 <p>LEE VALLEY REGIONAL PARK AUTHORITY</p> <p>EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</p> <p>22 FEBRUARY 2018 AT 11.00</p>	<p>Agenda Item No:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">11</p> <p>Report No:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">E/547/18</p>
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COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP, HIGHER TIER – RIVER LEE COUNTRY PARK

Presented by Head of Parklands

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Countryside Stewardship is the current agri-environment funding stream which has superseded the previous Higher Level Stewardship scheme.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

This paper is seeking Members approval to delegate Officers the power to enter the Authority into a five-year Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship agreement with Natural England for identified landholdings in River Lee Country Park. The Authority would receive a revenue grant totalling approximately £30,000 over the five-year agreement period.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members Approve: (1) that Officers are delegated the power to enter into a five-year 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 designated in 1995 on account of its wetland habitats and associated assemblage of wildfowl. The Site of Special Scientific Interest (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 for which it will receive in excess of £380,000 over their ten-year period. The grant money from these schemes is used to undertake on-going best practice management of biodiversity-focused features required.

The four agreements are:

1. Holyfield Hall Farm (2012 – 2022)

£130,542

Wild Bird seed mixes, ditch management, wildflower-rich field margins.

2. South sites (2013 –2023)

- Tottenham Marshes
- Walthamstow Marshes
- Rammey Marsh
- Middlesex Filter Beds
- WaterWorks Nature Reserve

£150,331

Grassland, reedbed, woodland, ditch and scrub management.

3. Cornmill Meadows and Tree Park (2013 –2023)

£72,645

Ditch and meadow management and water level management for target species.

4. Silvermeade (2014 – 2024)

£34,288

Ditch, meadow and reedbed management.

COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP

- 4 Countryside Stewardship is an agri-environment scheme administered by Natural England 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 needing support from Natural England and include multi-year and capital items. This type of agreement is for a five year period from January 2018 to December 2023. It is in addition to the £380,000 Higher Level Stewardship funding shown in paragraph 3 above.
- 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 River Lee Country Park and this agreement also meets many of the Authority's Park Development Framework objectives.

THE AGREEMENT

- 7 Due to administrative backlogs in the application process there is a delay in the

issuing of the final agreement by Natural England, therefore if approved the agreement would commence retrospectively on 1st January 2018, for duration of five years. The Agreement can be terminated in writing by Natural England 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 Natural England whereby there may be the requirement to pay back payments received.

- 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 £4200 per annum for the five year duration of the scheme.
- 9 Payments are for one-off works such as the introduction of grazing to a site and installation of wildlife nesting boxes. The payments for capital items will total approximately £9,000 with works needing to be completed by 31st December 2019.
- 10 The total funding for the Countryside Stewardship scheme is likely to be in the region of £30,000.
- 11 The annual revenue and one-off items outlined within the agreement over the next five years are works that the Greenspace 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 Greenspace Team will also benefit from advice on biodiversity improvements from Natural England, the national conservation body.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12 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

- 13 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 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.
- 14 Failure to complete and submit a claim for items by the date shown in the agreement may be considered by Natural England 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 Greenspace Manager to ensure that they are met and this work programme is monitored by the Senior Parklands Manager.
- 15 There will be no additional revenue implications from the work carried out by

the Authority through the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 16 If approved, the delivery of both the annual and capital elements 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

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

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 18 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 Natural England to advise them of any change and adjust the grant claim forms accordingly.

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PREVIOUS COMMITTEE REPORTS

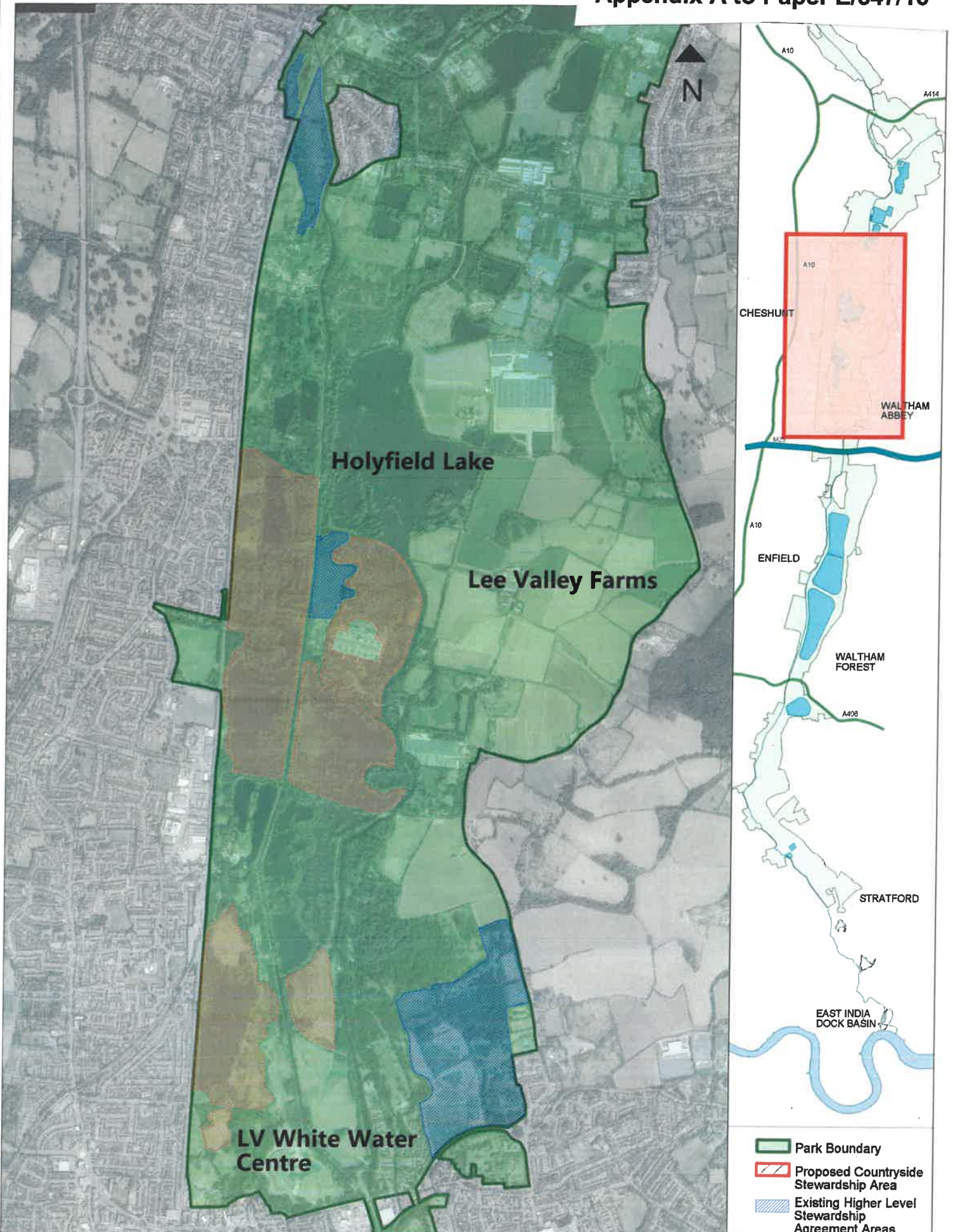
Executive Committee	E/249/12	HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP – Holyfield Hall Farm	22/11/12
Executive Committee	E/265/13	HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP – Lower Lee Valley	28/02/13
Executive Committee	E/316/13	HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP – Cornmill Meadows and Tree Park	21/11/13
Executive Committee	E/371/14	HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP – Silvermeade and Broxbourne Meadows	25/09/14

APPENDICES ATTACHED

Appendix A Area to be included in the ES agreement

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SSSI Site of Special Scientific Interest



Proposed Countryside Stewardship Area

