

**COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP, HIGHER TIER
– RIVER LEE COUNTRY PARK**

Presented by the Corporate Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Countryside Stewardship is the current agri-environment funding stream which superseded the previous Higher Level Stewardship scheme. The Authority currently has four active Higher Level Stewardship agreements and one active Countryside Stewardship scheme on its landholdings.

The current five-year Countryside Stewardship agreement in River Lee Country Park comes to an end on 31 December 2022 and the Authority has been offered the opportunity to enter into a mirror five-year agreement commencing on 1 January 2023.

This paper is seeking Member approval to enter the Authority into this mirror five-year Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship agreement with Natural England for identified landholdings in River Lee Country Park. The Authority would receive a grant totalling approximately £18,000 over the five-year agreement period.

RECOMMENDATION

Members Approve: (1) entering into a five-year mirror Countryside Stewardship Agreement with Natural England for the Authority's identified landholdings in River Lee Country Park.

BACKGROUND

- 1 River Lee Country Park stretches from Waltham Abbey to Broxbourne and is an important area for wildlife highlighted by much of the landholding being designated on an international, national and local level.
- 2 The majority of the proposed agreement area forms part of Turnford and Cheshunt Pits Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designated in 1995 on account of its wetland habitats and associated assemblage of wildfowl. The SSSI in turn along with three other sites in the valley forms part of the wider Lee Valley Special Protection Area, designated in 2000. In addition to the sites that form part of the SSSI, there are also Local Wildlife Sites included in the

agreement area. These are non-statutory designated sites but are important for wildlife on a county level.

- 3 The Authority currently has four Higher Level Stewardship agreements in addition to the existing River Lee Country Park Countryside Stewardship Scheme. In total the Authority will receive in excess of £400,000 through these agreements.

The four agreements are:

1. Holyfield Hall Farm (2012 – 2023);
2. South sites (2013 –2023)
 - Tottenham Marshes
 - Walthamstow Marshes
 - Rammey Marsh
 - Middlesex Filter Beds
 - WaterWorks Nature Reserve;
3. Cornmill Meadows and Tree Park (2013 –2023); and
4. Silvermeade (2014 – 2024).

COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP

- 4 Countryside Stewardship is an agri-environment scheme administered by the Rural Payments Agency which provides funding to farmers and landowners to deliver effective environmental management on their land.
- 5 There are four main elements of Countryside Stewardship. This scheme is part of the Higher Tier, multi-year agreements for environmentally significant sites that require more complex management. This type of agreement is for a five year period.
- 6 There are a range of Countryside Stewardship annual options and capital items which are individually tailored to deliver maximum environmental benefits for wildlife, landscape, historic environment and resource protection. Officers have worked with Natural England to create a package of works specifically for River Lee Country Park and this agreement also meets many of the Authority's Park Development Framework objectives.

THE AGREEMENT

- 7 Entry in the current agreement was approved by Members on 22 February 2018 (Paper E/547/18). This current agreement is due to expire on 31 December 2022 and under new domestic regulations a new five-year mirror agreement has been offered. The offer was made via email and response was required by 31 March, however due to the length of the new agreement and the requirement for Member approval officers have requested the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) grant an extension to this deadline which has been granted until 30 April 2022. The Agreement can be terminated in writing by the RPA if there is a breach in terms or on giving the agreement holder six months written notice. The Authority may terminate the agreement at any time by giving written notice to the RPA whereby

there may be the requirement to pay back payments received up to that point in time.

- 8 The Countryside Stewardship scheme is divided into annual revenue and capital payments. The annual revenue payments are for the on-going maintenance of biodiversity-focused features such as the management of grassland for target species, control of invasive species and management of scrubland. The Authority will receive annual payments of approximately £3,500 for the five year duration of the scheme.
- 9 Capital payments are for one-off works, the current agreement had capital items however no capital funding is included in the new agreement.
- 10 The annual revenue items outlined within the agreement over the next five years are works that the Open Space Team should undertake as best practice. With the assistance of the Countryside Stewardship scheme the Authority now needs to only partly fund rather than wholly fund these works. As well as the financial advantage the Open Space Team will also benefit from advice on biodiversity improvements from Natural England, the national conservation body.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11 There are no specific environmental implications arising from this report. Work carried out through the Countryside Stewardship scheme will enhance the biodiversity value of landholdings within River Lee Country Park.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12 If funding is claimed but the works not carried out the Authority may be in default of the agreement and grant funding could be clawed back. However, if the delivery of planned works could not take place for any reason such as adverse weather conditions, early dialogue with both the RPA and Natural England would take place so that they are aware of the situation. With their agreement the claim form would be amended, the grant award revised accordingly and the agreement would therefore not be defaulted.
- 13 Failure to complete and submit a claim for items by the date shown in the agreement may be considered by the RPA as a breach of agreement and the Authority may have to repay any grant received. The claim deadlines will be embedded in the work programme of the Ranger Service Manager to ensure that they are met and this work programme is monitored by the Head of Parklands.
- 14 There will be no additional revenue implications from the work carried out by the Authority through the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15 If approved, the delivery of the Countryside Stewardship scheme will be the responsibility of the Greenspace Team, supported by the Conservation Manager and can be assimilated into their regular work programme.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 16 In addition to the legal implications already highlighted in the body of the report once issued the signed agreement must be returned to the RPA.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 17 It is considered that any risk to delivery is minimal. However, if planned work is unable to take place due to unforeseen circumstances officers will contact the RPA to advise them of any change and adjust the grant claim forms accordingly.
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Author: Cath Patrick, 01992 709 882, cpatrick@leevalleypark.org.uk

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE REPORT

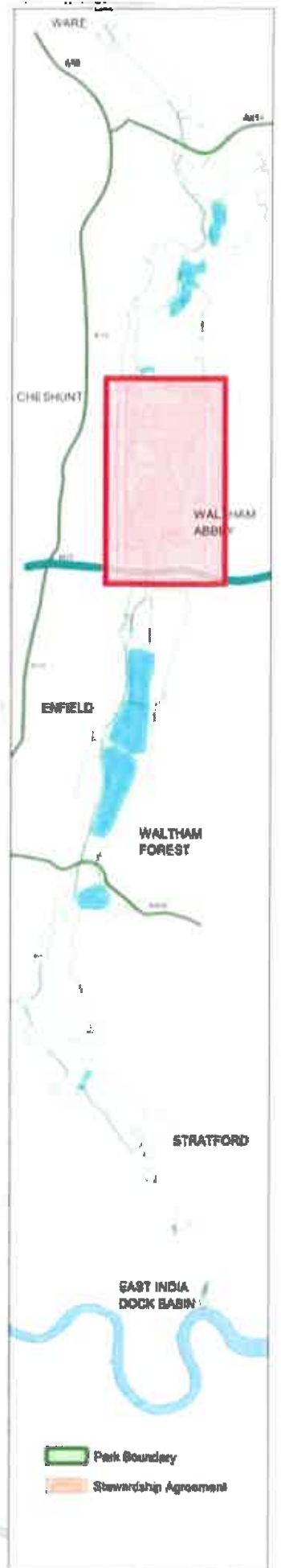
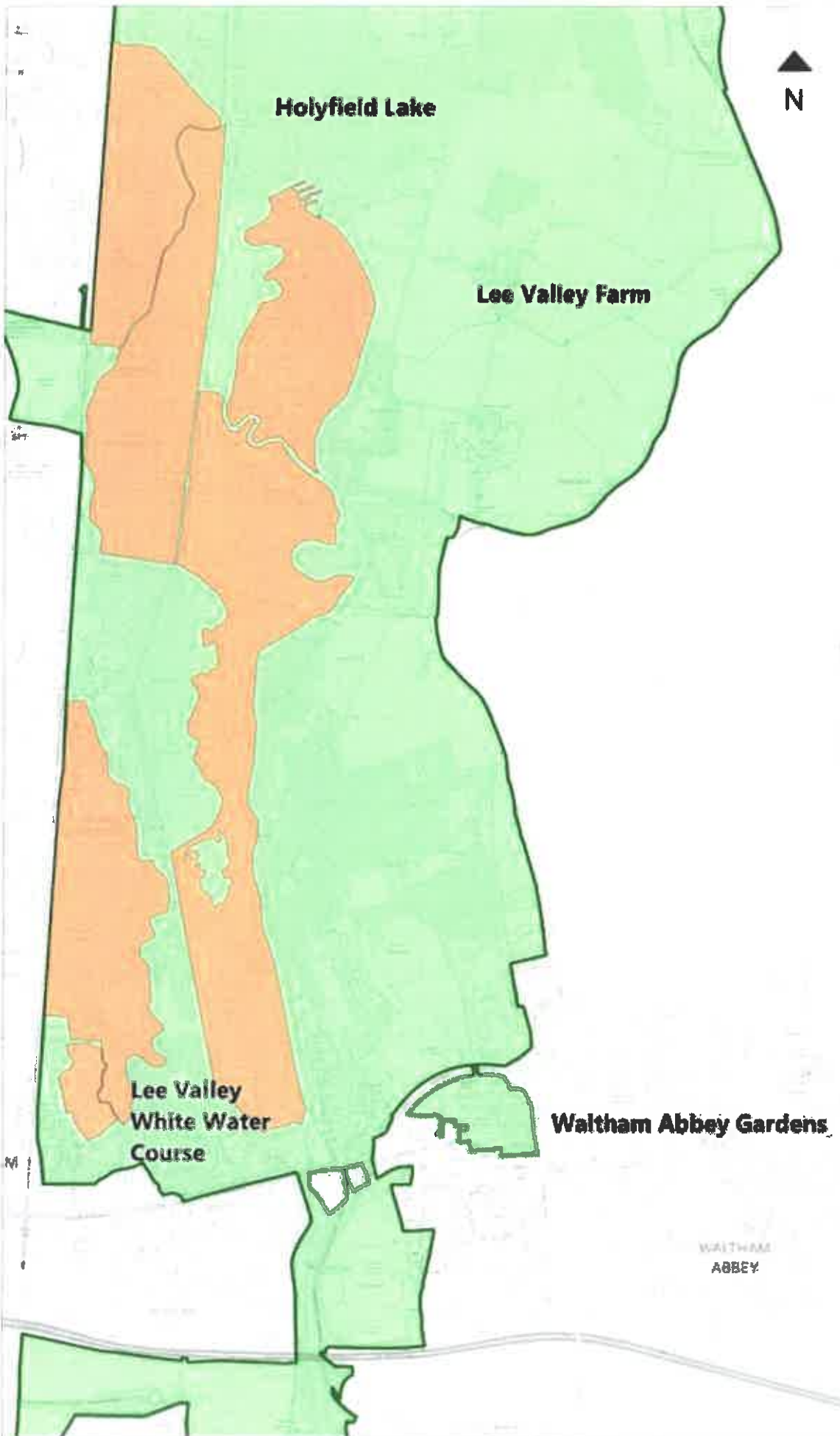
Executive	E/574/18	Countryside Stewardship, Higher Tier – River Lee Country Park	22 Feb 2018
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APPENDIX ATTACHED

Appendix A Area to be included in the ES agreement

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
RPA	Rural Payments Agency
NE	Natural England



- Park Boundary
- Stewardship Agreement

River Lee Country Park Countryside Stewardship Agreement



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W. Collins, 11 New Bell Street, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 1JF. Tel: 01473 211111. Fax: 01473 211112. Email: info@leevalley.gov.uk

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