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| <b>Meeting:</b>         | <b>Council</b>  | <b>Date:</b>                    | <b>25 January 2024</b> |
| <b>Subject:</b>         | <b>Petition – Saintbridge Pond and Nature Reserve</b>           |                                 |                        |
| <b>Report Of:</b>       | <b>Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment</b> |                                 |                        |
| <b>Wards Affected:</b>  | <b>Abbeydale</b>  |                                 |                        |
| <b>Key Decision:</b>    | <b>No</b>   | <b>Budget/Policy Framework:</b> | <b>No</b>              |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b> | <b>Mark Graham- Open Spaces Strategy Team Leader</b>            |                                 |                        |
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| <b>Appendices:</b>      | <b>1. Petition Front Sheet</b>                                  |                                 |                        |

## FOR GENERAL RELEASE

### 1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the Council's proposed response to a petition regarding Saintbridge Pond and Nature Reserve that has obtained in excess of 1,000 signatures, thus triggering a Council debate in accordance with the Council's Petitions Scheme.

### 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Council is asked to **RESOLVE** that

- (1) The contents of the petition be noted.
- (2) The contents of this report be noted.
- (3) The management plan for Saintbridge Pond Nature Reserve that already exists and has been shared with partners is noted.
- (4) It is noted that the Council will not plan to carry out dredging at this time, for the reasons set out in this report, but will keep this position under review.
- (5) It is noted that the Council will work with partners to manage the perimeter vegetation and foliage at the site.

### 3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 A petition regarding Saintbridge Pond and Nature Reserve was submitted to the Council by the Friends of Saintbridge Pond and Nature Reserve (FOSPNR) and supported by Councillor Gravells, Ward Councillor for Abbeydale. The petition, formed of both paper and online versions, had 1251 signatures as at the date of submission to the Council and therefore meets the threshold for a Council debate.
- 3.2 The petition asks the Council to fulfil its ownership duties by providing a maintenance / business plan for the perimeter vegetation and foliage at Saintbridge Pond and Nature Reserve, and to reduce the amount of silt to address the loss of wildlife habitats and eradicate the invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam and the Giant

Reed which crowds out native species and reduce wildlife habitat. The full wording of the petition is included at Appendix 1.

- 3.3 The Council is the owner of Saintbridge Pond which has Green Flag status. A management plan exists for the site and this was submitted as part of the Green Flag application. The management plan is for 5 years and was updated last year, with input from partners, including the Environment Agency (EA) and Friends of Saintbridge Pond. The current level of silt does not impact on the green flag status and the previous inspector who granted status did not raise concerns.
- 3.4 Saintbridge Pond is classified as a formal reservoir under the Reservoirs Act 1975 (the Act) and as such, dam safety elements are operated and managed by the Environment Agency. As a requirement of the Act an independent Reservoir Panel Engineer carries out a thorough inspection at least once a year. Any issues raised from these inspections will be acted upon and in the last 12 months the EA have carried out works embankments and flood walls that hold flood water when the storage area is operated.
- 3.5 Regular meetings take place with partners to discuss the management of the site and any arising issues. Partners include the EA and Friends of Saintbridge Pond.
- 3.6 It is the view of the Council, following discussions with the EA, that from a flood risk perspective and from a biodiversity perspective, dredging of the pond is not currently needed and there are no concerns regarding flood water storage capacity.
- 3.7 In terms of the management of wildlife and biodiversity of the site, this has not deteriorated though it has changed over time. The life cycle of a pond, impacted by nature is that it will evolve from a pond to a wetland and eventually become land over a period of time. The biodiversity of the site will therefore change naturally. This does not mean that the Council accepts the full and permanent evolution of the site from pond to land, rather that a partial evolution of the pond/land in the short to medium term is acceptable as long as it does not impact on the flood risk.
- 3.8 Himalayan Balsam and Giant Reed exist across many sites all over the country and do not grow because of the silt. Therefore, the removal of silt is unlikely to lead to these species ceasing to grow on the site. Activities carried out at other locations such as Balsam bashing can be undertaken to address the Balsam growth.
- 3.9 The silt can create a smell, as noted by residents. The period during desilting work, should it take place, would create a significant increase in smell.
- 3.10 The main holding area for flood water is the dry basin located off Redpoll Way. There is an access path along a section parallel to the River Twyver relief channel to allow the EA access to maintain and operate the dam elements such as the trash screen and penstocks. This path is not a formal right of way and is subject to silt deposition following operation of the storage basin. Alternate routes are available and sediment clearance from the path is carried out as soon as practical by the Council.
- 3.11 The estimated cost for removal of the sediment to create an expanse of open water within the lower pond is in the region of £700,000.

#### **4.0 Social Value Considerations**

4.1 Environmental impact is a key consideration as part of our social value work. Environmental implications are laid out below.

#### **5.0 Environmental Implications**

5.1 If the pond is not dredged the area will continue to transform to a wooded wetland with two watercourse channels running through it. This provides a bio-diverse habitat which has evolved from what the original site habitat would have looked like. Should the pond not be dredged, the eco-system and wildlife would not be lost and would continue to change with the natural site evolution.

5.2 Consequently, dredging the pond will have a negative impact on the current wildlife and eco-systems that are succeeding at the site.

#### **6.0 Alternative Options Considered**

6.1 The Council could proceed to carry out the removal of silt at this location. However, this is unlikely to reduce the issues long term and would be at substantial cost to the Council which would reoccur approximately every 20 years.

#### **7.0 Reasons for Recommendations**

7.1 As stated above, the removal of silt is not guaranteed to address the issues being raised and would be at substantial cost to the Council.

#### **8.0 Future Work and Conclusions**

8.1 The Council, along with several partners including Stroud District Council and the EA, are investigating opportunities to manage the source of the sediment higher up in the Cotswold Escarpments in the form of Natural Flood Management (NFM). This involves re-naturalising manmade concrete watercourse channels, de-culverting sections and providing land use management interventions such as tree planting to improve erosion control and alternative livestock drinking points to prevent poaching of ground that introduces sediment into the watercourses.

8.2 Discussions with the EA and National Highways are also planned with regards to the M5 motorway discharges that enter the River Twyver and Sud Brook. These are considered to contribute to water quality issues and sediment deposition within the city's urban watercourses.

8.3 Activities such as 'Balsam Bashing' which has been carried out at other sites in the City, can be planned with partners at the appropriate time of the year.

#### **9.0 Financial Implications**

9.1 The cost to remove the majority of sediment from the lower pond would be in the region of £700,000. A significant element of this is the disposal of the sediment, and this figure could be a significant under-estimate should the arisings be considered contaminated.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

## **10.0 Legal Implications**

- 10.1 As detailed in the body of the report, the Council are the owners of the land and are responsible for its maintenance. A management plan is in place for the area and was prepared in consultation with partners, including the EA and Friends of Saintbridge Pond.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

## **11.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications**

- 11.1 The flood risk at the site will continue to be monitored by the Council and the EA and any changes to the management plan in light of changes to flood risk will be made.

## **12.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:**

- 12.1 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact; therefore, a full PIA was not required.

## **13.0 Community Safety Implications**

- 13.1 None

## **14.0 Staffing & Trade Union Implications**

- 14.1 None

## **Background Documents:**

None