

**GREAT FEN – MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT
(Report by Director of Operational Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The District Council are partners in this project together with the Wildlife Trust, English Nature and the Environment Agency. The partnership has been guided to-date by a Memorandum of Understanding which was approved by Cabinet on 20th June 2002 (Minute Ref 02/32). The project has now reached a stage where that document needs to be strengthened into a Memorandum of Agreement, which is attached.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Great Fen Project is an exciting 50 year project designed to safeguard important wildlife habitats and species by restoring over 3000 hectares of wetland around two important nature reserves in the fenland landscape of Huntingdonshire. It will also create major access, recreational and tourism opportunities that will stimulate diversification in the economy in and around the project area to the benefit of local communities and the District in general.
- 2.2 The aims of the project are as follows:

The Great Fen Project will:

- ❖ Safeguard two very important National Nature Reserves. These are legally protected sites, one of which is of international importance for its wetland habitats and species;
 - ❖ Create over 3000 hectares (over 4200 football pitches) of new wildlife habitat, making a major contribution to local and national local targets as set out in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan;
 - ❖ Contribute to diversification in the local economy, creating opportunities for new jobs and income streams;
 - ❖ Sustainably maintain and enhance flood protection in the Middle Level drainage system;
 - ❖ Create access for a wide range of users in an area largely devoid of public footpaths;
 - ❖ Become a significant tourist destination;
- 2.3 The Great Fen area has been included as an area of Strategic Green Space Enhancement within the Council's Core Strategy, recently approved and deposited for formal consultation. These areas are of particular importance in the context of providing recreational and other opportunities to compliment the growth in housing and employment, as well as being important in their own right to encourage biodiversity.
- 2.4 The Memorandum does not create a legal partnership, rather it is meant to be an Agreement entered into in good faith and in the spirit of co-operation to achieve common aims. It sets out the duties of the partners and the project management arrangements. It does not bind the Council to any particular capital or revenue contributions. The

vast bulk of funding is, in any event, being sourced from grant making bodies and private donations. So far, the Council has made modest amounts available from existing budgets but has largely contributed in terms of in-house specialist expertise, particularly Planning, Economic Development and Countryside Management.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 This project is rapidly gaining a national, even international, reputation as being at the forefront of habitat restoration. Its importance to the District is not just in this important ecological work but in the wider social and economic potential. In this regard its relationship to growth areas and to the Ramsey Partnership Area and rural renewal in providing economic potential is highly significant.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 That the Director of Operational Services be authorised to sign the Memorandum of Agreement on behalf of the District Council

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

1. **The Great Fen Project Memorandum of Understanding**

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