

Information Briefing on Edgbaston Reservoir

Introduction

This information note provides an update on the Edgbaston Reservoir Masterplan Draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and associated work. It also includes recent discussions about a potential future, more local management arrangement for the Reservoir.

Community Partnership Forum

The Forum was set up following a request from the Leader to work collaboratively with the Community Consortium who submitted an alternative plan to the public consultation. The purpose of the Forum is to enable the Council to work with the community to better align the vision of BCC's masterplan with the vision of the alternative plan.

Five meetings have been held with the Forum. In February it was agreed to postpone future meetings until the Council are able to answer the Forum's questions regarding future management of the reservoir and viability evidence.

Alongside this the City Council have been exploring more productive ways of conducting sessions with the forum. This is obviously constrained by social distancing currently, but there has been ongoing engagement via email and phone calls, and a new approach is being developed.

Addressing the Forum's questions

To answer the Forum's questions and progress the Masterplan, officers were intending to send a report to Cabinet in May. However, following internal discussions, it was agreed that a Cabinet Report was unnecessary and that any work could be done under delegated powers. No-one should be alarmed by this decision – it was taken to ensure only essential reports – linked to the Council's response to Covid 19 – went to Cabinet. The same outcomes will be delivered but through a different approach.

The proposed Cabinet report had four recommendations:

1. The funding and procurement of a viability appraisal to aid decisions around the future use of the wider Tower Ballroom Site;
2. The funding and procurement of demolition of the Tower Ballroom building;
3. The funding and procurement of the Edgbaston Reservoir Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Management Plan to be updated to identify ways in which future development can ensure the Local Nature Reserve is protected and enhanced;
4. Adoption of the community principles to unite the aspiration of the community and council.

Here is the City Council's plan to address these recommendations:

Funding and procurement of a viability appraisal for wider Tower Ballroom Site – The City Council will undertake a viability appraisal before decisions are made on how to progress the site. This is so it can better understand the minimum amount of development required on the site and the gap in funding for community, sport and leisure uses. A brief will then be prepared which will test a number of different scenarios for the site's development before the tender process starts.

Funding and procurement of demolition of the Tower Ballroom building – The viability appraisal will inform a decision regarding the demolition of the Tower Ballroom building. If officers determine demolition is required, something is very likely, a report will go to Cabinet.

The funding and procurement of the Edgbaston Reservoir Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Management Plan to be updated – The City Council is progressing this piece of work using delegated powers. This is the issue that is most relevant to the work of the Local Nature Reserve Committee and the brief will therefore include the need for a partnership approach so that the Local Nature Reserve Management Plan is adopted by the Committee. The great news is that funding has been secured to write a new Management Plan which the LNR will be closely involved with.

Adoption of the community principles to unite the aspirations of the community and council - The Community principles have been proposed by the Community Partnership Forum (see below). The principles are in line with the adopted White Paper for Localism, albeit in a more area-specific way. It is planned to include them in the final version of the Masterplan SPD.

Community principles:

1. Edgbaston Reservoir is a Local Nature Reserve, all development should respect nature.
2. All development should be environmentally sustainable, with responsible use of resources in both build and function.
3. Edgbaston Reservoir belongs to everyone and provides an environment that supports community cohesion.
4. Development should encourage and provide learning opportunities for all.
5. Improved access to social, cultural and sporting facilities should enhance health and wellbeing.
6. The Reservoir is an integral part of the green network across Birmingham and all development should enhance connections to the green network.
7. The Council's stated position on involving local communities (Localism Agenda) and its declared status as the UK's only Biophilic City should inform all development.

A more localised management arrangement for Edgbaston Reservoir

I was tasked with progressing this aspect of the LNR Committee's objectives. My first task was to gain the approval of the four City Council members representing North Edgbaston and Ladywood. This was quickly and easily obtained. I then made contact with Joe Hayden, Head of Parks with the City Council outlining the LNRs and local elected member's support for a more localised management arrangement. Rather than precis his response I think it best to include it verbatim:

"Further to our conversation on Friday I am just following up with confirmation that the Parks Service is very willing to consider a more localised management arrangement for the Reservoir.

As we discussed we have a very successful operating model which has been in place for over a decade at Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve (and Balaam's Wood LNR) where that Management Committee very much steers the development, enhancement and promotion of that LNR.

The Management Committee comprises local members, local community groups and resident representatives, and BCC officers -mainly Parks (but colleagues from Drainage, Planning, Property Services etc) all contribute and agree a preferred way forward.

That preferred way forward is developed into a 5 year Management Plan – with annual review, that is agreed by all parties and forms the direction and priority for all subsequent works on site.

The Management Committee has an agreed working constitution to set out its role and expectations placed on the membership (attached).

The Management Committee (for the most part) is hands on out on the reserve and contributes to weekly work parties organised by The Friends of KNLNR. Parks staff agree what works from the management plan should be undertaken at the correct time of year and agree the manner in which the works will take place to ensure the site, volunteers, and general public are all safe at all times.

The Friends co-ordinate these sessions and work with minimal supervision based on the mutual trust and competency that has been developed over the years.

The Friends/Management Committee are key to the production of the Management Plan – see latest attached. More info on the website See <http://www.fknnr.org.uk/A-Home.html>

The Friends/Management Committee organise and minute the meetings.

The Friends/Management Committee have a great website through which they promote their activities and the Local Nature Reserve itself. See <http://www.fknnr.org.uk/A-Home.html>

Parks would be very willing to adopt the same approach for Edgbaston LNR if you feel this would meet the requirements of the local groups/consortium? Please let me know what you think"

I hope you will all agree with me that this is a very positive response and will now allow the Edgbaston Reservoir Masterplan Draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and associated work to be developed simultaneously with the development of a more localised management arrangement for Edgbaston Reservoir

Next steps

- Update the community and existing users on the new approach being taken to achieve the aims set out in the Cabinet report
- Develop a model for a more localised management arrangement for Edgbaston Reservoir through the LNR Committee
- Commission the viability appraisal and update of the LNR Management Plan now that funding has been secured
- Understand the timescales for when the viability appraisal will be completed – this will inform the time frame for working with the community, which will in turn inform when the SPD is likely to be adopted.
- Find a new way to work with the Forum going forward during covid-19. It may be that the Council could work collaboratively on drafting some elements of the masterplan electronically as a way to work with the Forum without meeting in person.
- Officers are working on revisions to the Masterplan; this will continue in conjunction with the Forum. Once the revised document has been prepared there will be a further round of focused consultation enabling all members of the community to comment on and endorse the revised document.

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Thanks to Rebecca Farr, Development Planning Manager – North & West Birmingham for assistance in the writing of this Briefing.