

Title: Abbey Fields Management Plan

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Portfolio Holder: Councillor Will Roberts

Wards of the District directly affected: Kenilworth Abbey & Arden

<b>Approvals required</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>
<b>Portfolio Holder</b>	30/08/23	Will Roberts
<b>Finance</b>		
<b>Legal Services</b>		
<b>Chief Executive</b>	30/08/23	Chris Elliott
<b>Director of Climate Change</b>	30/08/23	Dave Barber
<b>Head of Service(s)</b>	16/08/23	Marianne Rolfe
<b>Section 151 Officer</b>		
<b>Monitoring Officer</b>		
<b>Leadership Co-ordination Group</b>		
<b>Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council?</b>	Yes Recommendation to: Cabinet Committee	
<b>Contrary to Policy / Budget framework?</b>	No	
<b>Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?</b>	No	
<b>Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?</b>	Yes, Forward Plan item 1,392 scheduled for 20 <sup>th</sup> September 2023	
<b>Accessibility Checked?</b>	Yes/No	

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## Summary

The report asks the Cabinet to approve both the Abbey Fields Management Plan and the Abbey Fields Management Plan Executive Summary.

## Recommendation(s)

- (1) That subject to the proposed amendments set out in paragraph 1.12 below, the Cabinet is requested to approve the Abbey Fields Management Plan and its Executive Summary, as laid out in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.
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## 1 Reasons for the Recommendation

- 1.1 By approving the Abbey Fields Management Plan, the Council will demonstrate the vital importance of Abbey Fields as one of Warwick District premier green spaces. Its significance to the local community was reflected in the interest and feedback received from various stakeholders and the wider public made during the consultation process.
- 1.2 Despite its popularity and importance, Abbey Fields lacks a clear vision. The park means different things to different people, and that can often result in a piecemeal approach to management, maintenance, and investment, with different groups sometimes coming into conflict over what's viewed as best for the green space. This results in a status quo being maintained, but also in a lot of missed opportunities for the green space to live up to its potential.
- 1.3 Abbey Fields is considered one of the districts 'destination parks', attracting visitors from the local area and from further afield. It is a complex green space that needs investment and interpretation. There are significant constraints on the site including Grade 1 listed buildings, significant archaeological remains, flood zone 3 areas and the whole site is designated as a scheduled monument.
- 1.4 It has many historical features that vary in condition and require further conservation and interpretation and include the abbey ruins, the churchyard, abbey barn, gatehouse, the Mound, and the monastic slab. The management plan will help in conserving these historic features.
- 1.5 The park also has range of important natural qualities with acidic grasslands, veteran trees, stream and pond at the centre of the site. The landscape quality and the views towards Kenilworth Castle are a significant attraction which have historical and landscape quality. The management plan will help in conserving these historic features and landscape quality of this site.
- 1.6 The aim of the Management Plan is to outline how Warwick District Council will develop, maintain, and manage Abbey Fields over the next ten years, as well as adapting to Climate Change and all the pressures expected over the coming years.
- 1.7 The plan details a greater understanding of site with regards its rich heritage, its abundance of wildlife, its landscape, and its ever-increasing recreational needs to serve the community. The plan recognises each of these and how best to manage them.

- 1.8 The plan sets out a long-term vision for the green space being *"Abbey Fields is a green space rich in wildlife and steeped in history that protects, conserves and sensitively adapts to the needs of the changing climate and increasing population, whilst providing a high-quality welcome and inclusive experience for all users to enjoy the benefits that Abbey Fields has to offer, now and in the future."* It then sets a number of aims and objectives and then details a number of actions with timescales, responsibilities and resource requirements.
- 1.9 The plan provides a focus for partnership working and helps bring the community together. Abbey Fields is special in having so many interested community groups and stakeholders, this is reflected in the variety and diversity of the actions in the management plan. The implementation of the plan will be undertaken in collaboration with all key stakeholders and the local population to create a green space that is truly embedded into the local community engendering a sense of local pride and ownership.
- 1.10 The approval of the management plan will also aid in sourcing various funding opportunities beyond the funding available through the Council. The plan recognizes the need to seek additional resources and funds for conservation and heritage enhancements which could include National Heritage Lottery Funding Feasibility Study, HS2 and CIL funding.
- 1.11 The management plan will support any future application for Green Flag and Green Heritage Award for quality. This is a key requirement for any application.
- 1.12 In December 2022, the Council agreed a Notice of Motion which included a commitment to take practical action for safe cycling by:

"including students cycling to various schools through Abbey Fields within the remit of the current investigations being carried out as part of the new Abbey Fields Management Plan and Sustainable Transport work which will include relevant consultation with all affected"

Subsequently, in March 2023, the Cabinet agreed to further design work on a preferred route for cycling through the park, as the basis for a consultation. As these decisions were taken after the Abbey Fields management Plan was drafted, it is proposed that the Management Plan be amended as follows:

- a) That an additional aim for Abbey Fields is included (page 33 of the Executive Summary and Page 196 of the Management Plan) to read:

Subject to further consultation, to create a safe, designated cycle route through Abbey Fields to link existing cycle routes and to encourage cycling.

- b) That action 7 within the Action Plan ( page 36 of the Executive Summary and page 204 of the Management Plan) be amended to read:

Action No	Character Area	Relates to issues and Opportunity Areas	Objectives	Implementation / Task	Responsibility	Resources
7	Areas 1-6	1e 1t 10a 10f	Encourage safe cycling within Abbey Fields cycling on	Work with Sustrans, Warwickshire County Council Transport Planning to bring forward proposals for consultation for safe cycle routes through Abbey Fields that	Climate Change Team; WCC Transport Planning	Subject to separate approval

			designated routes	connects with existing off road cycling provision through Kenilworth.  Should the cycle route be implemented, enable safety, by restricted cycling to designated routes and entrance points.		
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It should be noted that these amendments are in line with the outcome of the consultations which showed support for cycling within Abbey Fields and can be accommodated without changing other elements of the Management Plan.

### **Further background to the management plan**

- 1.13 The Management Plan has followed the Heritage Lottery Fund Management and Maintenance Plan guidance (2012) and also the format and content provided in "Raising the Standard", The Green Flag Award guidance manual (updated in 2016) with a view to achieving Green Flag Award Status for Abbey Fields, as well as complementing a future Phase One HLF National Heritage Lottery Fund Grant.
- 1.14 The Council appointed a lead consultant Idverde UK to develop and produce the Abbey Fields Management Plan together with other specialist consultants.
- 1.15 The Management Plan will be reviewed annually and updated in Year 5. However, it is intended to be a working document that can be flexible to changing demands, policies and climate requirements. As such it may be subject to change as required.
- 1.16 The structure of the Management Plan is a logical process. It begins by introducing Abbey Fields, its historical timeline and its present status within Kenilworth, and how planning policy has and will likely influence the current and future management of Abbey Fields. The Management Plan identifies current maintenance practices and service level agreements that are in place. Appraisals have been undertaken on the ecology, hydrology, accessibility, and the fabric and features of Abbey Fields, understanding this green space's current condition, and making recommendations where required.
- 1.17 The Management Plan summarises key findings of public consultation undertaken in 2019 and also more recently its historical provenance. The issues and opportunities arising from these appraisals and consultations are summarized and formulated into clear aims and objectives for the Management Plan that have fed into the Vision of Abbey Fields. These have then been formulated into key actions required over the 10-year time frame to allow Abbey Fields to adapt to current needs and future demands, reviewing annually and when necessary, over the lifetime of this Management Plan.
- 1.18 The following is a summary of the main objectives of the plan in relation to the future management and direction for all those involved in Abbey Fields over the next 10 years.

- Apply planning policies, strategies and designations to protect, conserve and adapt the historic and natural aspects of Abbey Fields, considering the needs of the community.
  - Management and Maintenance needs to balance the needs of the historic, wildlife and amenity value of Abbey Fields.
  - Conserve, enhance and reinstate where possible historic trees with consideration of ecological benefits and statutory permissions. Create specific management objectives for veteran trees and promote their value within Abbey Fields.
  - Conserve, manage, enhance and increase the habitats within Abbey Fields with consideration of ecological surveys, Local Biodiversity Action Plans and statutory permissions. Increase wildlife interpretation and promote positive engagement with ecological resources.
  - Conserve existing hydrological features of the Brooks, Lake, ditches and rain garden ensuring they function as they are intended and create new hydrological features such as ponds, swales and rain gardens to resolve water related issues on site.
  - Improving the accessibility of users as they enter the Fields whilst improving path networks throughout Abbey Fields for the inclusion of all abilities to enjoy and participate in what the Fields has to offer.
  - To ensure Abbey Fields has a unique sense of identity with cohesive furniture that connects each character zone of Abbey Fields. Providing clear cohesive welcome signage to every entrance.
  - To enable the historic and non historic built structures of Abbey Fields to adapt to the needs of the community and preserving its character for generations to come. Building on existing relations with volunteer groups, setting up a Partnership Group to carry this work forward.
  - Maintain the right for everyone to enjoy and use Abbey Fields, ensuring a wide variety of public uses, whilst maintaining its natural and historic character and balancing the needs of the community with the requirements to maintain and protect sensitive habitats, and important heritage.
- 1.19 The plan will be subject to continual review as it is used and Warwick District Council will prioritise and update the Action Plan annually, if required. A formal review and update of the balance of the plan will be undertaken every 10 years.
- 1.19 Following approval of the plan more accurate costings will be obtained for each of the actions within the plan, identifying opportunities for further funding.

## **2 Alternative Options**

### **2.4 Not to approve the management plan.**

The Cabinet could consider not to approve the plan and to continue without one. The consequence of this decision is that there would be a lack of focus on managing and maintaining Abbey Fields, while missing out on potential funding

and accreditation opportunities. For this reason, this option has not been recommended.

2.5 Have a different type or style of management plan.

The management plan has been developed following best practice as recommended by the Heritage Lottery Fund Management and Maintenance Plan guidance (2012) and the format and content provided in "Raising the Standard", The Green Flag Award guidance manual (updated in 2016). For this reason, this option has not been recommended.

2.6 Have a management plan reduced in years and size.

Ten-year management plans are common amongst many nationwide parks management plans and again follows best practice. This ten year covers short-, medium- and long-term actions. An Executive Summary has been produced which is smaller than the full document and is common practice when the full document is so large. For this reason, this option has not been recommended.

### **3 Legal Implications**

- 3.1 The Council will ensure legal advice is obtained throughout the delivery of the plan including anything applicable to procurement laws, legal agreements, and consents.

### **4 Financial Services**

- 4.1 Within the management plan, there are several actions that have estimated costs against them, some being capital costs while others being revenue cost with many actions currently unfunded. Some costs are yet to be determined and require further feasibility studies, while other actions are covered within existing budgets. These are all set out within the detailed action plan.
- 4.2 To get a more accurate and up to date cost of the management plan one of the key actions is to prepare a costed masterplan to undertake all actions for Abbey Fields, identifying opportunities for CIL funding and the feasibility of an HLF application for additional works.

### **5 Business Strategy**

5.1 Health, Homes, Communities

This plan will make a direct contribution to supporting health and well-being, and an active community.

5.2 Green, Clean, Safe

The plan will enable green space improvements and will offer significant opportunities for active travel, and for biodiversity enhancements.

5.3 Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment

- 5.4 The plan will make a significant contribution toward the green infrastructure of the district and in the walking and cycling infrastructure, both of which will assist the visitor economy.

5.5 Effective Staff

The plan will help staff to be more effective in managing Abbey Fields and aid decision making and use of resources in the park.

5.6 Maintain or Improve Services

The plan will enhance the Council's Green Spaces service and provide clarity in terms of the landscaping contract requirements with contractor Idverde UK.

#### 5.7 Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term

The plan will enable better financial planning for Abbey Fields and utilise relevant S106 payments in the district.

### **6 Environmental/Climate Change Implications**

- 6.1 The Management Plan will look at opportunities for SuDS and wetland creation building on established rain gardens and wet areas within the Fields. There may be opportunities to create additional seasonal wetland areas and look at reducing local pollution through SuDS schemes.
- 6.2 The Management Plan will consider the types of replacement tree planting considering climate change and biosecurity. Due to Historic England restrictions for the site given its status as a designed scheduled monument, additional tree planting is restricted.
- 6.3 The plan will serve both nature and people, by improving existing and creating new wildlife sites and working with appropriate delivery partners to ensure that Abbey Fields becomes part of the Nature Recovery Network as well as enhancing people's connection with nature, by improving path networks, actively encouraging community groups and schools to use/manage the Fields, work with local health providers and improve the environmental legibility of the site.
- 6.4 The plan will look at opportunities of reducing and managing waste, such as recycling at source, and litter management. Encouraging more active travel to the Fields will help to reduce air pollution.
- 6.5 The plan will serve to adapt to the needs of Climate Change and will ensure the Fields is climate change ready in its current and future provision.
- 6.6 Use of the Plant Health and Biosecurity Toolkit for landscape practitioners prepared by The Landscape Institute in conjunction with SGD, The Association of Professional Landscapers and BALI, will ensure the risk of pests and diseases associated with movements of plants will be managed appropriately prevent the introduction of pests and diseases that could seriously impact the health of existing and new plant communities.
- 6.7 The plan will ensure the Council will consult with Sustrans and Warwickshire County Council Transport Planning to consider potential cycle routes through and/or around the Fields that connects with existing off road cycling provision through Kenilworth. It will look at funding providers locally to provide key messaging and campaigning to encourage active travel to the Fields.

### **7 Analysis of the effects on Equality**

- 7.1 An access audit was undertaken to help inform the management plan and assessed the quality of access within, and to the Fields, in terms of its visibility,

legibility and accessibility for both able bodied and less able-bodied users and is supported by the Access and Circulation Plan within the management plan.

- 7.2 Several of the actions in the management plan including entrance audits are included to improve accessibility within the park.

## **8 Data Protection**

- 8.1 There are no data protection implications of the plan.

## **9 Health and Wellbeing**

- 9.1 The plan will look to provide equal access for all by improving entrances, pathways, and access to facilities, encouraging walking and cycling to the Fields, improvements to the tennis court facilities and encouraging more informal play, as well as linking to health and sports providers to encourage Fields use for more active fitness and wellness programmes. Improving the facilities of the Fields and connecting these facilities with key providers will ensure the Fields is more actively used to improve health, social and cultural well-being and will adapt to climate change.
- 9.2 The plan seeks to encourage active travel with walking and cycling and therefore reduce the use of vehicles and this reduce air pollution in the local area.

## **10 Risk Assessment**

- 10.1 The management plan, once adopted, cannot be funded in full due to financial constraints. This will be a political choice at the time the budgets for 2024/25 and beyond are set.
- 10.2 There is a risk that there will be insufficient staff resource to deliver the Abbey Fields management plan. The management plan identifies the resource requirements for its delivery and as a result this can be considered in setting future budgets staff resource to develop and deliver the plan.

## **11 Consultation**

- 11.1 Residents and community groups in Kenilworth were invited to have their say on "Fields for the Future" in a public consultation which was carried out from 4 November 2019 until 9 December 2019. Warwick District Council organised seven drop-in events, where the public were encouraged to take part in an information gathering exercise for Abbey Fields, which would help to inform a management plan for the wider Abbey fields. The drop-in sessions took place from 9 to 30 November 2019 at Abbey Fields Swimming Pool, Castle Farm Recreation Centre, the Kenilworth Centre and the Holiday Inn.
- 11.2 At these events staff from the WDC parks project teams and our management and maintenance plan consultants Idverde UK asked attendees to complete 'Fields for our Future' consultation questionnaires and offer insights into how they currently use the Fields with the aim to gain the opinions of Abbey Fields users. In addition to the drop-in sessions people also completed the consultation surveys online.
- 11.3 The consultation raised some important aspects in relation to how people use, value and wish to see improvements to Abbey Fields. The findings of this consultation were in line with the findings from the consultants' surveys that



have been undertaken at Abbey Fields during the preparation of this Management Plan.

11.4 Further to the 'Fields for the Future' consultation it was evident that additional consultation was required specific to the historic assets within Abbey Fields. In January 2021, key stakeholders were consulted on the Heritage Management within Abbey Fields. Extended consultation was undertaken with the following statutory and local stakeholders:

- Historic England
- Warwickshire County Council-Archaeology
- Warwick District Council-Conservation, Green Spaces and Assets
- Kenilworth Abbey Advisory Committee (KAAC)
- Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society (KHAS)
- Kenilworth Town Council (KTC)
- Friends of Abbey Fields
- St Nicholas Church

The consultation took the form of interviews with individuals, and individual groups. Prior to the meeting a brief discussion paper was circulated to all attendees, along with the 2005 Conservation Plan, written by KAAC. The findings of these further consultations fed into the development of the management plan.

### **Background papers:**

### **Supporting documents:**

This is not a legal requirement but may assist others in identifying documents you have referred to in producing the report.