

BATESWOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE – PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Submitted by: Head of Operations – Roger Tait

Portfolio: Culture and Active Communities

Ward(s) affected: Halmer End/Audley and Bignall End

Purpose of the Report

To report the findings of the recent consultation which was carried out to ascertain public opinion on requests from the community for an additional bridle route provision and use of part of the main pool for fishing in Bateswood Local Nature Reserve.

Recommendation

That the views of the Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are obtained and are included in the report to cabinet.

Reasons

To ensure that Bateswood Local Nature Reserve is managed to offer people special opportunities to study, enjoy and learn about nature.

To ensure that other identified community recreational needs in the locality are met and managed to coexist with the educational and nature conservation uses of the site.

1. Background

- 1.1 At the Cabinet meeting of 7 September 2011 it was resolved that consultation be carried out to ascertain public opinion on requests from the community for additional bridle route provision and use of part of the main pool for fishing in Bateswood Local Nature Reserve in Halmer End.
- 1.2 At Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 31 October 2011, the committee agreed that the proposed methods of consultation were acceptable. A copy of the agreed consultation plan is attached to this report at Appendix A.
- 1.3 In summary, 950 leaflets were hand delivered to local residents' homes by ward members which signposted residents to an online questionnaire and telephone/e-mail contact details to use to submit comments. The questionnaire was publicised via flyers in local shops and community buildings, an article in the Reporter and a press release. Letters were sent to relevant local and national organisations. During the consultation period, a public meeting was also arranged by a local ward member. The meeting was held on 13 January 2012 at Halmer End Methodist Church and 102 people attended the meeting.
- 1.4 During the consultation period 2 petitions were also received.

The first was submitted on 25 January 2012 signed by 257 people and requests:

"We, the undersigned, would like to like to support the proposal of extending the bridle path in Bateswood Local Nature Reserve; and would like Newcastle Borough Council to take into consideration when deciding whether to approve these proposals".

- 1.5 A further petition was received on 26 January 2012 signed by 225 people, this requests:
- "We the undersigned wish Bateswood to remain as a nature reserve. We do not want to have fishing or any other activities on the lake nor do we want an extra bridleway on the reserve".*
- 1.6 Under the council's petition scheme, both petitions received enough signatures to trigger a Council debate and were scheduled for the meeting of Wednesday 22 February 2012.
- 1.7 The petitions were considered by full council at the meeting of 22 February 2012. The resolution of Council will be reported verbally at your meeting.
- 1.8 The results of the questionnaires were collated following the closing date for responses of 27 January 2012. The Council received 210 individual responses to the questionnaire and 10 letters from individual residents. This represents a response rate to the leaflet delivery of 23.1%.
- 1.9 Responses were received from the following 13 groups, copies of which are attached at Appendix D:
- Keele Parish Council: responded to say that no comments were raised.
 - The Environment Agency
 - The RSPCA: responded to say they are unable to provide comments.
 - Audley LAP
 - Audley Rural Parish Council
 - Halmer End Wildlife Trust
 - Newcastle Countryside Project
 - Staffordshire Police Architectural Liaison Officer
 - Staffordshire Wildlife Trusts
 - Natural England
 - Staffordshire County Council Environment and Countryside
 - The North Staffordshire Bridleways Association.
 - The Equestrian Forum
- 1.10 25 people provided their contact details suggesting that they would like to become involved in improving Bateswood LNR.

2. **Issues**

- 2.1 The results of the consultation are provided in Appendix A, with a list of themed comments provided at Appendix C.
- 2.2 The discussions at the public meeting of Friday 13 January (organised by a local ward member) highlighted many conflicts and tensions between community user groups regarding the use of the site.

Horse Riding Results:

Support:

- 2.3 The majority 71.2% (148) of respondents to the questionnaire supported the principle of an additional bridle route in Bateswood LNR. Both route options were supported, with option B being preferred by most.

2.4 Support for the project was demonstrated by the petition signed by 257 people:

“We, the undersigned, would like to like to support the proposal of extending the bridle path in Bateswood Local Nature Reserve; and would like Newcastle Borough Council to take into consideration when deciding whether to approve these proposals”.

2.5 Support, subject to comments, which could be accommodated, was indicated by:

- The Environment Agency
- Natural England
- Staffordshire Police
- Staffordshire County Council: Environment and Countryside
- Staffordshire Wildlife Trusts
- The North Staffordshire Bridleways Association.
- The Equestrian Forum

Opposition:

2.6 Opposition to the project was indicated by 28.8% (60) respondents to the questionnaire.

2.7 Opposition to the project was demonstrated by the petition signed by 225 people:

“We the undersigned wish Bateswood to remain as a nature reserve. We do not want to have fishing or any other activities on the lake nor do we want an extra bridleway on the reserve”.

2.8 Opposition was indicated from the following consultees:

- The Halmer End Wildlife Trust

Angling Results:

Support:

2.9 A narrower majority of respondents 57.4% (116) supported the principle of allowing angling on part of the large pool, than was the case with the bridle route.

2.10 55.1% (109) of respondents supported the proposed area (shown as the zigzag on the plan) being designated for fishing.

2.11 Support, subject to comments which could be accommodated was indicated by:

- The Environment Agency
- Natural England
- Staffordshire Police
- Staffordshire County Council: Environment and Countryside

Opposition:

2.12 Opposition to the project was indicated by 86 (42.6%) of respondents to the questionnaire

2.13 Opposition to the project was demonstrated by the petition signed by 225 people.

“We the undersigned wish Bateswood to remain as a nature reserve. We do not want to have fishing or any other activities on the lake nor do we want an extra bridleway on the reserve”.

2.14 Opposition was given from the following consultees:

- Halmer End Wildlife Trust.
- Staffordshire Wildlife Trusts.

3. **Options Considered**

3.1 That the Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the results of the consultation and make comment to inform any decision which Cabinet may wish to make.

4. **Proposal**

4.1 That the views of the Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are obtained and are included in the report to cabinet.

5. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

5.1 To ensure that Bateswood Local Nature Reserve is managed for its designated purpose, which is to offer people special opportunities to study or learn about nature or simply to enjoy it.

5.2 To ensure that other identified community recreational needs in the locality are met and managed to co-exist with the educational and nature conservation uses of the site.

6. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

6.1 Creating a cleaner, safer and sustainable Borough.

6.2 Creating a healthy and active community.

7. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

7.1 The Council is empowered to provide recreational facilities by a number of statutes relating to open space, public health, miscellaneous provisions and well-being. The Council is required by statute to consider the effect of any decision on crime and disorder.

7.2 Bateswood Local Nature Reserve has been declared as a Local Nature Reserve under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

8. **Equality Impact Assessment**

8.1 It is considered that a positive differential impact will accrue from providing additional recreational opportunities at the site.

9. **Financial and Resource Implications**

9.1 There are no direct capital or revenue implications arising from this report.

10. **Major Risks**

10.1 The major risks associated with this report are:

- Conflict and tensions between community user groups regarding the use of the site
- Pressure on the Council from community groups with differing views regarding the use of the site
- Potential loss of support from community groups involved in the management of the site
- Adverse media reaction
- Reputational damage
- Pressure on staff resources in managing the consultation process

11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 The report will not result in significant savings or expenditure for the Council. It impacts directly on two wards and has been included in the Forward Plan.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

Full Council 22 February 2012

Cabinet 7 September 2011. Resolution No 297/12

Cabinet 18 December 2002 Resolution No. 759/03

Cabinet 13 September 2006 Resolution No. 366/07

13. **List of Appendices**

Appendix A - Results of the Consultation

Appendix B - Approved Consultation Plan

Appendix C - List of comments received

Appendix D - Group responses (will be available)