

**'TEN PARISHES OUTDOOR WORKSHOP
AND CREATIVE SPACE'
WIVELISCOMBE**

INTERIM SUMMARY FEASIBILITY STUDY

1040-3492

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Prepared for

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and Somerset County Council**



1 Introduction

The Feasibility Study is being carried out on behalf of the Wiveliscombe Area Partnership (WAP). It is proposed that WAP acquire the 22 acre site at Farmers Cleave as a permanent community asset that is held in trust for the use and benefit of the communities of the 10 Parishes for the purposes of outdoor education and responsible environmental practices.

It should be noted that whilst the current owners of the site have expressed a willingness to consider selling the site to a charitable trust, no agreement has yet been reached and any recommendations made in the feasibility study may not be realised if the site's owners or WAP decide that they do not wish to proceed.

2 Environmental Assessment

An environmental assessment of the site has been undertaken to assess the current biodiversity of the site and to determine any impacts the proposal to use the site for community purposes may have on the ecology of the site and any protected species. This includes providing mitigation advice if necessary and recommendations for ecological enhancements of the site.

The proposal, as defined in the Scoping Study for Wiveliscombe Area Partnership (May 2010), includes conserving and enhancing the natural features and amenity of the site to provide opportunities for education and learning associated with the natural environment.

An initial ecological survey was carried out in August 2010 by a suitably qualified ecologist.

The site comprises a large area of undisturbed habitat close to the centre of Wiveliscombe with a high number of veteran trees, a watercourse bisecting the main part of the site and associated biodiversity habitats. The site was found to be species diverse due to the unmanaged nature of the site providing opportunity for further vegetation surveys to be undertaken to further explore the diversity of the vegetation.

Mature biodiversity corridors comprising mature trees and boundaries with good wildlife links to surrounding open farmland and further woodland areas surround the site. The ponds on site are linked to the stream running through the site, which further increases their potential wildlife.

It is considered that the site has a good potential for Protected Species to be present on site. Further species specific surveys would be necessary to determine the extent the site is being used by specific or protected species. It is thought that the site has the potential for badgers, reptiles, bats, great crested newts and water vole to be present. These provide potential for learning and workshops to understand more about the local wildlife and biodiversity and how these can be protected in the site through mitigation without restricting the overall concept.

The level of 'development' currently being discussed for the site is not considered to pose a threat to any protected species if found to be present on site. However, if the development plans include the clearing of large areas of vegetation in a short space of time or any significant ground works as examples, then protected species surveys should be carried out. If protected species are found to be present, then a robust mitigation strategy would need to be devised and approved by Natural England to prevent any harm being done.

A further more detailed vegetation survey and species specific surveys would help to determine what species are present on site. This would be of benefit as it would provide valuable data to help with the restoration of the ponds, the conservation of the species rich grassland and to help with enhancement measures, as well as to provide information for the education of visitors to the site.

The site presents many opportunities for enhancement to further encourage a diversity of species to thrive on site. It is considered that by sympathetic restoration of the site so as to retain and enhance its mosaic structure the already species rich site can be furthered. There will also be opportunities for enhancement for specific species such as owls, bats, reptiles and insects as well as restoring habitats such as the wildlife ponds and creating meadows and new planting.

3 Development Plan

A development plan has been formed for the first three years of the project with the primary aim of allowing access to as much of the site as possible for all abilities and ages.

The key early stage outputs are formalising access to the site, defining and securing the boundaries, constructing an outlying circular path around the site accessing the main features and provision of teaching/learning space to allow user groups. Also at an initial stage will be the first stage of scrub clearance and habitat restoration and placement of interpretation boards around the site showing both the existing baseline habitats and the proposed restoration scheme and how the community can get involved.

Development activities in years 2 and 3 will focus on building on the foundations laid by the year 1 activities restoring the key internal site features such as the watercourse, ponds, tree groupings and meadow in front of Abbotsfield House. During this stage further site facilities will be developed

Year 1	Years 2 & 3
Form entrance and public viewing area	Assess feasibility of micro-hydro on site
Fence the site boundary	Clear and define the sites internal pathways
Install access gates	Build and install pathway bridges
Clear and define the sites outer pathway	De-silt lakes
Clear scrub and vegetation	Begin works on vehicle access and turning area
Construct and install shelter points	Begin land management – grass
Define the rivers path	Begin land management – Trees
Cut and meadow seed the large grass area	Begin land management – River
Build and install interpretation boards	Begin land management – Lakes
Build and install a toilet	

4 Draft Management Plan

The site has been unmanaged for many years and has extensive scrub, tree, herb and grass growth covers the site hiding many features of the site and presenting many risks to site workers and site users. During the first year this vegetation should be cleared and the site opened up to show what features are present on site and help to remove/limit any potential risks to site workers and users. This will ideally be done during winter, with no excavation works, to create the least impact on flora and fauna that may be present on-site.

Once vegetation has been cleared and the surrounding boundary trees have been made safe the public can be encouraged to come to view the works being undertaken to create and maintain a sense of community ownership and support. This will be facilitated through the creation of a viewing platform with interpretation boards and works to establish a perimeter (fence and pathway) of the site which people can walk safely.

Also in year one, to facilitate works in year 2 and beyond there will be works to clear and define the streams pathway and establish shelter points and facilities. Bringing the stream back into bank and leaving small areas of marshy land works will create manageable habitats with the ability to establish protected habitat areas as well as protecting the safety of site users and the addition of 2 shelters and an on-site toilet with reed bed treatment system will create rest points for site users and a further habitat on-site.

Years 2 and beyond will require careful management of the vegetation and water features to create and maintain the wide variety of habitats on-site whilst enabling safe use of the site.

As part of the works the two ponds will be re-instated through a process of vegetation clearance and de-silting to open the waterway up for amenity use, improving existing and create new habitats to develop focal points for the site, care will be taken to provide benefit to any potentially existing habitat users, such as newts through actions taken.

With the established outer perimeter footpath internal pathways can be created, in conjunction with bridges for crossing of the river by able and disabled people. For the purpose of inclusion of the local community within the site it is proposed that a competition be held for local individuals and groups to design the bridges that will be used and constructed on site.