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1ST DECEMBER 2009

CABINET

21ST JANUARY 2010

**PAXTON PITS NATURE RESERVE EDUCATION CENTRE
(Report by the Head of Operations)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The reserve currently hosts approximately 100 school and education groups a year. These are managed by staff from Huntingdonshire District Council and the Wildlife Trust and supported by volunteers from the 'Friends Group'.
- 1.2 There are currently no specific facilities available to education groups at the reserve. They use the visitor centre for storage of coats, lunch boxes etc, whilst they are out on-site. The visitor centre is also used for providing teas and a visitor welcome to the general public. This is whilst the education groups are present. In bad weather we have to cancel education groups as we cannot accommodate them.
- 1.3 A small area of the reserve, approximately 1 acre, has been set aside for education groups. This has been fenced and a hedge planted. The various habitats found on the reserve will be constructed so that young people can work in an enclosed area free from dogs.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Wildlife Trust applied to the Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF) for funding for a classroom, office and education staff. They received confirmation of this funding for £280,000 in October 2009. Countryside Services has received match funding of £70,000 from the Housing Growth Fund whilst the Friends of Paxton Pits have supplied £4,000 in money and a substantial amount of match funding in terms of labour.
- 2.2 Planning permission has already been granted along with Environment Agency approval.
- 2.3 The terms of the grant mean that £150,000 has to be spent by 19th March 2010 with the remainder spent in the next financial year. It is expected to start the building programme in February 2010 and finish in May 2010. The building will be owned by Huntingdonshire District Council once it has been constructed.

- 2.4 The Wildlife Trust will lease the education area at a peppercorn rent for 30 years. In return for the use of the building they will provide educational services including Watch / Wex groups and adult training courses.
- 2.5 The education centre will be built by the same firm that has built the visitor centre at Little Paxton. The maintenance costs for the original centre, built over 20 years ago, have been minimal as the only refurbishment needed has been the application of timber preservative. This is undertaken by volunteers. The main running costs of the building, including supplies, services and NNDR etc., will be met by the tenants as part of the lease agreement.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The education centre will enhance the asset at no cost to it.
- 3.2 The reserve is becoming ever more popular to residents and visitors alike. The addition of the education area will allow us to provide a much greater service to all users of the reserve at no extra cost in staff time.
- 3.3 The partnership working of this project can act as a model for partnerships in the future where all parties will benefit.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 It is recommended;

that Cabinet notes this report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Draft Memorandum of Understanding

Contact Officers: **Pat Knight**
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