

Meeting	Parks & Open Spaces
Date	11 th October 2022
Report Title	Cliffords Meadow
Agenda Reference	6b
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Officer's Recommendation:

1) To note a complaint and request for an Enforcement Order for Natural England to investigate the potential breaches arising from lack of maintenance and potential failure to protect the SSSI status at Cliffords Meadow, was submitted on Monday 3rd October 2022.

Background

On Thursday 15th September 2022 Councillors R Hailstone, R Ross, V Manro and S McDermott along with the Head of Parks & Open Spaces and the Deputy Clerk & Services Manager met with residents regarding their concerns of lack of maintenance at Cliffords Meadow SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest).

Following the meeting one of the residents sent through the original maintenance plan (see agenda document 6a) and another resident submitted some details for grant funding via the Department of Rural Affairs (Defra) that the Landowners/ Land Agent could apply for to assist with future maintenance. Natural England and the Forestry Commission can give advice in support of the scheme.

The Council submitted a complaint and requested an Enforcement Order to Natural England for it to progress with an investigation into the potential breaches and threat of Cliffords Meadow losing its SSSI status.

There is another meeting planned for Thursday 6th October 2022 to update on any matters arising and this will be given verbally during the Parks & Open Spaces Committee meeting.

Maintenance Concerns Reported

The residents reported that their main concerns were the lack of maintenance, and the gaps in the stock fencing which is allowing members of the public to trespass on the land.

The hedges around the meadow are now over 20ft tall and haven't been cut for 3 – 5 years. The meadow has not received a hay cut this year and it is assumed it is too late for maintenance to be carried out now. Councillor R Ross gave the Land Agent details of a contractor who could help, but no contact was made. It was thought that a contractor has not been available due to the current costs of fuel, resourcing and local farmers do not want to put their cattle or sheep in the meadow due to safety risks from dogs.

Previous Maintenance

The funding set aside from the development Section 106 money lasted eight years. During this time Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and Natural England were involved in carrying out regular maintenance to maintain Clifford Meadow's SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) status.

Cliffords Meadow received cattle grazing last year.



Haydon Wick Parish Council has tried to secure one gap in the fence by Luna Close Play Area in Oakhurst, but this has not been able to mitigate against trespassers and has only been a temporary fix until the stock fencing is repaired.

Communications

The resident asked the Parish Council to promote why it is important that the meadow is maintained and what types of species are protected there. Previous contact with the land agent regarding this and other matters has been unhelpful. Recently the Parish Council enquired about displaying private property signs on the gates, which was rejected due legal implications, and assistance with fixing the fencing and closing gaps in the surrounding vegetation. These were both rejected due to cost implications.

Enforcement

Natural England is responsible for enforcing laws that protect wildlife and the natural environment. Natural England aims to use enforcement:

- as a last resort but it is sometimes necessary to make sure that the natural environment is protected
- in a consistent and proportionate manner to target illegal activities that have the greatest impact on wildlife, geology, and landscapes

Going down the route of enforcement will force Natural England to do something and be actively involved in maintaining the SSSI status.