

## **Report for Resolution**

**Report to** Mousehold Heath Conservators

30 March 2012

**Report of** Report of the head of local neighbourhood services

**Subject** Mousehold Heath update report

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### **Purpose**

To request approval for two areas of work and to provide an update on issues and recent activities at Mousehold Heath

### **Recommendations**

That the Conservators:

1. Approve the budget allocation towards interpretive material for the Earth Heritage Trail
2. Consider the request from SOS for use of Mousehold Heath for their activities
3. Comment on the work undertaken on Mousehold Heath over the last period.

### **Financial Consequences**

Any additional costs arising from this report will be met from approved budgets.

### **Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities**

The report helps to meet the strategic priority Safe & Healthy Neighbourhoods, and the service plan priority to ensure that Norwich has a clean & safe environment.

### **Contact Officers**

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### **Background Documents**

Mousehold Heath management plan, 2008-2013 and annual work programme 2011/12.

## Report

### **Earth Heritage Trail**

1. The Earth Heritage Trail project has made good progress, with geological conservation work being undertaken on site and more planned. Tim Holt-Wilson of the Norfolk Geodiversity Partnership, who is leading on the project, has also designed interpretative material to be used for the planned web pages and a proposed leaflet.
2. Although the project's main emphasis will still be on web-based material, research by the Mousehold wardens has indicated a higher than anticipated demand for a good quality leaflet that can be distributed at guided walks and other events. The leaflet would be entirely based upon the existing interpretative material to be used on the website, so its production should not involve further design costs. The costs of preparing a print run of 1000 would cost in the region of £250 - £300. Subject to the Conservators approval, it is hoped that the leaflet will be available for many of this year's events.
3. Recommendation – the Conservators are requested to approve expenditure up to a maximum of £350.00 for the design and printing of a leaflet for the Earth Heritage Trail.

### **Request for use of Mousehold Heath**

4. The Council has been approached by Survival Outdoor Skills (SOS), a company offering courses and activities based around outdoor, survival and fieldcraft skills, with a request to use Mousehold Heath for some of their organised activities.
5. The views of the Conservators are needed and a representative of the company has been invited to give a short presentation at your meeting so that a decision can be made.
6. Recommendation – that the Conservators consider this request

### **Site management work**

7. Since the last meeting on 13 January 2012, volunteers have achieved 855 hours at Mousehold. These have involved BTCV, Green Gym, City College, Assist Trust and Earth Heritage trail volunteers, two BSKyB corporate groups and an Easton College student. Work undertaken included the following (the relevant management plan sections are in brackets):
  - Ride and glade restoration, Long Valley and Silver Birch Walk (section 9)
  - Footpath maintenance and sapling removal to conserve acid grassland and open up views from St.James' Hill (sections (8 & 11)
  - Heathland restoration (section 7)
  - Geological conservation work as part of Earth Heritage Trail project (section 11)

8. A Community Spring Wildlife walk, organised and led by the Mousehold Heath wardens and Norfolk County Council Adult Education, was attended by 22 people including members of community groups such as Move on East. One of the main aims of such walks is to help improve health and well-being in the community through spending a day in the natural environment.
9. Other activities have also taking place have included Forest School sessions for children. Event and volunteer task programmes for 2012/13 are currently being prepared by the Mousehold wardens, and it is hoped that we shall be able to maintain at least the 2011/12 activity levels on the Heath.
10. Additional management work has included humus stripping with a specialist 'cut and collect' machine, and the creation of 'scrapes' both of which will encourage regeneration of heathland vegetation. Many fallen trees and branches – brought down by gales and snowfall - have been removed by the Mousehold wardens and other trees assessed for safety.
11. The existing ten year Countryside Stewardship Scheme management agreement, which covers a small part of Mousehold, expires this year and the natural areas officer and the Mousehold wardens are working on an application to its successor, the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. If the application is successful, the HLS scheme will provided annual funding for conservation work and possibly also for 'one off' conservation projects.
12. Despite the very dry winter, the Vinegar Pond continues to hold water after part of the original pond basin was re-profiled and lined with bentonite clay in December. Frogs have returned to breed in the pond, which will continue to be monitored to assess the longer term success of the work. Plans for an entirely new wildlife pond at Mousehold are also in preparation, and at the Conservators' request, William Stewart has produced a report for information at appendix 1. This also covers the recent work on the Vinegar Pond

#### **Contract work**

13. The collapse of Fountains, the council's contractor for grounds maintenance, street cleaning and trees management led to temporary problems with litter and over-flowing bins at Mousehold. The Mousehold wardens, the Mousehold Heath Defenders and other volunteers responded quickly and effectively to address the problems.
14. Interim contracts have been agreed with Biffa and work is in progress to bring works on line over the coming weeks. Work to procure long term contract arrangements is now taking place so that these can start in April 2013. The council's contract manager will attend your meeting to answer any questions.

#### **The Fountain Ground changing rooms**

15. Due to an ongoing dispute with the supplier, the Fountain Ground changing rooms are still not operational but the council's properties section is progressing the electricity supply connection, after which the building should

**Mottram memorial**

16. Nigel Hales has also been investigating options and costings for the repair of the Mottram Memorial and a verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

**General**

17. The Mousehold wardens have continued to undertake their routine duties, including patrolling, resolving minor maintenance issues and addressing anti-social behaviour problems such as the removal of graffiti and a burnt out motorcycle.

## Appendix 1

### Vinegar Pond project update and proposed new wildlife pond, Mousehold Heath



**Fig 1: Showing Vinegar Pond full of water on 08/03/12**

#### **Introduction:**

This year has seen high water levels being restored in the Vinegar Pond (see Fig 1), following the restoration work carried out in December 2011. Over one thousand frogs are believed to have entered the pond to breed, with an abundance of spawn being produced. This has increased understanding and enjoyment of the site for many members of the community, especially children.

Due to the success of this project, there is now an opportunity to create a permanent wildlife pond, to compliment the existing habitat and increase aquatic biodiversity.

Mousehold Heath is an important site for reptiles and amphibians, with half of the native British reptile species and almost half the amphibian species being recorded on the site. Recent ecological studies have shown that sites with a mosaic of aquatic systems such as permanent and seasonal ponds increase biodiversity.

The seasonal Vinegar Pond is an important landscape feature and much loved by many members of the community. This offers habitat for spawning frogs and newts, as well as a bathing area for dogs, until the summer months. However, due to disturbance and its seasonal nature, the pond will never develop an aquatic plant community and its associated wildlife.

Many visitors to the heath suggest that the development of a second, more permanent wildlife pond would increase their enjoyment of the site. This could be used by local schools and Beaver/Cub groups, etc, to carry out ecological fieldwork (i.e. pond dipping), to increase understanding and enjoyment of local wildlife.

### **Aims:**

Create a water feature to increase biodiversity where there are already resident reptile and amphibian communities on the site, along with ideal adjacent habitats.

Create a new ecological study area to increase understanding, involvement and enjoyment of the site.

To create a habitat to which spawn/tadpoles from the Vinegar Pond can be relocated during unusually dry spring seasons.

### **Possible location:**

A possible site has been located at one of the lowest points in the Long Valley (near the Gilman Road entrance to the valley), in a wooded glade area, that has recently been restored (see Fig 1) by volunteers. This area has been identified because:

- It already holds small amounts of water in high rainfall (the glade pools had frog spawn in during the last wet spring of 2008).
- Geographically it is at the lowest point of the Long Valley and away from main path and at less risk of disturbance.
- It is partially shaded by adjacent woodland.
- During a recent site visit David Robertson (County Archaeologist) suggested that a nearby WW2 bomb hole should be conserved, but the possible new pond site was fine to be excavated.

### **Timescale/Size:**

The works would best be carried out in dry conditions September – October and would take one day to complete. The size of the pond would be roughly 10 x 8 metres.

**Cost:**

It is strongly recommended by professional organisations that a Bentonite mat liner should be used, to ensure that clear water and maximum plant and other aquatic biodiversity develops.

The estimated cost and installation of a Bentonite mat liner would be £6,000 - £7,000.

**Fig 2; Showing site of possible new pond – taken from Gilman Road, looking down the Long valley.**

