

**FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS TO RIVERSIDE PARK, HUNTINGDON  
(Report by Heads of Planning Services, Operations,  
Environmental Management, Legal and Estates)**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Further to the established commitment to enhance the Riverside Park, a new Masterplan for its improvement that includes new planting, footpaths and cycleways, additional recreational areas, new hard surfacing, and moorings and signage together with costings has been produced and members are asked to approve this plan for further public consultation.

**2. SUPPORTING/BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 In November 2004 the findings of an earlier consultants report entitled 'Riverside Park Options Study' was discussed by Cabinet. The consultant's aim, supported by an earlier Cabinet meeting (April 2003), was to look at ways to positively diversify leisure activity in the Riverside Park. The brief for consultants was:

- To explore options involving the community
- Produce an options report and brief to guide the extent and design of any new development
- Provide indicative costs

- 2.2 In arriving at the options the consultants considered a number of key issues concerning the Riverside Park as follows:

- Poor links and access to the town centre mainly due to barrier of the ring road and poor links through and within the park
- Inadequate footpath/cycle routes and mooring points
- Lack of distinguishable gateway features and arrival point within the town centre
- Negative impact of the existing car park and lack of dedicated spaces for park users
- Ecological and landscape features are not exploited to their potential
- Lack of distinctive and exciting leisure attractions or events – existing leisure facilities are under utilised (football pitches), in need of upgrading ( boat hire facility) or do not appeal to a broad range of people
- There are a number of visual detractors from the site and a lack of visual stimulation
- There is a need to create a critical mass of facilities in the centre of the park

- 2.3 Two options were drawn up and in-order to assist the process the Consultant's considered that the Riverside Park split naturally into three sections:

1. From the Old Bridge to the car park – Formal Park
2. Car park to the eastern side of the football pitches- including the boat hire, boat club and pavilion - Activity Area
3. From the eastern end of the football pitches to Church Lane-Green Lung

2.4 In drawing up these options a number of particular constraints were identified. The nature of the land, much of which is within the indicative flood plain, would preclude any large scale leisure development. The proposed bus lane along Hartford Road and the associated cycle lane would potentially reduce the available land on that frontage. A preferred option was arrived at after consultation with the public and is set out in Annex A.

2.5 The potential scheme with all its elements was costed at £3.375 million which was well above the level of funding available or that could be achieved through an MTP bid. It was agreed, therefore, to produce our own masterplan as an alternative and more selective way forward.

2.6 In the preferred option the shape of the car parking area was to be altered to achieve the principles set out in the plan. The car park was to be extended along the Hartford Road and the existing car park was to be reduced in size. A planning application made in 2007 to extend the car park without carrying out any of the proposed improvements was met with some hostility from local people. The application was withdrawn as it was considered to be premature ahead of the development of a car parking strategy and further consideration to achieve a more realistic masterplan for the Riverside Park.

### 3. **THE NEW MASTERPLAN (see Annex B)**

3.1 The new masterplan reflects the key issues identified in 2.2 above and has used specialist consultants as well as our own staff to produce the plans. The proposed new scheme now looks at the park in the same three areas with suggested improvements as described below. A small plan is included in Annex B, with a larger plan included at the end of the papers.

3.2 For Area 1 (the Formal Park) the following improvements are suggested:

- Make the two entrance areas opposite the Bridge Hotel and along the ring road more welcoming. In association with the main entrance near the Bridge Hotel, investigate the greening of the traffic island crossing
- Create a new path parallel to the ring road inside the park
- Create a focal point with shelter in the centre of the park
- Improve the mooring facility and the paved area adjacent to Bridge Foot works
- Remove certain trees and carry out new tree planting
- Have less regimented grass maintenance in certain areas
- Clear the river bank in certain locations to encourage easier access, short term moorings and formal fishing areas.
- Standardised signs and interpretation boards erected

3.3 For Area 2 (the Activity Area) the following improvements are suggested:

- Reconfigure the equipment in the play area and reduce the area in size to enable a footpath to be created on the south eastern side.
- Removal of certain trees to allow more light into the play area.
- Remove south eastern side of car park (loss of 17 spaces) and incorporate into a wider landscaped walkway
- Make up for the removal of car park spaces by providing an additional 16 spaces adjacent to the Pavilion and Boat House
- Replace adult football pitches with 2 mini soccer pitches
- Create an area of reinforced grass on part of the former football pitch closest to the Pavilion for use as an events area (fair/circus/Town events/overspill car parking). The removal of the fair from the car park will reduce the spaces and income lost during each visit.
- Provide a Multi Use Games Area adjacent to the Boat Club
- Retain tarmac path linking the Boat Club area with Area 3 but remove chain link fence
- De-formalise the large green open space/football pitches with additional planting and a less rigid management regime with areas for mini soccer pitches or equivalent
- Clear riverbank in certain locations to encourage easier access.
- Make allowance for loss of land to cycleway and bus priority measures
- Encourage the redevelopment of the boat yard in accordance with the brief
- Standardised signs and interpretation boards erected

3.4 For Area 3 - (the Green Lung)

- Carry out management plan to enhance the biodiversity and attractiveness of the area (see Annex C for copy of draft management plan)
- Provide better signposts to car park in Church Lane and pedestrian signposts to the entrance to the Riverside park
- Provide small informal parking area adjacent to pumping station on Hartford Road for both visitors and to assist with maintenance
- Standardised signs and interpretation boards erected

3.5 The future of the Purvis Marine boatyard has not been included in this report, as separate discussions are taking place with the owners, for them to come up with a development plan for the site. The options being consider by the owners generally fit with our plans.

#### **4. COST IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The costings for the scheme are detailed in Annex D and are split into the different areas as described above.

4.2 The construction costs for each area are:

Area 1	£317,000
Area 2	£213,000
Area 3	£ 32,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£552,000</b>

Design costs of 10% need to be added to these costs to give a final cost of £607,000

- 4.3 A revised MTP bid has been submitted for this scheme to give a new expenditure of £610,000. This MTP bid also includes £5k per year for extra maintenance required for these works. No formal decision has been made on this bid as yet. If this is approved, then the full funding for the scheme will be available.

## **5. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 The risk assessment to the completion of the scheme is:
- The land is all in the ownership of the district council except the traffic island near the Bridge Hotel. The traffic island improvements will need County Council approval. The extent of the works will determine their opinion.
  - Planning permission will be required for certain aspects of the work. Refusal is not expected
  - Environment Agency approval will be needed as work is within the flood plain. Refusal is not expected as works will not reduce flood storage.
  - Increased costs above the budget will mean that lower priority works will not be completed, or extra monies may be found from S106 funds.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 Huntingdon Riverside Park is an important entrance feature to the town of Huntingdon, and as it contains the main long stay car park for the town, is the area that visitors see first.
- 6.2 Various reports have been carried out in the past on the park and all come to similar conclusions. The site has a potential to be greatly improved by: enhancing the views from and through it; replacing certain trees with better specimens; giving better footpath access that link the three areas; providing signage within the park and to and from the park to the town centre, and; replacing the adult football pitches with mini soccer pitches together with more general playing areas that are usable by a wider group.
- 6.3 In view of the time lapse since the Gillespie proposals were considered and the changes in the detail that are now proposed it is important that a similar consultation exercise is carried out. This would include a manned exhibition during times and at a location to maximise publicity.
- 6.4 The scheme meets many of the aims of Growing for Success as it improves the diversity of the habitat, gives better access to the public to good public open space, encourages youth activity and young play all within safe surroundings. It can also help the local economy by bringing more visitors to Huntingdon.


## **7. RECOMMENDATION**


7.1 It is recommended that –

- (1) Cabinet approve the scheme for consultation and receive feedback at a future meeting.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Riverside Park Options Study October 2004 (Gillespies)

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## EXAMPLES OF FOCAL POINT/MEETING SHELTER FOR FORMAL AREA



## EXAMPLES OF MULTI USE GAMES AREAS FOR ACTIVITY AREA





**ANNEX C**

**MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR HUNTINGDON  
RIVERSIDE PARK – EASTERN END**

**May 2007**

**COUNTRYSIDE AND PARK SERVICES  
HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**DRAFT**



## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

Huntingdon Riverside Park is a linear park owned by Huntingdonshire District Council which stretches from Huntingdon's Old River Bridge at the western end, to Church Lane in Hartford at the eastern end. The site is bounded by the River Great Ouse on one side and Huntingdon town on the other.

The park is designated in planning policy as an Area of Best landscape and an Open Space and Gap for Protection which restricts development on the land. Much of the site is in the floodplain identified by the Environment Agency.

The western part of the park is semi-formal parkland with a number of single trees, and a hard surfaced path running through it. At the western end there is also a children's play area, a large car park, Purvis Marine boat repair yard, a boat club, a pavilion and two football pitches.

To the east of the football pitches a line of mature Poplar and Willow trees marks the point where Riverside Park changes to a more rural environment with more naturalised tree belts and pockets of woodland, a wide expanse of meadow, ditches and wet areas as well as ancient trees. In addition to the hard surface path which continues from the southern end, there are less formal grass mown paths around the meadow.

This management plan is concerned with the area of Riverside Park which is east of the football pitches. Also included is the small mown area by Church Lane at the very eastern point where there is a small car park.

The eastern end of Riverside Park, to which this management plan refers, totals 0.0901 km<sup>2</sup> or 0.3478 miles<sup>2</sup>.

## **MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS**

The eastern end of Riverside Park has been divided into zones, which are shown on the aerial photograph.

ZONE 1 : Poplars and Grassland Strip  
ZONE 2 : Meadow  
ZONE 3 : Tree Belt  
ZONE 4 : Woodland Pocket  
ZONE 5 : Car park and Green

For each zone the main plant/tree species are noted and a proposal given for management of that area. A separate map has been used to identify particular areas within the zones where work has been suggested.

### **ZONE 1: POPLARS AND GRASSLAND STRIP**

Main Species: Poplar and Willow trees, bramble and nettle.  
Hedge along grassland strip consists of Hawthorn and Elm.

- The line of Poplars and Willows at the edge of the playing field have been cut in the past and this should be continued. The trees should be checked every 8 years to see if the tops need cutting.

- The path running parallel to the Poplars should be mown between April and September if the ground is dry. To encourage wildflowers along the edge of the path, a 1 metre strip along the middle could be mown with the blade on low and for 1 metre either side the blade could be raised slightly.
- The entrance from the playing field at point 1A should be kept accessible. The bramble bush here needs to be trimmed each year in the autumn to prevent it from growing across the path.
- The grassland strip which runs parallel to the road is kept short by rabbits but periodic mowing of the nettles and creeping thistles will discourage these from spreading.
- The hedgerow along the grassland strip, which is an important boundary to the road, both visually and for wildlife, is thin and gappy. To encourage the hedge to thicken out, the hedge bottom should not be sprayed with herbicides and an un-mown strip of 2 metres from the base should be left. This will benefit all wildlife from invertebrates to small mammals.
- The Guided Bus Route is expected to have an impact on this hedgerow when the route is constructed. Reinstatement of a native, rabbit protected hedge, needs to take place following this work.
- There is a dangerous manhole cover in the grassland strip which has a hole in the corner big enough for a child or dog to loose their foot through. This needs to be dealt with to avoid any accidents.

## **ZONE 2: MEADOW**

Main Species: Cut-leaved Cranesbill, Meadow and Creeping Buttercup, Cow Parsley, Meadowsweet, Dock species, Dandelion, Ground Ivy, Cleavers, Nettle, Sorrel, as well as Cuckoo Flower, Pond Sedge, Marsh Marigold, Reed Sweet Grass and Common Reed in wetter areas.

- Mow the meadow once per year in June/July and ensure hay is removed from site. This will encourage less coarse grasses and more wildflowers to grow. There are areas where trees such as Poplar and Blackthorn are encroaching onto the meadow. Annual mowing is important to limit the succession to woodland.
- Between April and September mow the grass around benches and either side of the hard surfaced path – 1 metre either side, unless the path is close to the river bank when a 0.5 metre strip should be cut.
- Between April and September mow a grass path around the meadow 1½ metres wide, keeping well away from the river bank. This provides more varied walks for visitors to the site.
- The wet corner of the meadow at point 2A is good for Marsh Marigold and Meadowsweet and should be included in the hay cut. If this is not possible to do by machine, it should be cut and raked off by hand. This will help to reduce the dominance of the coarse grasses. The Poplar is seeding in this area and the small poplars should be cut to prevent encroachment into the meadow.
- Leave some areas of the meadow which are close to the river out of the hay cut to discourage people getting close to the river during the summertime. Monitor scrub encroachment in these areas in order to maintain viewpoints of the river and Westside Common.
- At 2B the Ash tree has lost a large limb which needs clearing up. The wood could be cut up into smaller sections and placed away from the path in Zone 4 as a habitat pile for invertebrates and small mammals.

- At the footbridge at point 2C, on the side of the bridge which is furthest away from the river bank, the two willows could be re-pollarded during the winter time.
- Create a large glade at 2D between the Horse Chestnut trees, and another glade nearer the footbridge at 2C. These should be mown in September, raked up and the cuttings removed. For the first two years mow them again at the first cut of the year in April and then in July, removing the cuttings. This will reduce the amount of nettles and increase the variety of wildflowers.
- At 2E the Weeping Willow should be removed.

### **ZONE 3: TREE BELT**

Main Species: Willows, Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Elm, Maple, Ash, Lime, Black Walnut, Apple, Ornamental fruit trees:

- At point 3A cut a small glade either side of the path and rake off the cuttings, to reduce the stinging nettles and add variety. Avoid making the glade too big as this will encourage unwanted public access into the wooded area. Maintain the standing dead wood in the area where possible. The glade should be cut on one side of the path one year and the other side the following year.
- The wooden bridges either side of 3A should be inspected regularly to check they are safe and are not rotten.
- At 3B the Elm with 3 stands should be re-coppiced and the leaning branch of the other Elm next to the bridge should be taken off.
- At 3C on the other side of the bridge, the dead elms should be cut down at shoulder height.
- Create glades on the edge of the tree belt at 3D and 3E by again cutting the vegetation and raking off the cuttings. Since the meadow circular path passes next to these areas, the dead Elms which are near to the path should be removed.
- Set up a programme to remove the non native trees in the tree belt. This work would need to be carried out over 10 years to avoid too much public concern. The gaps and hollows in the tree belt could be planted up with native shrub willows.
- Maintain standing dead wood as much as possible to provide valuable habitat for invertebrates and birds. Standing dead wood close to paths should be inspected, closely monitored and removed only if necessary.
- There are several dead Elm trees along the tree belt on the meadow side which are a potential danger to the public taking the circular mown path around the meadow. Some of these need to be cut down and stacked to form habitat piles.
- Consider developing a programme of pollarding for some of the ancient Willows in order to prolong their life. Some of the younger Willows on the edge of the grassland strip could be pollarded first to allow light onto the ancient Willows. The very old Willows will need a lot of light if they are going to survive any pollarding.

### **ZONE 4: WOODLAND POCKET**

Main Species: Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Elm, Ash, Field Maple, Green Alcanet (garden escape), Forget me not, Comfrey, Speedwell, Cow Parsley, Hard Rush, Gypsywort, Rosebay Willowherb, Lesser Celendine, Hedge Garlic:

- Improve the entrance to the park at the Hartford end by trimming back vegetation to let more light in. Some of the Elder trees could be cut back slightly.
- Involve the Enforcement team in any fly tipping that is found next to the residential areas here.
- Remove the old Nature Trail posts.
- Mow 1 metre either side of the path and side up any overhanging branches to give a more open feel to the Woodland Pocket.
- Allow more light to the ditch and ponds at 4A by coppicing trees and removing scrub within 2 meters of the edge. This will also help to improve flow by reducing the amount of leaf litter that can fall, and will allow water plants to grow. Retain some scrub for structural diversity, landscape and as a food source for wildlife. It is important that this work isn't done all at once because it will look very drastic and it may encourage unwanted access off the path to these areas. The coppicing could be done on one side 1 year and the other side the next year. This would then be left for 5 years until it is done again.
- At point 4B, thin out some of the Elms to allow regeneration of ground flora and to allow more space for the remaining Elm's to broaden out.

### **ZONE 5: CAR PARK AND GREEN**

Main Species: Horse Chestnut, Ash, Hawthorn, Sycamore and Willow and species poor grassland.

- Continue to mow the green, maintain the car park and maintain the open views of the river and meadows on the opposite side.
- At the base of the 2 trees in the middle of the green, leave an un-mown large circle for wildflowers. Mow once each year in September and remove the cuttings.
- Decide on the management required for the ditch which is next to the car park, if it is HDC's responsibility. There are some very large trees which are very close to the houses.
- The Weeping Willow in the northern corner of the green at point 5A needs reducing as it is too big.
- Metal plates could be secured onto the picnic benches to prevent barbeques from burning the benches.
- Consider putting in a 48 hour mooring by the Green to encourage people to visit Huntingdon Riverside Park by boat.

### **FURTHER POTENTIAL ENHANCEMENTS FOR BIODIVERSITY AND PEOPLE**

Other projects affecting the whole of the Huntingdon Riverside Park Eastern End which could be discussed are:

- Reinstatement of the redundant ditches through the whole of the site could improve their amenity and wildlife value.
- Create wetland areas by installing sluices etc
- Provide fishing platforms along the river bank.
- Re-seed parts of meadow to improve diversity of the flora.

## **EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Riverside Park is well used by local people for getting to town, work, school as well as to walk their dogs. The eastern end is particularly popular with people because of the varied habitats and the wide range of wildlife associated with it.

Working with the community is an extremely effective way of solving problems, encouraging people to enjoy the site and planning for its long term future. By encouraging local people to become involved in practical work and events on the park, a sense of pride and ownership will develop.

## **PROPOSALS TO ENCOURAGE INVOLVEMENT**

- Work with local schools and groups to offer activities such as: mini-beast hunting, tree activities, scavenger hunts, guided walks and countryside events.
- Develop links with secondary schools and encourage use of the park for project work for older children e.g. GCSE and A level Geography and Biology Projects.
- Encourage people of all ages and abilities to enjoy and be involved in practical work on the park such as litter picking and conservation tasks. Pond and ditch management, scrub clearance, litter picking, tree planting and maintenance are all very suitable for volunteers, and will help to develop pride in the site and understanding of the management of Riverside Park.
- Encourage fishing along the river by formalising an agreement with a local club.
- Review the number of moorings along river bank and consider increasing the number to allow more day visitors by boat.

## **GENERAL PUBLICITY**

- Welcoming information boards would help to link the fragmented western and eastern ends of Riverside Park, as well as provide information on the history and wildlife value of the site. They could be placed at either end, and one in the middle could focus more specifically on the wildlife of the eastern section.
- Press releases and features would help to inform the public about management and to ensure good publicity for HDC's Parks Service.

## **WIDER ISSUES**

- Erosion of banks by river

## **FUTURE MANAGEMENT**

- It is anticipated that the park will continue to be managed by HDC's Parks Service with support from Countryside Services.
- There are a lot of interested people living near to the park and using the site so a Friends Group could be formed to help with day to day management, events, positive publicity and fundraising.



## ANNEX D

### SCHEME COSTINGS

#### AREA 1 – THE FORMAL PARK

Greening Traffic Island	15,000
Bridge Foot Moorings	75,000
Reconstruct exist footpath	47,000
New Footpath	46,000
Decorative paved areas	14,000
Focal Point Shelter	30,000
Seating and Information Boards	32,000
Planting scheme	92,000

Total Area 1 297,000

#### AREA 2 – THE ACTIVITY AREA

Alterations to existing car park	6,000
New car parking	31,000
Revision to play area	5,000
Multi Activity area	34,000 (up to 66,000)
Reinforced grass area	116,000
Activity trail	10,000
Planting scheme	21,000

Total Area 2 223,000

#### AREA 3 – THE GREEN LUNG

Seating and Information Boards	12,000
Hartford road car park	20,000

Total Area 3 32,000

**CONSTRUCTION COST ALL AREAS £552,000**

**DESIGN COSTS £ 55,000**

**TOTAL COSTS £607,000**