

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Executive
Date: 18th December 2024
Report for: Decision
Report of: Executive Member for Economy & Regeneration, Executive Member for Climate Change, Executive Member for Highways, Environmental & Traded Services

Report Title

Former William Wroe Golf Course, Flixton – Future Plans

Summary

William Wroe closed as a golf course in 2017. Fields in Trust protected status has been secured and as a next step, the Council needs to agree priorities for the site. The Arup options appraisal developed in 2019 set out a range of possible uses, including fitness, play, wildlife and relaxation. However, resources are limited, and the site is not part of the Amey One Trafford Partnership maintenance contract.

This report puts forward a proposed plan of action for the next few years, that focuses on the site as primarily a community greenspace with a countryside character and prioritises work to improve site accessibility, signage, access to nature, habitat improvements and natural flood management. External funding will be sought for carrying out nature-related improvements to the site, such as wetland reclamation. Other potential improvements that were set out in the Arup options appraisal, including fitness and play, will be deprioritised, due to capacity, capital funding and the level of additional maintenance resources necessary.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Executive:

- (i) Notes the contents of this report.
- (ii) Agrees to the proposed focus on access, infrastructure and nature-related activities for the next 2-3 years.
- (iii) Agrees to the Council and partners seeking further funding to progress accessibility improvements and wetland creation/reclamation work.
- (iv) Delegates authority to the Corporate Director of Place, following consultation with the Director of Finance and Systems, to agree the scope and funding of short-term infrastructure works to improve signage and access.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Paul Farrand

Extension: x5504

Background Papers: None

Appendices: None

CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS	
The Best Start for our Children and Young People	Restored wetlands could act as an important destination for students from local schools to access and learn about nature.
Healthy and Independent Lives for Everyone	The proposed work on the site will improve accessibility and allow more people to use the site and enjoy the health benefits of exercising in nature. The work will also provide opportunities for volunteer work to support the maintenance of the site.
A Thriving Economy and Homes for All	The wetland reclamation work will help protect properties and infrastructure in the area from potential flooding.
Address the Climate Crisis	The project will protect and enhance the site as a carbon sink and will increase the resilience of the local area to climate impacts such as flooding.
Culture, Sport and Heritage for Everyone	The site is a well-used local resource providing green space and physical activity to the community.
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	The project meets the GM 5 Year Environment vision of a clean, carbon neutral, climate resilient city region with a thriving natural environment, plus the GM Places for Everyone policy priorities under Sustainable and Resilient Places and Greener Places.
Financial Considerations	There are no immediate implications for the Council's existing budgets. The proposed future maintenance plan can be resourced in the short to medium term through existing resources and from partner and volunteer support. However, a more sustainable long-term option will eventually be needed. There may be a need for some match funding to attract grant funding from external sources which will need to be evaluated at the time accordingly.
Legal Implications:	The Council must comply with the requirements of the site's Fields in Trust protected status. The proposals contained within this report align with these statutory obligations and the implications of any future plans for the site will also be considered in this context.
Equality/Diversity Implications	Carrying out work to improve accessibility (e.g., a circular footpath route) will help expand access to a wider range of people. As it is a countryside site, rather than a formal park, it may not be reasonable to expect the site to be fully accessible. Inclusive access will be considered as work progresses.
Sustainability Implications	The project contributes to GM-level work on Biodiversity Net Gain, Green Infrastructure and Nature Based Solutions, with a Natural Capital approach employed.

Resource Implications e.g. Staffing / ICT / Assets	The proposed maintenance regime will add some additional tasks for the Council, such as inspection and sweeping of any permanent footpaths. Whilst the costs of this can be covered in the short-term, a more sustainable longer-term solution will be needed. Where possible, we will look to draw in partner and volunteer support for other maintenance tasks.
Risk Management Implications	As with any site of this nature, there are potential risks from trees. Tree works have been undertaken on site on an ad hoc basis to date, although a full tree survey of the site is planned for summer 2025.
Health & Wellbeing Implications	Improvements at William Wroe will increase opportunities for movement and physical activity. Access to nature, green spaces and walking and cycling will also provide additional health and wellbeing benefits, in line with Trafford Moving and Trafford Locality Plan.
Health and Safety Implications	Securing investment into William Wroe would enable the Council to address backlog maintenance issues relating to infrastructure and habitats, brought together with a site management plan.
Socioeconomic duty Implications	Carrying out work to improve accessibility will help attract more people to the site, who will be provided with multiple green space and wellbeing benefits at no cost.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 William Wroe was previously a municipal golf course, which closed in 2017. It was proposed for partial residential development as part of the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (now GM Places for Everyone) but was withdrawn from later versions of the Plan in 2018.
- 1.2 Following public engagement in 2019 and an options appraisal by Arup, in 2020 the Council Executive agreed to seek legal protection for the green space on behalf of the local community.
- 1.3 Fields in Trust status was confirmed in early 2024 and ward members and the local community are therefore now keen to have more clarity on what the immediate future holds for the site and what next steps need to be taken.

2.0 The Arup Options Appraisal

- 2.1 The Arup Options Appraisal¹ set out a guiding vision for the site as *“a truly multifunctional greenspace, providing opportunities for a diverse range of activities, and a landscape where wildlife can flourish”*. It was developed following a set of guiding landscape principles:
 - Improvements to access and circulation
 - Definition of site entrances
 - Connection of the north and south
 - Opportunity for diverse activity
 - Enhancement to ecology and biodiversity
 - Provision of visitor and community facilities

¹ <https://www.trafford.gov.uk/residents/leisure-and-lifestyle/countryside-and-conservation/docs/William-Wroe-Future-Appraisal.pdf>

2.2 On this basis, Arup proposed potential interventions arranged under 5 themed trails:

- Fitness
- Play
- Edible
- Wildlife
- Relaxation

Using 5 criteria (delivering the vision, key themes from consultation, Council corporate objectives, deliverability, cost), possible interventions were prioritised. High and moderate scoring interventions were identified as possible short-term measures (0-3 years), with low scoring interventions requiring a longer-term approach (3-5 years+).

High	Moderate	Low
Wildflower meadows/nature trail	Structural landscape planting	Community hub/learning resource
Creation of wetland areas and boardwalks	Reinstatement of historic orchard	Café/catering
Access to/from Flixton Road and Church Rd	Improved bridge crossing	Replacement railway bridge crossing
Installation of benches and furniture	Sculpture and sculpture trail / sculptural play	
Creation of spaces for group activity		
Outdoor fitness trail		
Food growing space/edibles		
Natural play features		
Creation of green corridors		
Creation of glades and relaxation spaces		

2.3 The options appraisal also considered a number of potential management approaches:

- Council retains overall ownership, with site management through environmental partners and charities framed by a management agreement.
- Trust model – company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity, overseen by a board of trustees.
- Strategic management by Council through Trafford Countryside Management Partnership (TCMP), with site management through a private maintenance contractor.

3.0 The current situation

3.1 **Maintenance:** The One Trafford Partnership contract with Amey predated the closure of the golf course, and as such does not include for the routine maintenance of the site. Since the golf course’s closure, a basic maintenance regime has been carried out, including mowing access routes and carrying out maintenance to infrastructure and trees as necessary. The wider meadow area is mowed once a year, with paths being mowed closer to the ground seven times a year. This allows the Council to manage the site by moving mown path routes around the site annually, allowing ground to recover. Bins associated with the golf course were removed from the site to reflect its countryside character. All perimeter hedges are cut annually, with a reactive service to any hedge encroachments. The Council has an annual base budget of £16k to fund any planned and reactive maintenance activity at the site.

3.2 **Nature and green space:** Work has been carried out since December 2023 by TEP, funded by Natural England as part of their ‘Lost Wetlands’ programme and co-ordinated by City of

Trees. The project explored the feasibility of enhancing existing and creating new wetland habitats. The final report recommends a number of wetland areas for the site, along with some landscape works, and footpath loops around the north and south of the site. A plan showing a possible layout of the site is included at Appendix A, along with some photos at Appendix B showing the current site. The TEP report has been shared with ward members and Flixton Green for All and forms the basis for further funding bids to implement the recommendations.

- 3.3 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to development to ensure that habitats for wildlife are left in a better state than before the development took place. Where developers cannot provide all the BNG on-site they are able to deliver it off-site through buying 'biodiversity units'. In July 2024, a baseline ecological assessment of the site was carried out which identified the potential for biodiversity improvements which could generate biodiversity units. This could potentially provide a revenue stream to fund biodiversity improvements. This is a complex and emerging area, and officers are reviewing options alongside GMCA colleagues, with the intention of reporting to a future Executive if this is likely to be a deliverable opportunity.

4.0 Future plans

- 4.1 Whilst the Arup options appraisal highlighted a range of potential uses, it is proposed that the short-term priority for the site over the next 2-3 years should focus on nature and biodiversity, achieved through the existing Council maintenance budget, supplemented with any opportunities for external funding. Examples of such funding are outlined in section 6.3 below. Alongside this, it is proposed to make some simple improvements to the site in terms of accessibility and signage, which will publicise the site's protected status and new name following a public vote. Some of this work has been costed in the TEP report. For example, a circular path and accompanying infrastructure (e.g. some boardwalks) in the northern section of the site could cost in the region of £175,000. As outlined in paragraph 6.1 below, some funding is available to support this work. However, consultation with community groups and ward members will be needed to identify the best options within available resources. It is also planned to add some new site signage now the new name for the site has been agreed (see paragraph 8.0 for more information).
- 4.2 **Maintenance:** The short to medium term management approach would be a continuation of that outlined in paragraph 3.1, with a focus on partner and volunteer support to help with additional habitat management. The intention would be to stop grass cutting in selected areas from April-September to allow for species to flower and set seed. The Council would carry out grass cutting in late September / early October with scything work supported by The Conservation Volunteers (TCV). The sites chosen for wetland reclamation and creation may need some replanting of native species once the above works have completed, and there may need to be removal of any debris that may have accumulated over time via TCV, City of Trees and volunteers. Trees and woody vegetation would require some thinning via City of Trees, TCV and volunteers in conjunction with the Council Tree Unit, as part of a dedicated and itemised site management plan.
- 4.3 Any new, surfaced footpath routes will need routine maintenance along with inspection approximately every six months (by highway inspector). This will identify any repairs required. One-off repairs would need to be funded from the non-adopted highways revenue budget but would need to be considered alongside the needs of other parks and greenspace locations across the Borough. TfGM has contributed £130,000 to greening measures as a condition of the Trafford Park Metrolink development work and there is potential to prioritise an element to support some urgent footpath work on site. Formal paths will need sweeping/blowing to remove build of detritus approximately every 3- 4 months, and boardwalks and bridges over the wetlands would require routine inspections and clearance (leaves & vegetation). This will need to be factored into commitments against the existing routine maintenance budget in 3.1 above. There will need to be further work undertaken to explore

the funding of more sustainable, long-term options for the management of and any investment in the site.

- 4.4 There will also be certain maintenance tasks associated with the wetland areas, for example occasional sediment removal from the drainage infrastructure, with low pressure jetting when required and work to remove vegetation from underground chambers. The aim would be for this work to be carried out by volunteers, overseen by partners such as City of Trees, TCV and/or Groundwork.
- 4.5 It will be important to manage risks such as those arising from trees. A site tree survey was last carried out in August 2020. A new survey is planned for summer 2025.
- 4.6 **Nature and green space:** The future approach for the site seeks to build upon its potential for the delivery of nature-based solutions to climate impacts, as well as enhancing the site's role as an important open space and biodiversity asset. This approach is set within the wider context of the site's relationship to the western Mersey Valley and strategic initiatives including New Carrington GM Places for Everyone allocation and masterplan, the Great Manchester Wetlands partnership project, River Basin Catchment Management Plans, the Urmston Place Plan and Active Neighbourhood and United Utilities Asset Management Plan. The site also offers potential as a venue for the development of green skills development and training as one of a number of important hubs across Trafford including Longford Park, Sale Water Park and Trafford Ecology Park.
- 4.7 There are various funding sources available to the Council and partners, to support the implementation of the proposals in the TEP report. The Council and partners will keep these under review and collaborate to develop bids as appropriate, which may require match funding.

5.0 Long term management model

- 5.1 The report to Executive in March 2020 set out some ideas for possible future management models, as mentioned in Paragraph 2.3. More work will be needed to assess these further, involving discussions with existing and potential partners to gauge their interest, alongside legal and asset management implications. Once investigated, these will be subject to a future report to the Executive.

6.0 Funding

- 6.1 In addition to the nature-related funding streams mentioned above, funding already exists to carry out some basic work on the site:
- TfGM has contributed £130,000 to greening measures as a condition of the Trafford Park Metrolink development work. The Council is reviewing schemes to utilise this across the Borough but there is potential to utilise some element to support urgent footpath work on site.
 - There is £16k in the Council's annual revenue budget for the day-to-day upkeep of the William Wroe site. A one-off capital budget of £40k is also included in the Council's approved capital programme for 2024/25.
- 6.2 Council officers will work with community groups and ward members to scope out work that can be carried out in the short term, using the funding outlined above, to improve accessibility and signage at the site.
- 6.3 Further external funding will need to be accessed to support the wetland reclamation work. A recent bid to Projects for Nature, a platform connecting business with nature recovery projects, for £160,000, was unfortunately unsuccessful. A bid to the Environment Agency's Water Environment Investment Fund has been submitted for £84,000, with an outcome

anticipated in May 2025, whilst ongoing collaborative work with United Utilities is likely to result in funding related to improvements to drains and watercourses on site and disconnection opportunities from neighbouring residential streets as part of the natural flood management approach.

6.4 Planning contributions for biodiversity improvements may also be forthcoming from applications approved prior to mandatory BNG being introduced (February 2024), which is dependent on the planning applications involved being implemented and commenced.

6.5 Looking ahead, other bids could be considered to funds such as any future rounds of the GM Greenspace Fund, crowdfunding and potential landfill funds from the likes of Suez and Veolia. Any future funding bids requiring match funding would need to be evaluated for affordability at the time.

7.0 Other options

7.1 Other options are:

- Continue the current management approach without further site enhancements, with consequent adverse impacts in respect of community aspirations, climate change adaptation and nature recovery potential
- Postpone short to medium-term improvements in favour of exploring in detail alternative long term management models, which would fail to take advantage of the range of funding opportunities and volunteer resources that are available currently.
- Use available funding to implement many of the high and moderate priorities from the ARUP options appraisal, with repercussions for the medium to long-term management of the site and associated revenue budget impacts.

8.0 Renaming

8.1 The Council and the Flixton Green for All group invited residents to put forward suggestions for a new name for the site. The most popular suggestions were included in a final shortlist of three that were put to the public vote:

1. Wroe Green
2. Flixton Green
3. William Wroe Meadows

The most popular suggestion was number 3 – William Wroe Meadows. This outcome will be announced alongside the unveiling of a sign on site to mark and celebrate the site's protection with the wording "Protected Forever with Fields in Trust – Green Spaces for Good". Additional signs featuring the new name will be installed to reflect this.

9.0 Next steps

9.1 The next steps for the site are as follows:

- Further socialisation of the TEP wetlands report with key partners.
- Take forward work to improve signage and accessibility, in consultation with ward members and the local community, using available funding (e.g. see paragraph 6.1).
- Develop a site management plan, similar to those produced for green flag winning parks.
- Carry out a tree survey of the site to assess state of trees and possible risks – planned for summer 2025.
- Seek further funding for implementing the wetland reclamation work.

10.0 Consultation

- 10.1 Public consultation has taken place over autumn 2024 as part of the renaming competition and vote (see below), whilst Council officers, Ward and Executive Members have continued to liaise with the Flixton Green for All community group regarding progress with site protection and improvements. Further local consultation will be undertaken as part of a first phase of identity and infrastructure improvements referred to in the report and as part of the production of a site management plan that has local community support.

11.0 Reasons for recommendations

- 11.1 The Executive Members for Economy and Regeneration and for Climate Change are asked to approve the short to medium-term approach to realising ambitions for improved accessibility, infrastructure, biodiversity and natural flood management at William Wroe. This approach will allow the Council and partners to focus efforts on securing additional capital funding to implement the proposals within the TEP study, whilst capturing and communicating site management within a dedicated management plan that places an emphasis on resource-efficient, low-cost interventions with added capacity via environmental partners plus community groups and volunteers.


Key Decision No

If Key Decision, has 28-day notice been given? NA

Finance Officer Clearance PC

Legal Officer Clearance EM

[CORPORATE] DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE *(electronic)*



To confirm that the Financial and Legal Implications have been considered and the Corporate Director has cleared the report prior to issuing to the Executive Member for decision.

Appendices:

Appendix A – possible option for wetland reclamation

Appendix B – site photos

Appendix A – possible option for wetland reclamation



Appendix B – site photos

SITE PHOTOS | NORTHERN SECTION



WESTERN ACCESS (FLIXTON ROAD CAR PARK)



FLIXTON PARK PLAY AREA



VIEW EAST FROM WESTERN DITCHLINE



FLIXTON PARK - VIEW NORTH FROM ACCESS



SMALL WETLAND AREA ON WESTERN DITCHLINE



BRIDGE ACROSS WESTERN DITCHLINE

SITE PHOTOS | SOUTHERN SECTION



INFORMAL ACCESS FROM CHURCH ROAD



SOUTHERN END OF DITCHLINE IN SOUTH-EAST CORNER (NR CHURCH ROAD)



VIEW SOUTH-WEST ALONG DITCHLINE IN SOUTH-EAST CORNER



ELEVATED VIEW WEST OVER DEVELOPING WETLAND AREA IN SOUTH-EAST CORNER



VIEW EAST ACROSS DITCHLINE & DEVELOPING WETLAND AREA IN SOUTH EAST CORNER