

Climate Change, Leisure and Housing Committee
Wednesday 12 March 2025

PART I

**Rickmansworth Aquadrome Programme Update Report
(AD Environment)**

1 Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Rickmansworth Aquadrome Programme, including funding progress and opportunities.

2 Details

Project Overview

- 2.1 The Rickmansworth Aquadrome Management Plan 2022 – 2027 is an ambitious and far reaching plan. Produced in partnership with Countryside Management Service, the Plan's Vision Statement is:

“For the Aquadrome to be enhanced, nurtured, and protected. To achieve the balance so nature can flourish and visitors can connect with and discover beautiful and unique habitats, whilst understanding the importance of the environmental heritage of the site.”

- 2.2 As a result of the Plan, the Rickmansworth Aquadrome Programme has been developed. The benefits it will realise include:

- Habitat enhancement: grassland management, creating meadows, ditch management to facilitate natural drainage, nurture wet woodlands.
- Understand and manage the waterflow and floodplain environment.
- Reducing lake and riverbank erosion securing habitats and public access.
- River restoration to globally rare chalk river.
- Enhancement of marginal lakeshore habitats.
- Targeted enhancements to benefit priority species
- Introducing accessible interpretation on niche habitats and social heritage
- Replacement of pedestrian bridges to improve access/connectivity.
- Develop eco-friendly travel routes.
- Vegetation and tree management to complement natural features.
- Enhancing the step free access, improving sightlines and accessibility.
- Upgrading footpaths and site furniture.
- Creating a sense of arrival, welcome area, accessible signage.
- Improved inclusion and participation to engage diverse audiences in heritage.
- Involving community through an orchard and training.
- Implementing the new site narrative and Communication Plan to improve communication with all the Aquadrome visitors.
- Implementing a new and attractive branding to nurture the identity of the site

- 2.3 In addition to being a floodplain, the water network within the Aquadrome and wider Colne Valley is complex with the interconnectivity between the lakes, Grand Union Canal, River Colne, ditch network and spring sources. The Aquadrome project aims to mitigate negative impact of flooding on the site where possible. To understand how this may be achieved, a Hydrological Study is being undertaken.
- 2.4 The hydrological study is a staged process that relies on a number of data sources. An essential stage includes modelling the flooding that takes place across the site and how this may be impacted by potential interventions when also modelled. To complete this stage, the study requires the use of a key data source - the Environment Agency's (EA) Upper Colne Flood Risk Mapping Study (flood model), the current version of which was released in 2010 and is therefore considered to be out of date. Since the commencement of the TRDC hydrological study, the EA have been updating their flood model. Whilst an initial indicated publication date of July 2024 was provided by the ES, this publication date has continually been revised. TRDC Officers have been in dialogue throughout this period with the EA and understand that they are now in the final stages of their internal processes to release the model having experienced a number of internal delays. Officers have taken advice from specialist professional in this field of work which counselled against using the 2010 model, as to do so could be deemed irresponsible due to the changes that have been experienced with climate and weather in the past 15 years. The EA delay in publication of the flood model has had a direct impact on the timeline of the hydrological study. The study is currently paused pending the release of the new and updated flood model. The most recent advice on a potential release date is March 2025 but as with previous dates this may be subject to extension by the EA and is not guaranteed.
- 2.5 The completion of the hydrological study will inform all elements of the Aquadrome Programme and will be a critical aspect of all applications for works consents from the EA in the form of Flood Risk Activity Permits (FRAP). FRAPs are required for all infrastructure works taking place within 8m of the river channel and on the floodplain, for example river enhancements and pathway improvements.

Secured Funding

- 2.6 To date the programme has secured significant funding from several external sources.

Amount	Funder	Secured
£216,691	National Lottery Heritage Fund - Recovery and Resilience	Secured - project complete
£100,000	UK Shared Prosperity Fund (Fishing Swims)	Secured - project on track for completion (Mar '25)
£1,286,092	CIL and UKSPF (Replacement Bridge)	Secured - project on track for completion (Mar '25)
£510,463	HS2 Colne Valley Additional Mitigation Plan (AMP)	Secured - project has three years from commencement
£ 2,113,246	TOTAL	

Future Funding

- 2.7 Currently an application is being reviewed by the Water Restoration Fund and officers are awaiting this outcome. Officers are also liaising with Affinity Water to assess the application process for a future application for funds.

Amount	Funder	Secured / Applied For / Future Application
£477,786	Water Restoration Fund	Applied for
£TBC	Affinity Water	Future Application
£TBC	TOTAL	

National Lottery Heritage Fund – Water, Wildlife and Wellbeing

- 2.8 An application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund is a three-stage process and officers have been successful in the Stage 1 phase with a successful Expression of Interest which has secured permission to submit a Development Stage bid.
- 2.9 The purpose of the Development Stage (Stage 2) is to map in further detail the Council's ambitions for the site explaining its challenges and documents council and public support. The bid must meet the four main criteria, or pillars, of the Lottery:
- Saving heritage (Conserving and valuing heritage, for now and the future.)
 - Protecting the environment (Supporting nature recovery and environmental sustainability)
 - Inclusion, access and participation (Supporting greater inclusion, diversity, access and participation in heritage).
 - Organisational sustainability (Strengthening heritage to be adaptive and financially resilient, contributing to communities and economies).
- 2.10 If the Stage 2 bid is successful, officers will then need to submit a Delivery (Stage 3) bid. The Stage 2 phase will need to establish detailed designs for each aspect of work along with detailed project costings, continued stakeholder and community engagement and a delivery programme of works over a three-year period.
- 2.11 At the end of Stage 2 and following evaluation of the project, Officers will submit a Stage 3 bid. This stage of the project will aim to deliver improvements in the Aquadrome as detailed below, and deliver against the four main pillars set out by the National Lottery detailed in 2.9:
- **Visitor Experience & Activity Plan:**
 - Central Meeting Point, Contemplative area & Re-landscaped bird feeding area, site furniture, signage and interpretation, inclusive and diverse activity programme
 - **Connectivity:**
 - Entrance enhancements, accessibility improvements (pathways & bridges) fencing and gates
 - **Natural Infrastructure:**

- Flood alleviation, ditch management (subject to hydrological study) and river restoration, planting, orchard and community garden development.

2.12 For delivery phase, current estimates for the total project are in the region of over £5 million. These costs will be finalised during the development phase if the Stage 2 funding bid is successful.

2.13 Funding at each stage includes for project specific posts to ensure the project is effectively delivered and resourced.

3 Options and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 To note the content of the report and to delegate to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Lead Member for Leisure to approve bids for funding and to enter into contracts for the works where they are above £25,000.

4 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

4.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed budgets. The proposals also relate to securing additional funding, as outlined within the report.

4.2 The recommendations in this report relate to the achievement of the following performance indicators for the Leisure and Natural Infrastructure Service Plan 2025-2028.

4.2.1 LNI04 - External Funding secured to support Leisure and Natural Infrastructure Projects and Activities.

4.2.2 LNI05 - Year on year increase in the area of land owned by Three Rivers District Council, being managed for biodiversity benefit.

4.2.3 LNI06 - Percentage of vulnerable participants who take part in leisure activities.

4.3 The recommendations in this report relate to the achievement of the following Corporate Framework Objectives:

4.3.1 **Responsive, Responsible Local Leadership** – a key part of the development phase of the project, will be to continue to engage and consult with the local community about the project. In addition, the Steering Group, consisting of 15 external organisations, several Lead and Ward Councillors, and officers across many Services will act as a critical friend, steering the direction of the project. The project will focus on securing significant external funding, reducing pressures on Council budgets.

4.3.2 **A Great Place to Do Business** – the Aquadrome is a visitor destination and this project will further enhance this, whilst ensuring the balance between people and nature. A number of community organisations and businesses operate from the Aquadrome and it is anticipated that the benefits realised through this project will in turn, benefit and support them.

4.3.3 **Sustainable Communities** – the Aquadrome project will look to enhance the leisure and cultural offer to visitors to the Aquadrome. This will include engagement activities and voluntary projects. A full activity programme will be developed during the development phase, although this will be carefully balanced against trying not to significantly increase visitor numbers. The focus will be more on diversifying the audience and the engagement on site in order to improve health and wellbeing. Improved fishing areas will support the local recreational opportunities for fishing.

- 4.3.4 **Net Carbon Zero and Climate Resilient** – the initial focus on the project is ensuring the movement of water across the site is better understood in order to facilitate the natural flooding occurring on the flood plain. This will improve the adaptability of the site making it more resilient to the impact of severe weather and help to protect the town of Rickmansworth. This will be achieved through the completion of the hydrological study. Alongside this will be significant enhancements to the biodiversity of the site in order to improve the habitats present, opportunities to further improve the adaptability of the site will be incorporated.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 The total anticipated cost for the entire programme at this stage is not confirmed but is estimated to be in excess of £5m. The programme is to be funded from externally secured funds supported by internal budgeted council resources. The table below shows funding that has been secured to date and proposed future applications:

Amount	Funder	Secured / Applied For / Future Application
£216,691	National Lottery Heritage Fund - Recovery and Resilience	Secured - project complete
£100,000	UK Shared Prosperity Fund (Fishing Swims)	Secured - project due to be completed (Mar '25)
£1,286,092	CIL and UKSPF (Replacement Bridge)	Secured - project due to be completed (Mar '25)
£510,463	HS2 Colne Valley Additional Mitigation Plan (AMP)	Secured
£477,786	Water Restoration Fund	Applied for
£TBC	Affinity Water	Future Application
£787,315	National Lottery Heritage Fund - Development Phase	Applied for
£5,446,561	National Lottery Heritage Fund - Delivery Phase	Future Application
£TBC	TOTAL	

- 5.2 £2,113,246 has been secured to date as detailed in section 2 of the report.
- 5.3 A £3,649,920 Expression of Interest for Lottery funding was submitted in November 2024 and the Council was invited to proceed to the next stage for the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- 5.4 A funding application for development phase and outline delivery phase was submitted in February to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It is anticipated we will get the outcome of the decision in June.

6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 Under the Council Constitution, Committee approval is required to enter into any contracts above the value of £25,000.
- 6.2 All proposed works and equipment will be tendered within the Council's constitution and procurement procedures and any other permissions obtained (for example planning) where required.

- 6.3 Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, updated by the Environment Act 2021, places a legal responsibility on public authorities in England to have due regard for habitats and species of the greatest conservation importance, whilst protecting all biodiversity. Section 40(1) states that a “public authority which has any functions exercisable in relation to England must from time to time consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective.” The accompanying footnote to this part of the Act states that the aim of the biodiversity objective is to provide for the enhancement or improvement of biodiversity, not just its maintenance in its current state. Gone is the former ‘have regard’ element in respect of conserving biodiversity, and this has been replaced by a proactive duty (new section 40(1)) to “from time to time consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective”.
- 6.4 The Aquadrome Programme outlines a number of actions: within the Management plan with particular reference to 5.1 Creating Biodiverse and Sustainable Environments (Woodlands and Grasslands) and 5.2 Creating Biodiverse and Sustainable Environments (Lakes and Watercourses) the associated actions all aim to increase, conserve and enhance the biodiversity value of the site.

7 Equal Opportunities Implications

- 7.1 A Short Equality Impact and Outcome Assessment is included at Appendix A. The assessment outlines the positive impact the project will have on equality. Realising these positive impacts is dependent on securing external funding highlighted within this report.

8 Staffing Implications

- 8.1 The Aquadrome project will be delivered by the Programme Development Manager, along with a number of Officers within the Leisure and Natural Infrastructure Service, including the Natural Infrastructure Programme Manager, Leisure Services Manager, Trees and Woodlands Principal Officer and Leisure Capital Projects Manager.
- 8.2 External funding will also be sought for project specific posts, including a Project Support Officer, Community Engagement Officer, Natural Infrastructure Projects Officer and Leisure Capital Projects Officer to ensure the project is effectively delivered. Employment of these additional officer posts will be dependent on external funds.

9 Environmental Implications

- 9.1 A Climate Change and Sustainability Impact Assessment has been completed giving this report a score of 3.7 out of 4 indicating strong positive impact for sustainability. (Appendix B).
- 9.2 Climate and Sustainability Impact Assessment Summary:

Category	Score (out of 4)
Homes, buildings, infrastructure, equipment and energy	3.33
Travel	3.50
Goods and Consumption	3.50
Ecology	3.50

Adaptation	4.00
Engagement and Influence	4
Total Overall Average Score	3.7

10 Public Health implications

- 10.1 Subject to securing external funding, there will be a diverse activity plan focused on enhancing health and wellbeing, protecting the environment and educating the local community. Successful examples of this during the Natural Heritage Networks project, include mindfulness walks, nature photography walks, creative writing, sessions with local schools and storytelling workshops.

11 Communications and Website Implications

- 11.1 As part of the Natural Heritage Networks project, a new site narrative was developed, along with a communication plan and updated brand guidelines. These have been and will continue to be instrumental in future community engagement and creating a site identity. Appendix C is the Evaluation Report from this project, highlighting the success of this project and these key points.

12 Community Safety

- 12.1 Officers will liaise with the community safety team to ensure that crime is designed out where possible during the development phase process of the project.

13 Customer Service Centre Implications

- 13.1 None Specific

14 Risk and Health & Safety Implications

- 14.1 The Council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk>. In addition, the risks of the proposals in the report have also been assessed against the Council's duties under Health and Safety legislation relating to employees, visitors and persons affected by our operations. The risk management implications of this report are detailed below.
- 14.2 The subject of this report is covered by the Leisure and Natural Infrastructure, Environment Protection and Property Services and Major Projects Service Plans. Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within these plans.

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response <i>(tolerate, treat terminate, transfer)</i>	Risk Rating <i>(combination of likelihood and impact)</i>
Flood modelling from the Environment Agency further delayed	Hydrological study cannot be completed and therefore any new	Continue to liaise and engage with the Environment Agency on updates.	Treat	9

	infrastructure not implemented			
Increase in implementation costs	Insufficient project funding	Ensure a 25% contingency and inflation figure is included within the NLHF and other external funding bids Proper Procurement processes completed to assess value for money.	Treat	4
Asbestos present in delivery locations	Increase in costs to manage asbestos Delay to work programme	Manage all works in line with the site Asbestos Management Plan including: Undertake surveying work in key locations during development phase Ensure all scopes of works reflect actual and potential presence of asbestos	Treat	4
Unable to secure external funding	Project vision and objectives will not be realised	Evidence based funding applications Skilled staff employed to develop funding bids Continue to identify, review and apply for external funding	Treat	4

14.3 The above risks are scored using the matrix below. The Council has determined its aversion to risk and is prepared to tolerate risks where the combination of impact and likelihood scores 6 or less.

Very Likely 	Likelihood	Low	High	Very High	Very High
	4	8	12	16	
	Low	3	Medium	High	Very High
	3	6	9	12	

	Low 2	Low 4	Medium 6	High 8
	Low 1	Low 2	Low 3	Low 4
	Impact			
	Low -----> Unacceptable			

Impact Score

4 (Catastrophic)

3 (Critical)

2 (Significant)

1 (Marginal)

Likelihood Score

4 (Very Likely (≥80%))

3 (Likely (21-79%))

2 (Unlikely (6-20%))

1 (Remote (≤5%))

14.4 In the officers' opinion none of the new risks above, were they to come about, would seriously prejudice the achievement of the Strategic Plan and are therefore operational risks. The effectiveness of the management of operational risks is reviewed by the Audit Committee annually.

15 Recommendation

15.1 To note the content of the report.

15.2 Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance, in agreement with the Lead Member, to enter into a contract or funding agreement above the value of £25,000, subject to securing external funding in order that external funds where awarded for the Aquadrome Programme can be accepted by the Council

15.3 Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance, in agreement with the Lead Member, to enter into contracts above the value of £25,000 for works procured under the councils procurement and contracts procedure rules relating to those secured external bids.

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Data Quality

Data sources: Evaluation Report and Data Surveys

Data checked by: Jess Hodges and Jo Copley

Data rating:

1	Poor	
2	Sufficient	
3	High	✓

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX A: Short Equality Impact Assessment and Outcome

APPENDIX B: Climate and Sustainability Impact and Assessment

APPENDIX C: Evaluation Report -

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/501f89e70ce24bb68722f6ac715330e0>