

Community, Leisure & Recreation Committee

Title:	Rycote Meadow
Date:	31 October 2023
Contact Officer:	Andrea Oughton, Operations Manager

Purpose of the Report

1. To receive an update on the project to open up Rycote Meadow to public access.

Background

2. Rycote Meadow covers approximately 1.6 acres to the north side of Oxford Road (opposite Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve), bounded by the Cuttle Brook one side and properties in Cuttle Brook Gardens on the other.
3. Thame Green Living (TGL) presented summary proposals to open up Rycote Meadow to public access at the Committee meeting on 20 July 2021. The proposals included plans for a public footpath through the site to connect Oxford Road to Thame Meadows Estate with due regard to conservation and enhancement of the biodiversity of the meadow.
4. The project was phased into two sections: Phase 1 Planting of native hedge species, interspersed with modest size native trees along the western and southern perimeters of the site. Planting took place in November 2022 funded by a grant from the Trust of Oxfordshire Environment. Both hedging and trees are thriving.
5. Phase 2 Construction of the footpath – it is planned to move the existing metal field gate into the meadow to create sufficient space for a vehicle / tractor to pull off Oxford Road into the meadow. Removable bollards will be installed to prevent unauthorised parking and / or anti-social use of this space.
6. The footpath will run from the field gate parallel with Oxford Road to the Cuttle Brook and then follow the path of the Brook, keeping 10m from the bank (Environment Agency guidance) towards the northern boundary of the site to meet with the footpath at Thame Meadows (yet to be constructed).
7. The path will be 1.5m wide finished at 1.2m constructed in Coxwell self-binding gravel - russet finish. Passing / resting places will be provided at intervals along the path. A small section of boardwalk (3m approx.) will take the path across the wetland scrape. The path will be fenced on both sides with a post and wire fence to protect the biodiversity of the meadow from dogs and people.
8. Approximate costs for the path and fence are £47,500 (excl VAT). There is s106 funds of £26,471 (to be spent by Sept 2025) towards construction of the path and an expression of interest has been submitted to the Trust for Oxfordshire Environment to apply for up to £20k of funding. Subject to funding it is proposed to construct the path in spring 2024.

9. In consultation with River Thame Conservation Trust and Cuttle Brook Management Committee it is proposed to create a wetland scrape in the meadow to further enhance biodiversity encouraging rare plants and invertebrates which thrive in fluctuating changes in soil moisture that a scrape provides. The scrape will be part of a set of riverine proposals being planned with the River Thame Conservation Trust. It is proposed that a group of Cuttle Brook Conservation Volunteers (CBCV) will dig the scrape in November 2023.
10. TGL and CBCV have been working in partnership to progress the project. Once the project is completed it is intended that the meadow becomes part of the Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve and managed by CBCV. Fulfilling their aspiration to enlarge the reserve to the north (as a wildlife corridor) alongside the Cuttle Brook downstream to the River Thame.

Recommendation:

- i) To approve that Cuttle Brook Volunteers construct a wetland scrape in Rycote Meadow prior to construction of the footpath.***
- ii) To support in principle that Rycote Meadow is incorporated into Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve.***
- iii) To approve submitting the application form to draw down s106 funding associated with providing a path in Rycote Meadow.***