

Report to: Communities Committee, 19th July 2023

Report of: Corporate Director – Operations, Homes & Communities

Subject: GORSE HILL AND ELBURY MOUNT NATURE RESERVE – UPDATE REPORT

1. Recommendation

That the Committee:

- 1.1 Notes the contents of the report, and in particular the work undertaken to date; and**
- 1.2 Notes that a further report on this project will be presented to this Committee in October 2023, setting out a business case for any funding that is required.**

2. Background

- 2.1 As part of budget setting for 2022/2023 the Council approved the inclusion of a project for *'changes to the existing entrance gates and fencing that could reduce or even deter future anti-social behaviour'* at Gorse Hill and Elbury Mount Nature Reserve.
- 2.2 These projects have not had funding approved, although indicative costs of £50,000 were identified. As per the budget paper considered by Policy & Resources Committee on 8 February 2022, any capital allocations are dependent upon detailed business case reports being presented to policy committees.
- 2.3 The Gorse Hill and Elbury Mount Local Nature Reserve is made up of two hills which are the highest point in Worcester City. Elbury Mount contains an underground Severn Trent Water reservoir. Visitors to this haven of wildlife benefit from amazing views of the city.
- 2.4 Throughout 2021, neighbours to Elbury Mount had suffered from anti-social behaviour (ASB). West Mercia Police recorded more than 10 incidents of illegal use of motorbikes on the access road and stones thrown from the elevated vantage point of the reservoir at the back of houses on Kenwood Avenue. In response the Council's Youth Intervention Team and West Mercia Police carried out joint patrols and positioned a temporary CCTV camera on Ambleside Drive. The result of which led to a reduction in ASB into autumn 2022.
- 2.5 It is likely that ASB of this type is seasonal and will reoccur in the future. Making changes to the existing entrance gates and fencing could reduce or even deter future ASB. The cost to purchase and install this street furniture also means that agency and officer time spent patrolling the site and responding to complaints could be reduced.

2.6 Officers had planned to consult with neighbours and users of the site to identify current issues, recommend changes and seek feedback from the community to ensure any changes will not have a negative impact on access.

3. Activity to Date

3.1 In September 2022 officers conducted a survey of residents who reside in streets bordering the site. Of the 120 properties, 49 responded to the survey.

3.2 The most common feedback from residents was:

- *Not enough police officers around, would be nice for more presence / patrols.*
- *Motorbike issues during the summer of 2021 but nothing as bad this year.*
- *When camera was placed, crime and issues went down. Could we have that back?*
- *Bikes slip through on area to Elbury Mount (Elbury Park rd) and possible drug deals throughout the day.*
- *More lighting around Elbury Mount*
- *Youth issues congregating on Eskdale Close*

3.3 At the same time a complimentary Smart Water project was being delivered across an area of Gorse Hill in partnership with West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner, Ward Councillor and Platform Housing Group. Residents were visited between January – March 2023 with 193 out of a possible 250 households participating in the scheme.

3.4 In response to the resident feedback, officers met with West Mercia Police 'Design Out Crime' Officer in February 2023 which identified the following considerations:

a) Speed of cars along Elbury Park Road either being used as a cut through by commuting traffic or relating to ASB / criminal activity. Potential for identifying traffic calming measures.

b) Motorbikes entering the nature reserve. Severn Trent has entrance furniture to stop bikes getting through easily. However, if determined, people can still get a motorbike in, but they will delay anyone trying to leaving the site quickly. Could consider ensuring all entrances have the similar furniture, as long as access for pushchairs and mobility scooters is not inhibited.

c) Review of vegetation management in specific locations where either hedges could either be left to grow to give privacy to neighbour properties or cut back to expose areas of the nature reserve so that they aren't too discrete. There is a large tree trunk which is encouraging people to congregate near to neighbouring properties causing conflict. Potential to remove the tree trunk and use it in another green space.

d) Litter in isolated locations where people are congregating. Look to manage the vegetation in the area to create natural light and improve visibility. To consider putting in litter bin(s)

- e) Elbury Mount reservoir maintenance. There are a couple maintenance items that if repaired or carried out, would change the feel of the area for visitors. Officers will raise these issues with Severn Trent to see if this can be done.
- 3.5 Officers have reached out to identified contacts for each of these elements to develop detail and costs. Worcestershire County Highways are investigating a request for traffic calming and once work has concluded, we shall provide a response. In the meantime, they have asked officers to contact West Mercia Police Safer Neighbourhoods Team to raise the issue of inappropriate speeds of vehicles travelling along Elbury Park Road.
- 3.6 The Council's City Services identified a new location for the tree trunk and this was relocated on 26th April 2023.
- 3.7 Residents were supported to hold a community litter pick on Monday 8th May as part of the Kings Coronation Big Help Out. Volunteers included 5 adults and 2 children and they took a total of 14 hours to clear 8 bags of rubbish containing bottles, cans and a tyre. They are planning to run a litter pick every four to six weeks in the future.
- 3.8 Severn Trent Water has responded to officer correspondence and have been to site, identifying some maintenance issues. Severn Trent have since removed graffiti.
- 3.9 Officers met with the sponsor Member of this project on 12th May to review activity to date, options for improvements and to clarify next steps.
- 3.10 **Next steps**
- 3.11 Officers have arranged site visits with specialist officers from City Services on 29th June to identify maintenance and landscaping changes which would lead to improved visibility when visiting the site and privacy for neighbours to the nature reserve.
- 3.12 Officers will continue to liaise with Severn Trent Water, West Mercia Police Safer Neighbourhoods Team and Worcestershire County Council in order to identify opportunities for improvements.
- 3.13 Summary of costed proposals with recommendations to be reported to Corporate Director – Operations, Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair for Communities Committee October 2023.

Ward(s): **Gorse Hill**

Contact Officer: **Warwick Neale – Community Services Manager**

Tel: **01905 752971;**

Email: Warwick.neale@worceser.gov.uk

Background Papers: **none**