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**REPORT TO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 11 JUNE 2019**

**SUBJECT: SANQUHAR LOCH & WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,  
PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE)**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 Committee is asked to approve the Sanquhar Loch & Woodland Management Plan and agree to fund the improvements from revenue reserves.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (F) (11) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to exercising the functions of the Council in relation to Parks, Open Spaces and Tree/Woodland management and maintenance.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**2.1 It is recommended that Committee:**

- i) approves the management plan: and
- ii) agrees that £ 30,000 of the £53,938 legacy funding which is classed as revenue reserves that have been earmarked for the upkeep of the Sanquhar Estate may be accessed over a five year period between 2019 and 2024 to be spent on the recommendations of the Management Plan for the Loch & Woodland including associated upgrade and maintenance measures.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 On 20 March 2018 this Committee approved spend of up to £6,000 of the council's revenue reserves for the development of a management plan (paragraph 12 of the Minute refers).
- 3.2 The management plan has been written and is attached as **APPENDIX A**. Sanquhar Loch is situated in the southern residential area of Forres, (OS Grid Ref. NJ 040.581). The loch, which has been formed by a dam across the Burn of Mosset, provides an attractive local amenity with open-water, fen and wet woodland habitats of wildlife value. It is part of a more extensive area of woodlands and ponds in the Chapleton area of Forres as shown in **APPENDIX B**.

- 3.3 There is an extensive footpath network throughout, including a circular route around Sanquhar Loch and woodland which links to the wider network of footpaths around Forres.  
(see <https://www.forresfootpathstrust.org.uk/pdfs/Chapleton%20AI2.pdf>)
- 3.4 The landscaped grounds were formally part of the estate of Sanquhar House and are now in the ownership of Moray Council. There is a legacy fund, currently at £77,938; made up of fishing rights valued at £15,000, land at £9,000 and an earmarked revenue reserve of £53,938. The revenue reserve balance was £58,973, with approved spend in 2018/19 of £5,036 to write a management report for the woodland and pond area; bringing the balance to £53,938.
- 3.5 Sanquhar Loch is managed by Moray Council Environmental Protection - Lands and Parks section, who manage all Council owned grounds throughout Moray.
- 3.6 In summary, the key benefits of Sanquhar Loch are as follows:
- historical interest as a vestige of a landscaped estate;
  - local landscape and amenity value for residents and visitors with associated physical and mental health benefits;
  - part of a wider network of high amenity green spaces and public footpaths;
  - local ecological value with successional wetland habitats from open water to wet woodland;
  - a linking complex of habitats in the wider ecological network; and
  - educational value as it is used by local schools and other interested groups.
- 3.7 Local residents have long held concerns over the siltation rates of the Loch and the future management of the popular amenity site. The process of erosion and silt transport in the upstream catchment is now however considered to be under control from the Chapelton Flood Alleviation Scheme. There is a sediment trap included in the reservoir at Chapelton, which is part of the Burn of Mosset Flood Alleviation Scheme. The sediment trap will reduce the sediment load transported downstream but will not have any influence over erosion.

With the condition of the Loch now expected to be much more stable, a long term Management Plan to enhance the Loch and conserve the environment is considered justifiable.

#### **4. PROGRESS BY VOLUNTEER GROUPS**

- 4.1 A dedicated group of volunteers known as the Sanquhar Dam Restoration Group have been working on restoring the area in recent years for the benefit of the Community. At weekends they carry out works such as tree thinning and path restoration. The volunteers have carried out over 1800 hours of work to the loch, woodland and path network. The volunteer group are willing to carry out further works such as path edgings, drainage and upgrading

pathway surfaces and have requested Moray Council provide materials to enable approved works to progress.

The Group work in collaboration with Moray Council and only work that has been agreed with Moray Council is progressed by the group. Any work that involves the use of materials is assessed and quantified by Moray Council Officers.

- 4.2 There are clearly a lot of issues to be considered in how the Council move forward with a strategic long term plan for restoration and management of this popular local amenity. We will need to address a wide range of issues such as litter, health and safety, pollution and restoration and maintenance needs to be balanced against wildlife conservation, flood risk and public safety.

## **5. WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE**

- 5.1 The Management Plan sets out a programme of works along with associated costs for the period 2019-2023. It assumes that volunteer labour will be used where possible on non-hazardous or non-specialist activities. Moray Council will continue to work closely with the volunteer group, to provide a long-term vision for the Loch and detail works and operational duties required to achieve that vision. The management plan clarifies, to anyone interested in the Loch, how it is to be managed and improved to achieve the vision in line with the Council's strategies and associated legislation such as the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 and the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

- 5.2 The Management Plan:

- In partnership with stakeholder groups, has created a vision for Sanquhar Loch & Woodlands;
- It has clarified and communicated a work plan and agreed milestones and targets with the focus on conserving, rejuvenating and enhancing the existing natural capital of the site;
- It has clarified funding available;
- Ensured all stakeholders know about the management priorities for the site;
- Clarified issues such as risk assessments, insurance cover, health and safety for voluntary groups.

- 5.3 The plan will enable the Council to have a formal arrangement with the Sanquhar Dam Restoration Group and other organisations to achieve common goals. This plan is aimed at Council Officers, the local community, stakeholder/ volunteer groups and is a flexible working document that will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Preferred options for works will be prioritised and risk assessed.

## **6. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

- (a) **Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**

Contributes to Moray Council Core Values that support the progress and delivery of Moray 2023 especially Sustainability - “promote Community empowerment as a means of supporting communities to take on more responsibilities.” Also, contributes to objectives in the Corporate Plan, namely Priority 3 – Healthier Citizens – “We will create attractive, accessible open spaces for recreation” and “we will support the creation/maintenance of safe, attractive and accessible green space”.

**(b) Policy and Legal**

Sanquhar Loch could be classed as a reservoir under the Reservoirs (Scotland) Act 2011 when the consequences of the lower impoundment limit is enforced by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

The 2011 Act introduces a proportionate and risk based regulatory regime based on the consequences of an uncontrolled release of water on downstream receptors. The 2011 Act has been implemented through a phased approach.

Risk designations of either, high medium or low have been assigned to each reservoir by SEPA based on the consequences of an uncontrolled release of water.

**(c) Financial implications**

A total of £53,938 is available from the council’s earmarked revenue reserve. Approval to spend up to £30,000 of the reserves is requested at this time for the maintenance, further restoration and the development of a park management plan. Committee approval will be sought if additional financial resources over and above the £30,000 are required.

**(d) Risk Implications**

Robust governance of the funding will help ensure that funding is focussed on agreed priorities and that goods and services are procured in line with council policy.

**(e) Staffing Implications**

The proposals can be managed utilising existing staffing resources.

**(f) Property**

Sanquhar Loch and Woodlands offer the potential for multiple health, social and environmental benefits. To ensure that these benefits are realised requires careful planning and management. The implementation of the management plan would provide the required strategic direction.

## **(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**

Sanquhar Loch and Woodlands have the overall ambition of providing free access for all genders, ages and backgrounds.

The group along with the Forres Green Space working group have been working to improve the path surface to allow for mobility scooters to access the path network more easily and have reduced the steep incline by the Kennel Cottage on the eastern side of the Loch.

## **(h) Consultations**

Head of Direct Services, Corporate Director (Economic Development Planning and Infrastructure), Principal Accountant Financial Services, Consultancy Manager, Lissa Rowan, Committee Services Officer, Sylvia Jamieson, Community Support Officer, Legal Services Manager and the Equal Opportunities Officer.

The Management Plan was discussed by The Forres Green Space User Group on a number of occasions leading up to the production of the Management Plan.

The draft Sanquhar report was circulated to the Forres Green Spaces User Group in March. The setting up of this group was an action that came out of the Forres 2020 Vision Planning for Real Action Plan <http://www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file116777.pdf>

The group has membership from a wide range of groups that have an interest and/or care for or work in green spaces in Forres. It meets monthly and usually get 12-14 attending. Not all groups attend but the group also has an email group that the plan was circulated around which would have a wider membership. The Forres Green Spaces User Group isn't a formal constituted group rather it is a networking group to share information/materials etc. and tackle/discuss issues relating to green spaces together.

There were no objections raised to the draft Plan which was on the agenda and members were very supportive.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 Partial access to legacy funding will enable works contained within the Management Plan for Sanquhar Loch & Woodland asset to be carried out. A strategic Park Management Plan will provide a medium to long term vision for this important open space asset. This approach will benefit the local Community and visitors and build on the strong partnership with the voluntary group whose dedication and valuable contribution to the loch should be recognised.**