



**ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP, HIGHER TIER
– SILVERMEADE AND BROXBOURNE MEADOWS**

Presented by Jon Carney, Corporate Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper seeks Member approval for the Authority to enter into this four-year extension to the agreement with the Rural Payments Agency at Silvermeade and Broxbourne Meadows.

Silvermeade and Broxbourne Meadows have previously been in three agri-environment agreements designed to enhance their environmental management. The most recent of these agreements is due to expire in September 2024 and an offer has now been received from the Rural Payments Agency to enter into an extension running until 30 September 2028.

The Authority will receive a grant totalling £14,885.07 over this extended agreement period.

RECOMMENDATION

Members Approve: (1) to enter into an extension to the current Environmental Stewardship Agreement with the Rural Payments Agency for the Authority's identified landholdings at Silvermeade and Broxbourne Meadows until 30 September 2028.

BACKGROUND

- 1 Silvermeade and Broxbourne Meadows are located on the edge of Broxbourne (see map at Appendix A to this report) and are one of the few remaining areas of semi-natural wetland in Hertfordshire. Designated a Local Wildlife Site on account of its significance to nature conservation, Silvermeade contains a variety of plant communities typical of its floodplain location. A range of neutral grassland types, sedge marsh, reed swamp, willow scrub and tall herbaceous vegetation can all be found. Associated with this diversity of habitat are several species of plant and insect that are all uncommon in Hertfordshire, such as Meadow Rue and the Hairy Dragonfly. Of particular note is an important colony of Water Voles, a species which is declining rapidly in Britain.

- 2 In 1994 (Paper 2856) Members approved the entry of Silvermeade into a ten-year Countryside Stewardship agreement with Natural England; this ran from 1994 to 2004. This was followed up by a second ten-year agreement which ran until 2014. The current agreement approved by Members in Paper E/371/14 started in September 2014 and is due to finish in September 2024.
- 3 The previous stewardship agreements covered both Silvermeade and Broxbourne Meadows. Broxbourne Meadows have again been included in the new agreement as we do not want to reduce the amount of land which we aim to manage to this high standard. There are currently no paid options included for the Meadows; however our ability to manage them is limited by the flooding in this area. Future management will need to be reassessed after works to the Broxbourne Drain have been carried out, this is currently pencilled in for September 2024.
- 4 In addition to the existing Silvermeade agreement, the Authority currently has three current agri-environment agreements and one approved for signing by Members but awaiting the final documentation from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).

The agreements are:

1. Holyfield Hall Farm (5yrs 2024 - 2028);
2. Cornmill Meadows and Tree Park (2024 - 2028);
3. River Lee Country Park (2023 – 2027); and
4. South sites (awaiting final agreement):
 - Tottenham Marshes;
 - Walthamstow Marshes;
 - Rammey Marsh;
 - Middlesex Filter Beds;
 - WaterWorks Nature Reserve.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

- 5 Environmental Stewardship is an agri-environment scheme administered by the RPA which provides funding to farmers and landowners to deliver effective environmental management on their land.
- 6 There are three levels to Environmental Stewardship. This scheme is part of the Higher Tier, multi-year agreements for environmentally significant sites that require more complex management and agreements tailored to local circumstances.
- 7 There are a range of Environmental Stewardship options which are individually tailored to deliver maximum environmental benefits for wildlife, landscape, historic environment and resource protection. Officers worked closely with Natural England prior to the commencement of the current agreement to create a package of works that meets many of the Authority's Park Development Framework (PDF) and Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) objectives.

THE AGREEMENT

- 8 Entry into the current agreement was approved by Members in September 2014 and is due to expire on 30 September 2024; the Authority has now been offered a four-year extension to this agreement. The signed acceptance form needs to be returned to the RPA by 1 May 2024.
- 9 The Environmental Stewardship scheme provides annual revenue payments for the ongoing maintenance of biodiversity-focused features such as the management of grassland, management of ditches important for Water Voles and restoration of fen habitat.
- 10 The annual revenue items outlined within the agreement are works that the Greenspace Team should undertake as best practice. With the assistance of the Environmental Stewardship scheme the Authority now needs to only partly fund rather than wholly fund these works. As well as the financial advantage, the Parklands 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 Environmental Stewardship scheme will enhance the biodiversity value of landholdings at Silvermeade.

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 (North) 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 Environmental Stewardship scheme.

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15 If approved, the delivery of the Environmental Stewardship scheme will be the responsibility of the Parklands 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, 07715 449341, cpatrick@leevalleypark.org.uk

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE REPORTS

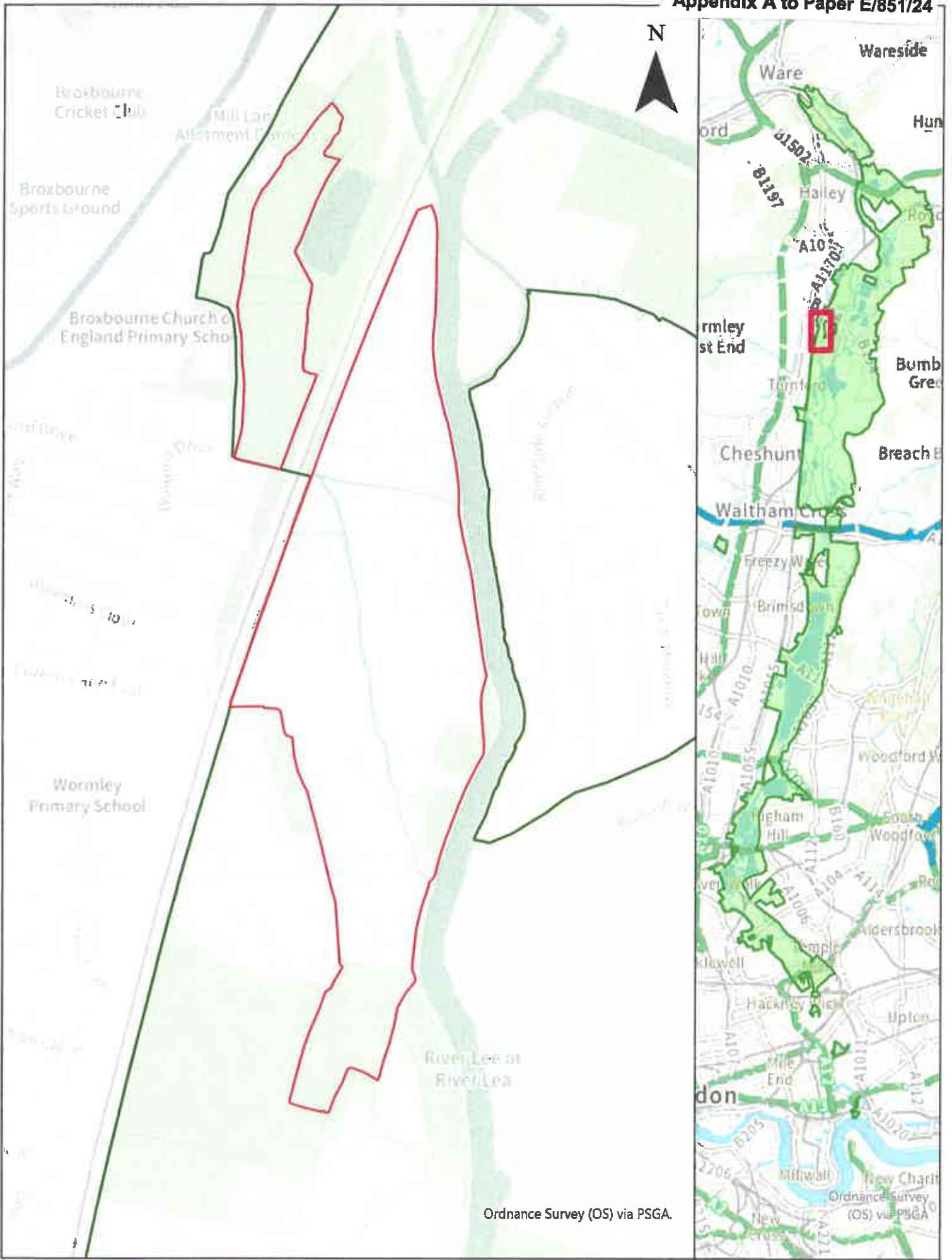
Executive	E/371/14	Higher Level Stewardship – Silvermeade and Broxbourne Meadows	25 Sept 2014
Authority Meeting	Paper 2856	Countryside Stewardship Scheme: Silvermeade	27 October 1994
Authority Meeting	Paper 3725	Countryside Stewardship Scheme: Agreement offer for Silvermeade	22 April 2004

APPENDIX ATTACHED

Appendix A Area included in the Environmental Stewardship agreement

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

RPA	Rural Payments Agency
NE	Natural England



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