

# Habitat Banking Programme

## 6.0 COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 6.2 The Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) Panel discussed the report at its meeting on 5th February 2026.
- 6.3 Councillor Criswell praised the sentiment of the project but expressed concern that the Council as custodians of the public realm were tying up parcels of land for extended periods which may be required for other purposes for the benefit of the public interest in the future. In addition Councillor Hunt queried whether legal contracts would be put in place to protect both the land and the public interest. The Panel were assured that legal agreements would be in place for this purpose and that there would be break clauses to take scenarios such as natural disasters and extreme weather into consideration. It was also assured that the programme would look to enhance existing spaces rather than redefine them. An example was given of sites with recreational sports pitches where the programme would keep the pitches but look to enhance the surrounding areas working with what would be feasible and practical.
- 6.4 Following an enquiry from Councillor Pitt in relation to the Priory Park site, the Panel heard that communications were ongoing with the Friends of Priory Park group who were open to the concept of the programme and that the team would be working closely with internal colleagues and external partners to ensure that the end result would enhance the space and not impact recreational use and enjoyment of the space.
- 6.5 In response to a question from Councillor Pitt relating to the inclusion of interest within the financial calculations, the Panel were advised that the figures had been developed in collaboration with Finance colleagues and that the modelling for the programme did not include the interest. The Panel were assured that a fluid case by case approach would be adopted with a further option to increase the number of credits available should the resulting habitats be of a more improved quality than anticipated.
- 6.6 Following an observation from Councillor Hassall in relation to the management of private estates and environments, with the example of Buckden Towers being given, the team advised that the programmes focus would be on the sites identified within the report, however they were aware of further opportunities and although a balanced approach would be undertaken initially this would be reevaluated and opportunities developed in the future if scope allowed.

- 6.7 The Panel were reassured following comments from Councillors Shaw and Bywater, that support from the Council's Operations Team had been factored in to be used in the event of extreme weather and that the legal agreements would be in place to protect the scheme from the unpredictability of nature. It was also noted that the richer and more biodiverse a habitat, the more resistant it was to natural disasters.
- 6.8 Concern was expressed by Councillor Mokbul that developers may utilise the credits scheme in place of delivering on development sites thus creating more heavily urbanised environments. The Panel were assured that the team were collaborating with Planning colleagues to develop and monitor habitats and developments across the district to ensure a balanced approach.
- 6.9 Councillor Hunt relayed his experience working with the team in relation to Riverside Park in Huntingdon and that he was impressed with how the suggested changes would enhance the current provision without hindering it's use by residents. He concluded with his belief that the scheme would allow residents to see investment in parks and green spaces for their benefit.
- 6.10 In response to an observation from Councillor Wells, the Panel heard that the team would be working with community groups and residents to develop the scheme and to strengthen community bonds with the Council.
- 6.11 Following a query from Councillor Shaw relating to the omission of Paxton Pits from the scheme, the Panel heard that the existing site was already rich in biodiversity and that the intention of the scheme was to increase the biodiversity of areas. It was noted that the forthcoming expansion of Paxton Pits may create further opportunities and could be included in the programme in the future if appropriate.
- 6.12 It was advised to the Panel that CIL funding would not be appropriate for the scheme due to the potential commercial nature therefore borrowing had been the better option for the programme.
- 6.13 Whilst in support of the scheme in general, Councillor Pitt expressed concern about the timescales within the report, noting that work was anticipated to start in May. The Panel were advised that following the outcome of the Budget through the democratic cycle in February, it was hoped that work would begin immediately to identify and progress the identified sites.
- 6.14 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.