

LEISURE, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

12 OCTOBER 2022

PART I

9a. RICKMANSWORTH AQUADROME MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022 - 2027 (DCES)

1 Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the new Management Plan for Rickmansworth Aquadrome, following extensive public consultation and engagement with stakeholders and to recommend its adoption by the Council.
- 1.2 This includes the Management Plan's approach to key topics highlighted at point 2.9 and the proposed projects, highlighted at point 2.16 and within section 5 of the Management Plan.
- 1.3 The final Management Plan will be used to support future external funding applications for the wider project.

2 Details

- 2.1 Rickmansworth Aquadrome has an existing Management Plan for the period 2019 – 2024. However, as a result of the impact of climate change, increased visitor numbers due to the impact of COVID-19 and an opportunity to make enhancements to the site, Councillors agreed for the existing Management Plan to be significantly updated to reflect these points. The project was therefore formally added to and adopted as part of the Service Planning process in March 2021.
- 2.2 Following this agreement, a part time post was appointed to in order to lead on the project: Rickmansworth Aquadrome Leisure Projects Officer and to work alongside the Countryside Management Service who would develop the new “map-based” management plan.

Public Engagement

- 2.3 An initial engagement period took place between September and October 2021, to establish core aims and objectives for the site. Following this period of engagement, it was clear that the public felt the priority for the site should be to protect and enhance the existing wildlife and led to the creation of the vision statement for the site:

“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.”

- 2.4 This vision is further detailed within point 4.1 of the Management Plan, Appendix A. The 4 key objectives for the site are:
 - Creating Biodiverse and Sustainable Environments
 - To Be Welcoming for All
 - A Friendly Site Community

- A High Quality Green Space

- 2.5 The Draft Management Plan was then developed further, using the vision statement and 4 key objectives as the basis for future proposals. As part of this development process, Leisure and Landscapes engaged with Councillors, Environmental Protection, Regulatory Services, Community Partnerships and Property to ensure the draft plan captured all aspects relevant to their service area.
- 2.6 Public consultation and stakeholder engagement took place between May and June 2022. This included an online survey, engagement with the Aquadrome Forum members and attendance at the Rickmansworth Festival.
- 2.7 A total of 321 members of the public responded to the survey and over 600 comments were recorded. An associated engagement response document, published as an appendix to the Management Plan, summarises comments received and any amendments made to the plan as a result. These can be viewed in Appendix B (section N).
- 2.8 In addition to the public consultation, Officers undertook a Visitor Observation Survey in July 2022 and will be used as a baseline for any future visitor recording. Observations were carried out in six two-hour periods in the morning, lunchtime and in the afternoon, during weekdays and weekends. Summary data is detailed below:

Visitors within 2 hours	Minimum no.	Maximum no.
Weekday	358	428
Weekend	600	957

Key Points considered in the Management Plan

- 2.9 There were a number of re-occurring themes that came from the public consultation and stakeholder engagement or have been included in general within the Management Plan. These include:
- Dogs – many members of the public reported issues with dogs. This included attacking wild/waterfowl and other dogs, and dogs not being in control in general. Officers are working alongside the Animal Welfare and Licensing Inspector and Community Partnerships at educational activities and events, however, this matter may come back at a later date, with a review of the current PSPO for the site. This is further detailed at point 3.3.4 of the Management Plan (Appendix A)
 - Ducks – many people raised concerns with allowing duck feeding at the site. However, Officers recognise it as a family pastime. Plans will include removal of official “bird feeding” locations, which will be re-landscaped, installation of educational interpretation boards and working alongside the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) to advise people on the best ways to feed the birds. This is further detailed at point 3.3.5 of the Management Plan (Appendix A)

- Vehicles – Leisure and Property are working with the existing leaseholders on traffic management for the site, with the main aim of keeping the site safe and secure for all and reducing vehicle traffic across the site. This is further detailed at point 3.3.3 of the Management Plan (Appendix A)
- Hire of Grounds – the Aquadrome is a very busy site and therefore the current arrangements have been reviewed and significant hire restrictions are now in place. This includes restricting the hiring of the site at busy times of the year and not allowing activities that may be detrimental to the environment, including the use of generators for bouncy castles etc. However, as the Rickmansworth Festival is an important community event, this has been excluded from the restrictions. This is further detailed at point 3.3.11 of the Management Plan (Appendix A) and section E of Appendix B.
- Public Swimming – a number of responses to the consultation requested public swimming within the lakes. Point 3.3.7 within the Management Plan answers this, however, it states that: *“wild swimming is not permitted at the Aquadrome, either in the lakes or in the River Colne. The use of Bury Lake for wild swimming would need to be managed by a swimming club in association with Bury Lake Young Mariners, both as leaseholders for water sports on the lake and as the only location with good facilities for water sports. However, this is not currently supported by either BLYM or the Council.”* Adoption of the Management Plan would re-confirm this position.

Proposed key action points and projects

- 2.10 Following the public consultation, the Management Plan has been developed with a number of key actions and projects, linked to the key objectives for the site. Many of these proposals will be subject to external funding and are therefore not confirmed.
- 2.11 There are a number of appendices which support the Management Plan, all contained with Appendix B of this report:
- A: Aquadrome Grounds Maintenance Schedule
 - B: Indicative Specifications
 - C: Not Used
 - D: Wider Context: Policies and Strategies that relate to the Aquadrome
 - E: Aquadrome Hire of Grounds
 - F: Health and Safety
 - G: Aquadrome Forum
 - H: Species Record
 - I: Local Wildlife Site Survey Report
 - J: Rickmansworth Aquadrome Bat Survey 2007
 - K: Visitor Survey Information
 - L: Aquadrome Brand Guidelines
 - M: Environmental Management and Sustainability
 - N: Engagement Response Document
- 2.12 One key aspect has been the proposal to divide the site into formal and informal zones. Management and maintenance techniques will differ depending on which zone it is in. For example, when trees fall or are felled within informal zones, the trees will be cut up and left on site in areas away from the main pathways in order to create/extend habitats in these areas. In the more formal areas, trees will either be

removed from site or positioned in an area away from the main recreational areas. The zonal areas are detailed at section 2 in Appendix A and have been created to recognise where more formal leisure and recreation may take place against more informal, natural, wildlife areas.

- 2.13 It is recognised that there is asbestos containing material (ACM) at the Aquadrome. This was deposited while the site was filled in following gravel extraction in the 1920's & 1930's. The risks posed by asbestos fibres were not known at that time and it was extensively deposited across the site without recording or documenting. The Property Team are currently enhancing the Asbestos Management Plan and have engaged external consultants to assist with this work. Early recommendations include maintaining the water level in Batchworth Lake to encapsulate ACM beneath the surface, regular picking of loose ACM, along with prohibiting any work to the banks of the lake, unless agreed and managed by TRDC. This is further detailed at point 3.2.7 of the Management Plan (Appendix A)
- 2.14 Key Projects within the Management Plan are detailed from point 5 within the Management Plan (Appendix A).
- 2.15 In addition, a capital programme has been developed over a 10 year period (Appendix A – section 6.2.2), with an estimated cost of £687,100, although this does not include the unknown costs as a result of the feasibility study and design work for the main entrance area and Riverside Drive Entrance (and pedestrian bridge) or any recommendations that may come out of the hydrological study. In addition, there is an estimated revenue spend of £35,000. As detailed at 2.10, delivery of this capital and revenue programme and other projects is subject to securing external funding or CIL funding.
- 2.16 Projects include:

Creating Biodiverse and Sustainable Environments

- Enhancements to the natural environment, including the rare Wet Woodland habitat, grassland management, tree works and surveys, creation of fruit orchard and community planting area, wildflower meadow creation and a programme of bulb planting across the site.
- Commissioning of a hydrological survey for the site, which includes a review of the ditch network and water flow in order to support the site as a natural floodplain.
- Enhancing marginal vegetation along the River Colne, Batchworth and Bury Lake, including necessary tree works to support this.
- Review Mink Monitoring along the River Colne and support Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust with the introduction of Water Voles.

To Be Welcoming for All

- Develop a full landscape plan, encompassing objectives for the entrance to the Aquadrome, including feasibility study, specialist consultants and stakeholder engagement. This will include enhancements to the car park (with a focus on the environment and sustainability), the area in front of and adjacent to the Café in the Park and to provide a sense of arrival for visitors to the site. In addition, Officers will continue to review usage, demand and

viability of the car park, as in-line with all Council owned car parks across the district.

- Develop a full landscape plan for the Riverside Drive entrance, including a full feasibility study and specialist consultants to advise on the specification to replace the existing pedestrian bridge to bring it in line with current national shared usage requirements. In addition, Ebury Play area will be considered as part of this proposal, alongside the agreed capital programme for upgrading play area.
- Re-landscaping the existing bird feeding areas and discourage dog access to the river and lakes through signage and interpretation.
- All signage and interpretation will be updated to include the new branding for the site. It will also include the removal of temporary or out of date signage and to, where possible, reduce the number of signs across the site.
- Improving and enhancing the permeability of the site to a range of users and how these connect to the wider areas.
- New directional signage will be included to assist the visitor with accessing the site and also to direct visitors to other areas, wider than the Aquadrome, including the Canal, Batchworth Lock Visitor Centre and the wider Colne Valley.
- New gates will be installed across the site to make it easier to close the Aquadrome or parts of the Aquadrome when needed (e.g. when heavily flooded, high winds etc.)
- Site furniture will be reviewed and replaced, including new benches, picnic benches, waymarkers, dog bins and bins (the environment and sustainability will be a factor when choosing materials etc.).
- Implement recommendations to the path network following the outcome of the hydrological survey. This includes implementing long-term bank and pathway reinforcement at key points across the site and a review of the sluice gate on Bury Lake.
- Introduce a new route through the pinetum and adjacent to the wet woodland and to upgrade pathways across the site where necessary.
- Introduction of a nature trail within the wooded areas adjacent to the dog free picnic area.
- Review of all swims (fishing platforms/areas) on Batchworth Lake and replace where necessary.

A Friendly Site Community

- Further develop a range of activities delivered at the Aquadrome for the local community and seek to engage a number of volunteers to support the delivery of the Management Plan.
- Further enhance the engagement with the Aquadrome Forum members to ensure the future sustainability of the site.

A High Quality Green Space

- Prepare and submit a number of grant funding applications to support the delivery of the objectives within the Management Plan. Alongside this, to establish a project steering group, involving partner organisations.

Next Steps and Funding

- 2.17 As highlighted at point 2.15, an outline capital programme over a 10 year period has been developed for the site, at an estimated total cost of £687,100, excluding the items highlighted at 2.15.
- 2.18 Following the adoption of the Management Plan, the Rickmansworth Aquadrome Leisure Projects Officer (RALPO) will be focused on securing external funding to deliver the capital programme and other agreed projects.
- 2.19 This will include liaising with the CIL Officer to identify opportunities to use CIL funding for some of the projects outlined in the plan.
- 2.20 A project proposal has also been submitted as part of the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund bid for £150,000 towards the project – confirmation of this funding will be in October 2022.
- 2.21 In addition the RALPO will review the current funding streams for the National Lottery Heritage Fund and submit an Expression of Interest in the first instance. Other sources of funding which will be explored, include HS2 and other local businesses and organisations.
- 2.22 It is important to note, the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) usually require funding applications to be accompanied by at least 40-50% match funding, so it will be imperative additional funding is secured prior to applications being submitted to the NLHF.
- 2.23 The RALPO will continue to work collaboratively with other TRDC services and partner organisations to ensure the project is delivered as a shared vision. This will also include the establishment of a project steering group, which was vital to the success of the Leavesden Country Park project.

3 Options and Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The purpose of this report is to present the new Management Plan for Rickmansworth Aquadrome, following extensive public consultation and engagement with stakeholders and to recommend its adoption by the Council.
- 3.2 This includes the Management Plan's approach to key topics highlighted at point 2.9 and the proposed projects, highlighted at point 2.16 and within section 5 of the Management Plan.
- 3.3 The final Management Plan will be used to support future funding applications for the wider project.

4 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

- 4.1 The recommendations in this report are not within the Council's agreed budgets but will form the basis for bids for external and CIL funding.

- 4.2 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy.
- 4.3 The recommendations in this report relate to the achievement of the following performance indicators.
 - 4.3.1 Housing and Thriving Communities
 - 4.3.2 Sustainable Environment
 - 4.3.3 CP02/EP16 - Satisfaction with Parks and Open Spaces
 - 4.3.4 LL34 - To Maintain Accreditation with Green Flag
 - 4.3.5 LL35 - To ensure all our key open spaces have a current management plan in place
 - 4.3.6 CP50 – Climate Emergency and Sustainability Action Plan
 - 4.3.7 EP15 – Satisfaction with keeping public land clear of litter and refuse
- 4.4 The impact of the recommendations on this/these performance indicator(s) is:
 - 4.4.1 The approval of the Aquadrome Management Plan and associated projects (subject to securing external funding) will support the Council with achieving the Corporate Framework Priority Themes, delivering against Key Performance Indicators and Service Performance Indicators for Leisure and Landscapes, Environmental Protection, Regulatory Services, Property and Community Partnerships.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There is a small existing annual budget to maintain the Aquadrome, however, in order to deliver the action plans and the capital programme detailed at point 2.15, external funding will need to be secured.
- 5.2 Officers have applied to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for £150,000 and it is recommended that Officers apply for CIL funding (where applicable) in order to deliver these projects.
- 5.3 Alongside this, Officers will submit expressions of interest to other funding bodies and partners including the National Lottery Heritage Fund and HS2.
- 5.4 The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) usually require funding applications to be accompanied by at least 40-50% match funding, so it will be imperative additional funding is secured prior to applications being submitted to the NLHF.

6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 The Council has a duty to have regard to conserving and enhancing biodiversity under S40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The proper meaning of a statutory requirement to have regard to something is along the lines of a requirement to consider it. It falls short of a requirement to make that thing the authority's only priority, or top priority. The Management Plan recommendations should in relation to every relevant recommendation evidence the consideration that

has been given to “conserving and enhancing biodiversity to ensure that the duty” to have regard” or “consider” has occurred and that compliance with the duty has been met.

7 Equal Opportunities Implications

7.1 Relevance Test

Has a relevance test been completed for Equality Impact? Appendix C	Yes
Did the relevance test conclude a full impact assessment was required? No, the Aquadrome project and Management plan fully reviews accessibility and impact for all. Project proposals also include the development of a Changing Places toilet on the site and enhancements to pathways.	No

8 Staffing Implications

- 8.1 Delivering the Management Plan project and objectives as well as securing external funding in order to deliver these will be led by the Leisure and Landscapes department.
- 8.2 In particular, it will require the time of the Landscapes and Leisure Development Manager, Rickmansworth Aquadrome Leisure Projects Officers, Leisure Contracts and Landscapes Projects Officer and the Community Biodiversity Officer.
- 8.3 Officers will also be working collaboratively and will require support and input from Officers in other services, including Regulatory Services, Property Services, Environmental Protection, Community Partnerships, Finance and Legal.

9 Environmental Implications

- 9.1 New management prescriptions for Rickmansworth Aquadrome will enable a varied and diverse development of habitats, which will have a positive impact on the flora and fauna across the district.
- 9.2 Specifically, enhancements will be made to the wet woodland area, a habitat of principle importance as defined under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006), as well as working alongside the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to introduce Water Voles along the Aquadrome stretch of the River Colne.

10 Community Safety Implications

- 10.1 As outlined at point 2.9, Leisure and Landscapes will work alongside Community Safety and the Animal Welfare and Licensing Inspector to monitor dog control across the site.
- 10.2 As well as establishing general rules for dog walking across the district including a limit of four dogs walked by one person and a requirement to prevent dog fouling, the existing Public Space Protection Order has a specific application to the Aquadrome.

It defines an area surrounding the Café in the Park where dogs must be kept on a lead. It also excludes dogs from the Ebury play area and the fenced picnic area.

11 Public Health implications

- 11.1 Accessible, well maintained parks and open spaces have never been more vital to the health and wellbeing of individuals than during the COVID 19 Pandemic. Being able to connect with wildlife has a positive impact on both the physical and mental health and wellbeing of individuals.
- 11.2 During a recent (2021) survey of people using Leavesden Country Park, over 80% said that being able to use the park was either very important or important to their health and wellbeing and 98% of people said using the park enhanced their quality of life.
- 11.3 Trees and greenery may boost lifespan, this has been studied for 8 years by Harvard researchers and published in April Environmental Health Perspectives.
- (<https://health.usnews.com/wellness/articles/2016-12-09/the-many-health-benefits-of-trees>)
- 11.4 Given the public health impacts associated with ACM's, the Property Services Team are leading on the enhancement of the Asbestos Management Plan as highlighted at point 2.9. This will ensure that the site is managed safely and effectively. Mitigating and minimising risks to the public, users, staff and contractors.

12 Customer Services Centre Implications

- 12.1 None specific.

13 Communications and Website Implications

- 13.1 As highlighted at point 2.23, a steering group will be established to support the delivery of the project. This will include Lead Members and Ward Councillors.
- 13.2 The website will be kept updated with any relevant changes to the site, following the adoption and ongoing delivery of the Management Plan.

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 Landscapes, Environmental Protection, Property Services and Community Partnerships and Regulatory Services service plans. Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this/these plan(s).

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response <i>(tolerate, treat, terminate, transfer)</i>	Risk Rating <i>(combination of likelihood and impact)</i>

Unable to secure external funding	The projects within the Management Plan would not be delivered	Project Officer appointed to lead on securing external funding	Treat	4
Inability to readdress the balance between nature and humans at the site	Negative impact on the wildlife and could impact for future generations. Wider implications for Climate Change and sustainability	Working alongside key partner organisations including Countryside Management Service and Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to secure funding for nature / biodiversity projects. Ensuring the Council's Community Biodiversity Officer is involved in project delivery	Treat	4
Disturbance of asbestos on site	Health implications for the public and staff	Development of an Asbestos Management Plan and ongoing monitoring of the site	Treat	6
Uncontrolled Dogs	Potential injury or death to wild/water fowl, other dogs or humans	PSPO in place at the site. Ongoing educational activities and public awareness Possible review of PSPO	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 ----- Remote	Low 4	High 8	Very High 12	Very High 16
	Low 3	Medium 6	High 9	Very High 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

That the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee:

- 15.1 Adopt the new 5 year Rickmansworth Aquadrome Management Plan (2022 – 2027)
- 15.2 Adopt the Management Plan's approach to key topics highlighted at point 2.9 and the proposed projects, highlighted at point 2.16 and within section 5 of the Management Plan.
- 15.3 For Officers to apply for funding, including CIL, where relevant, HS2 and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Report prepared by: Charlotte Gomes, Landscapes and Leisure Development Manager

Data Quality

Data sources:

Public Consultation Data

Visitor Observation Survey

Data checked by:

Jemma Duffell, Consultation and Partnership Officer

Jo Copley – Rickmansworth Aquadrome Leisure Projects Officer

Jess Hodges – Community Biodiversity Officer

Data rating:

1	Poor	
2	Sufficient	✓
3	High	

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Rickmansworth Aquadrome Management Plan

Appendix B: Rickmansworth Aquadrome Management Plan Appendices, consisting of:

- A: Aquadrome Grounds Maintenance Schedule
- B: Indicative Specifications
- C: Not Used
- D: Wider Context: Policies and Strategies that relate to the Aquadrome
- E: Aquadrome Hire of Grounds
- F: Health and Safety
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- K: Visitor Survey Information
- L: Aquadrome Brand Guidelines
- M: Environmental Management and Sustainability
- N: Engagement Response Document

Appendix C: Relevance Test