporated into the wider Park, however there is a risk that the Secretary of State may make a determination against the Council. If this happened, the Council would be required to re-market the golf course only. Such a decision would have an impact on the extent and effectiveness of the proposals set out in this report.

Climate implications

- 9.1 We are in the middle of a climate and nature emergency, and the two are inextricably linked. Climate change is driving nature's decline, and the loss of wild places leaves us ill-equipped to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to change. Responding to the climate crisis is not possible without creating more space for nature. This report proposes a rewilding approach at Allestree Park to help tackle these problems synergistically. If implemented the proposals would substantially contribute to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions in Derby as well as restoring precious biodiversity and helping to adapt to climate change.

Other significant implications

- 10.1 By connecting people and nature, the proposals will also improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Derby.

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal	Olu Idowu, Head of Legal Services	26 October 2021
Finance	Simon Riley, Strategic Director of Resources	27 October 2021
Service Director(s)	Claire Davenport, Director of Leisure, Culture and Tourism	27 October 2021
Report sponsor	Rachel North, Deputy Chief Executive (Communities & Place)	26 October 2021
Other(s)		

Background papers:

List of appendices:

A Vision for the Urban Rewilding of Allestree Park