

Full Council

Title:	Rycote Meadow
Date:	14 May 2024
Contact Officer:	Andrea Oughton, Operations Manager Becky Reid, Environmental Project Officer

Purpose of the Report

1. To request approval to forward fund works needed to open up Rycote Meadow to public access, in a situation where Section 106 Funds are approved, but release is delayed due to administration of legal agreement by SODC.

Background

2. Rycote Meadow is the land to the north side of Oxford Road, opposite Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve. A project to open this land to public access was proposed by Thame Green Living (TGL) at the Community Leisure & Recreation Committee on 20 July 2021, and subsequently approved. The project includes the installation of a path, with a small boardwalk section to ensure that the path is able to stay open when the field is partially flooded, as well as a post and wire fence that prevents people and dogs going onto the main part of the meadow so that the rich biodiverse habitats in this area are protected.
3. Following this the scope of the project was developed, and on 31 October 2023 the Community Leisure & Recreation Committee agreed the following:
 - a. that Cuttle Brook Volunteers construct a wetland scrape in Rycote Meadow prior to construction of the footpath.
 - b. To support in principle that Rycote Meadow is incorporated into Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve.
 - c. To approve submitting the application form to draw down s106 funding associated with providing a path in Rycote Meadow.

Current status

4. Since this time TGL has managed to secure Trust for Oxfordshire Environment (TOE) funding of £9,377 towards different elements of the project, including labour and materials for the proposed fence, and materials for the boardwalk. Following the award from TOE, an application was submitted to SODC to draw down the balance of funds needed to complete the project. This included:
 - a. the s106 funds of £26,471 already allocated specifically to a path on Rycote meadow (to be spent by Sept 2025) towards construction of the path,
 - b. as well as a further £4,816 of s106 funding earmarked for 'improvements to Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve', as the land will be part of the nature reserve going forward.
5. We have been informed by the S106 Officer at SODC that even after approval for release of funding is received, it can take a further month to release the funds. Once funding is

approved it cannot be retracted, written confirmation of the award will be sent to the Town Council, as well as recorded in the minutes of the SODC meeting at which it is agreed. The delays are due to capacity within SODC's legal team.

6. Our ambition is to construct the path this year, with work starting in June, so that it can be completed in the driest months of the year. We face two potential barriers:
 1. TOE funding can only be paid in arrears, once work is completed;
 2. The possible delay between SODC funds being approved and being released.
7. It is recommended that Thame Town Council forward fund the project, to allow the work to be delivered as planned.

Risk Assessment

8. TTC has recently received the first 50% of this year's precepts, therefore TTC's cash flow can support this forward-funding.

Recommendation:

- i) To approve that Thame Town Council forward fund the project to the value of the S106 and TOE funding awarded, to a maximum of £40,644¹ once we have written confirmation and a minute to confirm SODC approval.***

¹ The value of works is made up of separate suppliers and contracts in line with Financial Regulations