

 Executive 9th March 2016		Agenda Item No. 10
Title	St. Nicholas Park Petition	
For further information about this report please contact	Simon Richardson, Green Space Development Officer. 01926 456216 simon.richardson@warwickdc.gov.uk	
Wards of the District directly affected	Saltisford	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	Executive 21/12/12 – Agenda Item No. 8	
Background Papers	Petition presented to Council 27/1/16 Original HLF report 11/2/2008	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	No
Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken	No

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	22/2/16	Chris Elliot
Head of Service	12/2/16	Rob Hoof
CMT	15/2/16	Bill Hunt
Section 151 Officer	15/2/16	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer		
Finance	15/2/16	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	15/2/16	Cllr Dave Shilton
Consultation & Community Engagement		
Plans presented to Ward Cllrs and Warwick Town Council representatives – 12/12/14		
Plans presented to Warwick Town Council – 27/1/15		
Plans presented to Warwick Community Forum – 5/3/15		
Plans presented to Friends of St Nicholas Park committee – 16/3/15		
Final Decision?		Yes
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the issues raised in the petition presented to the Council meeting of 27th January 2016 by the Friends of St. Nicholas Park.
- 1.2 The petition related to the creation of meadow areas within the park, previously agreed by Executive in December 2012 as part of a wider agreement of the St. Nicholas Park Improvement Budget.
- 1.3 The areas marked on the plan where spayed out in October 2015 and a subsequent petition raised for the reinstatement back to amenity grass. See **Appendix Two** for the original plan.

2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Executive note the petition presented by the Friends of St. Nicholas Park, as set out at **Appendix One**.
- 2.2 That Executive agree that the two existing locations chosen to improve biodiversity in St. Nicholas Park through the creation of wildflower meadows, as shown at **Appendix Two**, are retained and the petition organisers notified accordingly.
- 2.3 That Executive note that the areas will take time to become fully established and agree that monitoring and evaluation is undertaken of their impact, contribution and aesthetics and the results reported back after they have been in place for at least two years.

3. **Reasons for the Recommendations**

- 3.1 The full Council meeting of 27/1/16 referred the petition presented to them to Executive for consideration.
- 3.2 The petition, set out in full at **Appendix One**, calls for the two areas of the park, already sprayed and marked out for use as wildflower meadows to be restored to their former condition as soon as possible. The chosen locations are along the river corridor and on the banked area at the back of the all-weather pitch, which is not used and difficult to cut. These areas were chosen after consultation with stakeholders, as detailed in **Appendix Three**.
- 3.3 The proposal to create meadow areas within the park was first introduced in 2008 as part of plan, approved by Council, to bid for Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) monies to improve the park. They were subsequently included in the proposals for the St. Nicholas Park remaining projects, presented to Executive in 2012, with the idea for a "meadow/improvement to wildlife along river corridor" have emerged from the public survey 'Have Your Say' undertaken in 2009.
- 3.4 A petition, relating to CCTV proposals within the park was presented by residents of Pickard Street in December 2012. As a result it was agreed that any remaining budget not required for CCTV enhancements would be used on other desirable projects with "Wildlife enhancements, especially river corridor" being one of them.

- 3.5 A presentation on the current proposals was made to Warwick Town Council in December 2014. They recommended that further consultation was undertaken with local stakeholders and as a result presentations were also made to Warwick Community Forum on 5/3/15 and the Friends of St. Nicholas Park on 16/3/15. As a result of these consultations the chosen areas were scaled back with, in particular, a significant reduction in size of the area along the river corridor as requested by the Friends group.
- 3.6 The wildflower meadow proposals will contribute to the delivery of the Council's Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) and have received support from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 Warwick District Council has a duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of our policy or decision making. Conserving biodiversity can include restoring or enhancing a population or habitat.
- 3.7 The meadows will also provide an educational facility for local schools and visitors and it is intended to involve local schools in their establishment in order to provide an educational resource aimed at Key Stage (KS)1, KS2 and KS3 children. The Green Space Team already has an established network of schools interested in the project.
- 3.8 Wildflower meadows will also make a positive contribution to the marking criteria used for Green Flag Award assessments.
- 3.9 The proposed areas only take up 6.6% of the total park area, leaving plenty of space for recreation, and will create another dimension to St. Nicholas Park and draw visitors down to the river corridor.
- 3.10 The whole band along the river has been sprayed out with the intention of cutting paths through the wild flower meadow to allow access to and from the river side path, as shown at **Appendix Two**.
- 3.11 Given the advanced stage of preparation for planting, the biodiversity and educational benefits and the extensive consultation already undertaken it is therefore recommended that the existing locations are retained and that the Friends Group are notified accordingly.
- 3.12 It is proposed that the impact and benefits of the meadows are closely monitored over a 2 year period and the results reported back to Executive. The impact can be measured as part of the Parks survey carried out during the summer and customer feedback from other sources including school participation. The biodiversity impact can be assessed by County Council Ecology and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. Their value can be assessed by the parks audit carried out by an external body and marked against the Green Flag Criteria.
- 3.13 The true value of the meadows will only become apparent over time and once these assessments have been made. It is worth noting that the value of the removal of flower beds and replacement with sustainable plants, a move that was also the subject of objections, now contributes to Warwick receiving a Gold award for the West Midlands in Bloom competition.

4. **Policy Framework**

- 4.1 The principles of Fit for the Future have been considered in the formation of the proposal.

- Services – Improving and maintaining a facility to the community, in this case creating an attractive new feature to St Nicholas Park and helping towards the National Pollinator Strategy 2014 to show Warwick District Councils contribution.
- Money – The funding for this project is the remainder from The St Nicholas Park Improvements Budget for already agreed improvements to the park. It could also attract more visitors to the park improving the local economy by adding another feature.
- People – The area will be used for educational purposes; this will be through interpretation and organized visits to the site. It will encourage visitors to explore the eastern end and river corridor of the park and has been well documented that the benefit of being outdoors and exercise has a positive effect on mental health and obesity, part of the Health and Well Being aim within the Sustainable Community Strategy.

4.2 The provision of high quality and diverse open spaces makes a significant contribution to making Warwick District a great place to live, work and visit.

4.3 The implementation of the meadow will help deliver the Council's Green Space Strategy, which aims to protect and improve biodiversity within the parks and open spaces of the District.

4.4 Adopt and promote maintenance and management practices that contribute to the sustainable management of green spaces.

5. **Budgetary Framework**

5.1 The initial cost of implementing the meadows is approx. £13,000. These costs can be met by utilising the remaining unallocated funding from the previously approved St. Nicholas Park Improvements Budget.

5.2 The impact on revenue from implementing the meadow would be a saving of approx. £600 per annum from the grounds maintenance budget, with this saving contributing towards the overall savings required to be found by the Council.

6. **Risks**

6.1 Failing to meet public expectations following the proposals put forward in providing improvements to the park.

6.2 Not fulfilling Warwick District Councils commitment to biodiversity.

6.3 The meadow does not fulfil the anticipated benefits and does not add to biodiversity.

6.4 The meadow once established proves unpopular with the public.

6.5 The petition could put other improvements at risk and the park does not move forward if other proposals are objected to following agreement.

7. **Alternative Option(s) considered**

7.1 The Executive could accept the petition as written. This has been rejected for the reasons set out in Section 3.

7.2 The Executive could agree that the meadows areas are scaled back further. This has been rejected as they have already been scaled back following the consultation exercise and their benefit to biodiversity and as an educational resource would be adversely affected.

7.3 An alternative proposal to site the meadow on Myton Fields, allowing viewing from St. Nicholas Park has also been rejected as Myton Fields is used as a car park during the summer and this would have an impact on revenue. There are also currently meadow areas within Myton Fields.

8. **Background**

8.1 Meadow areas have already been implemented on other parks e.g. Abbey Fields, Kenilworth. This meadow has won praise from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust for improving the flora and fauna from that within the previously close mown grass.

8.2 The Trust have been contacted by a member of the St. Nicholas Park Friends Group concerning the current proposals. Their response, from Ali Willers, Planning Assistant, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust was: *"I've had a look at the plans and proposals, as far as I know, we haven't been involved but to be honest I'm not overly concerned. Overall I think the enhancements proposed will be of benefit to wildlife, including a new wildflower meadow and replacement of trees. The thinning proposed in the Spinney Area (21) will improve the biodiversity as it will enable the ground flora to develop. It would be hoped that any bulbs and trees replanted in this area could be native."*

8.3 The proposals form part of Warwick District Council's commitment to providing pollinator areas throughout the district. The meadow will provide a valuable resource to pollinators such as honey bees and insects that are in dramatic decline (see 'State of Nature' report 2013). The meadow will also provide an educational facility for local schools and visitors.

8.4 The project could link to the HLF funded national campaign to 'Save our Magnificent Meadows' which wants to help communities cherish and celebrate the wonders of their local wildlife-rich grasslands and appreciate their important role within our culture.

8.5 During the consultation meeting with the Friends Group in March 2015 it was proposed that WDC officers would carry out further consultation with park users during the summer. This proposal was dismissed by the Friends as they apparently considered that it would be biased in favour of the proposals.

8.6 WDC officers received a number of favourable comments whilst on site when the spraying was being carried out, once the proposal was explained to them, from at least 15 members of the public. The Green Space Team have also received emails from members of the public supporting the proposals and questioning the petition, which are set out in **Appendix Four**, along with a letter published in the Observer on 21st January 2016 also offering support.