

Report to: Environment Committee, 14 March 2023

Report of: Corporate Director - Operations, Homes & Communities

Subject: MECO MEMORIAL NATURE PARK

1 Recommendations

That Committee:

- 1.1 Notes the scheme of works to be delivered at Meco Memorial Nature Park in line with funding approved by Policy and Resources Committee in September 2020.**
- 1.2 Consider a proposal for the delivery of additional works at the site (as outlined within this report), that would require £30,000 capital investment.**
- 1.3 Subject to approval of the additional work as set out within this report, recommend to Council an amendment to the capital programme of £30,000.**
- 1.4 Subject to approval by Council as outlined in recommendation 1.3, delegates authority to the Corporate Director - Operations, Homes and Communities in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Committee, to agree any final change in proposals within the existing budget, should the findings of any ecological assessment and habitat survey limit the additional works as outlined within this report.**

2 Background

- 2.1 At Council on 16th July 2019 a motion was presented to the meeting calling on the City Council to support the creation of a "Park of Peace" in memory of those killed in a bombing raid on the Meco Works during World War 2.
- 2.2 The park would be established on retained land between Sanctuary Close and Hopton Street adjacent to a housing development (**see plan and photographs in Appendix 1 & 2**) and include recreation facilities for the wellbeing of residents. The motion was supported and approved, and officers were tasked with taking this project forward.
- 2.3 The City's Landscape Consultant was commissioned to design a scheme in consultation with Ward Members and residents. Originally the scheme was going to include a memorial area to commemorate the victims, seating, a community orchard, pathways, fencing, a boardwalk over wetland, a small kickabout area, and interpretation boards. The cost was assessed during 2020 at £30,000.
- 2.4 A report was duly presented to Policy and Resources Committee on 8th September 2020 with two recommendations; 1) authorising the acceptance of £12,925 from Platform Housing as a contribution towards the park, and 2) for Council to add an additional £17,075 to the Capital Programme in 2020-21.

- 2.5 As part of this report to Policy & Resources Committee, it was confirmed that 'Divisional County Councillor' funding would be used for the design, manufacture and installation of a memorial sculpture.
- 2.6 In March 2021, a s106 Deed of Variation associated with the Platform housing development was agreed which specified the sum of £13,000 as the contribution to the park. This was paid in August 2021. The sum of £17,000 was brought forward to the Capital Programme for 2021/22.
- 2.7 A landscape architect was procured during Autumn 2021 and commenced design work in January 2022. Discussions commenced with Worcestershire County Council with a view to improving the Public Right of Way (PROW) running along the southern boundary of the park.
- 2.8 The first drawings and specification for the improvements were made available in March 2022 with a proposal to phase landscaping works and seasonal planting from Summer 2022 to Spring 2023. The final version of the scheme documentation was available in May 2022.
- 2.9 This specified the improvements as; a memorial area with sculpture, seating and interpretation board, an orchard, a picnic area, additional seating by a path, timber fencing, a pedestrian gate, a connection to a boardwalk with steps across a wetland area and park signage.
- 2.10 In addition, improvements to the ecology of the site were proposed including hibernaculum, wildflower areas, hedgerows, native shrub planting, and improving biodiversity associated with the wetland. Some targeted removal of excess vegetation would also be required to allow for better pedestrian access and establish the new planting.
- 2.11 A procurement exercise commenced for a landscape contractor in June 2022. The resurfacing of the PROW, funded by the County Council, was included within the contract documents. Signage and interpretation for the park would be arranged by officers outside of the landscape contract. Four quotations were submitted to the Council in July 2022, ranging from £82,086 to £93,691 excluding the PROW.
- 2.12 As all submissions were more than the approved budget of £30,000, it was agreed to approach the same four bidders using a priority list of improvements to ascertain what could be carried out for the funding available. Once the contract documentation was amended, a second procurement exercise was undertaken in November 2022. One bidder re-submitted prices based on the revised specification and schedule of work. The improvements that could now be delivered within the original funding envelope were ground clearance, the memorial area with seating, the orchard, and 2 areas of wildflowers. The PROW was kept in the contract as this would be funded by the County Council.
- 2.13 The landscape contractor was appointed in January 2023 however on trying to arrange the first site meeting officers were notified that the contractor no longer wished to carry out the work citing a business restructure. Officers engaged another landscape contractor to remove the excess vegetation before the bird-nesting season started. Another contractor is now being appointed for the hard landscaping works.

3. Preferred Option

- 3.1 That Members consider whether additional capital funding of £30,000 should be recommended to Council for approval, for the delivery of additional works at the Meco Memorial Nature Park.
- 3.2 Additional facilities proposed include kickabout area, a boardwalk, steps, and link paths across the wetland to create a north-south route for pedestrians walking around the park.
- 3.3 Subject to approval, it is proposed that the scheme would be split into phases according to the funding approved as follows:

Phase 1 (***funding approved***) – ground clearance (completed), the construction of the memorial area with a sculpture, seating and interpretation, wildflower areas, and a community orchard.

Phase 2 – (***funding not approved***) commission an ecological assessment and habitat survey then installation of a kickabout area, boardwalk, steps and link paths.

- 3.4 Subject to approval of this report, and furthermore subject to approval of an amendment to the capital programme by Council then it is proposed that authority is delegated to the Corporate Director (Operations, Homes & Communities), in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, to agree any change in proposals up to a maximum of £30,000 should the ecological assessment and habitat survey highlight factors which limit the delivery of the proposed additional works.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 No further improvements via additional funding

Advantages:

- No further capital funding requirement (£30,000) and associated annual revenue pressure (£3670.00 per annum for 10 years).

Disadvantages:

- Would not allow the council to fully meet the definition of the 'Peace Park' as defined within to the s106 Agreement.
- Additional facilities for this site are not provided.

4.2 Deliver some additional improvements avoiding the wetland area

Advantages:

- Reduce risk of possible, as yet unknown, costs associated with working in water and with a potential high-water table.
- Avoiding disturbance of possible protected species.
- Use Phase 2 funding for one or more of; upgrading existing paths, a viewing platform, picnic benches, fencing, and to support habitat across site.

Disadvantages:

- Boardwalk and path connection allowing a circular route inside the park is not achieved.

4. Implications

3.5 Financial & Budgetary Implications

The proposals set out within this report would require an additional £30,000 of capital investment and an adjustment to the Capital Programme for 2023/2024. There will be an annual borrowing cost of approximately £3670, assuming a 10-year asset life.

These costs are in addition to what has already been committed to the site and a current annual borrowing cost of approximately £2080 for the funding already agreed.

This park is a City Council maintained asset with revenue impacts for mowing paths, strimming and tree maintenance. The improvements will be accommodated within existing budgets.

3.6 Legal and Governance Implications

The site is within the Council's ownership. £13,000 has been generated via a s106 Agreement with Platform Housing for the purposes of a scheme of enhancements towards a "Peace Park".

Improvements to the wetland area and management of protected species must be conducted in compliance with Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

3.7 Risk Implications

If the cost of contract labour and materials continues to escalate, further delay may result in poorer value for money and that the community facilities are not achieved.

3.8 Corporate/Policy Implications

This programme supports:

- City Plan Themes:

Theme 1: *Stronger and connected communities* – sustainable neighbourhood infrastructure.

Theme 3: *A healthy and active city* – healthy walking routes.

Theme 5: *Enhancing and sustaining our beautiful city for future generations* – increased use of our green spaces and parks.

3.8 Equality Implications

Due to the gradient of land which slopes towards the middle and the requirement for steps on one side of the boardwalk this feature will not lend itself to wheelchair access in a continuous route across the park.

3.9 Human Resources Implications

There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

3.10 Health and Safety Implications

There will need to be an approved scheme agreed with the contractor to mitigate the risk of working in the wetland area.

3.11 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

An ecological appraisal and habitat mapping, and protected species surveys will be required before any works are commenced. The cost will need to be included as part of the approved funding.

Additional facilities will bring greater benefit to the local community and increase use of the park. The facilities will lead to an improvement in the regular maintenance of the park and promotion of ecology within the site.

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Background Papers: Land to the East of Sanctuary Close / Hopton Street Pocket Park, Policy and Resources Committee Report, 8 September 2020.

Meco Memorial Nature Park Site Plan



St John's Cemetery

Scale @ A3: 1:750

9 0 9 18 27 m



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Date: 07/02/2023
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APPENDIX 2 – Site Photographs

Looking west across southern part of site (Public Right of Way to left):



Looking east across northern part of site (boundary with allotments on left):

