**Specification: Management of conservation areas at**

**Conningbrook Lakes Country Park**

**Outline Requirements**

The successful bidder will contracted for a period of 5 years to manage the designated nature conservation areas of Conningbrook Lakes Country Park (compartments 1, 3 & 4 on the attached plan) in accordance with the Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Management Plan 2016-20 and Conningbrook Lakes Management Objectives 2021-25. The nature conservation areas of the country park covers an area of approximately 46 acres, including approximately 2.5 miles (4000m) of river and lakeside habitats, the ‘eco-lake’ and area of wet woodland (14 acres), grazing / wildflower meadow (21 acres). The successful bidder will also provide a part-time 'warden service', and develop and implement a volunteer and community engagement programme. Another important element of the contract is to monitor and record flora and fauna and to measure biodiversity gain throughout the duration of the contract.

**Detailed requirements**

1. Provide a part-time ’park warden’ service and appoint a ‘point of contact’ for the management of the nature conservation areas of Conningbrook Lakes Country Park. The park warden service to include regular monitoring and oversight visits at least three times per week to:
   1. Monitor and maintain the existing condition of the boundary and stock fencing and gates within compartments 1, 3 and 4 (and any new fences/gates as agreed by the parties);
   2. Maintain and keep clear all pathways and public rights of way;
   3. Make adequate arrangements for the management and clearance of litter;
   4. Report any damage and/or vandalism (i.e. to life belts, park furniture etc.) and/or illegal activity on the Land;
   5. Report any observed incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB) through appropriate channels as specified under the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) currently in force until June 2024
2. Implement and in consultation with ABC’s Nature Conservation Officer review and revise as necessary the Management Plan[[1]](#endnote-1) to incorporate the ‘Management Objectives’[[2]](#endnote-2)with the overall aim of enhancing wildlife habitats and increasing biodiversity. This will include recording and monitoring flora and fauna in order to measure biodiversity gain (or loss) over the course of the contract.
3. Organise and implement a seasonal conservation grazing regime in accordance with the Management Plan and Management Objectives, including the provision of livestock (sheep or cattle) either from own herds or through arrangements with a local farmer / grazier.
4. Develop and implement a volunteer and education programme in support of conservation objectives, and promote community involvement in the implementation of the Management Plan and Management Objectives. This to include weekly (depending on the season) volunteer task days throughout the year and as required to implement the management plan, including invasive species control,grassland and scrub management, coppicing, birch pulling, litter picking, fencing and path maintenance.
5. Engage with and maintain good relations with residents on the Conningbrook Lakes estate, including by interacting on social media platforms, with a view to managing impacts on adjacent conservation areas particularly in ensuring dogs are kept on leads at all times throughout the country park.
6. Engage with local organisations with an interest in nature conservation, such as the Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT), Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP), and other private and voluntary sector organisation with a view to developing partnership-working opportunities.
7. Provide training / work experience opportunities for volunteers interested in pursuing a career in nature conservation.
8. Work closely and coordinate with other Country Park ‘operating partners’ such as Freedom Leisure (Freedom) and Mid Kent Fisheries (MKF), and attend bi-monthly meetings of the Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Operating Partners Steering Group (Steering Group).
9. Attend quarterly contract management meeting with ABC to review delivery of key requirements and to evaluate progress in implementing the Management Plan and Management Objectives and the targets set for delivery of the volunteer and community engagement programmes.

**Detailed Management Objectives 2021-25**

The following section lays out the Management Objectives 2021-25. The successful bidder must present an outline of how they intend to achieve these objectives.

1. **Manage and improve the habitat quality of the wet woodland areas surrounding the lakes, specifically for breeding and migrating bird populations, as well as for reptiles, amphibians, dragonfliesand other invertebrate populations**.

* Create a varied age structure of trees through regular coppicing and scrub management to provide greater abundance of nesting and roosting sites as well as feeding sources for birds, and improved basking, breeding and feeding conditions for reptiles, amphibians and dragonflies.
* Manage reed beds to control water levels and to reverse natural succession, creating structure and ensuring balanced presence of young and mature reeds.
* Control invasive species, specifically Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) and Lucerne (*Medicago sativa*). Eradicate Himalayan Balsam from site working from edge of range towards riverside.

1. **Manage and enhance improved, semi-improved and wet grasslands, including its ponds and pools, specifically for butterflies and dragonflies, and for amphibians and reptiles. Other key species to benefit include barn owl, harvest mouse and skylark**.

* Create and maintain a varied structure of biodiverse grasslands favourable to reptiles and other target species.
* Encourage native flowering species to increase nectar source for insects.
* Create and maintain areas of wet grassland.
* Keep pools and ponds in favourable condition, including rich species diversity and stable water levels.

1. **Protect sensitive habitats and wildlife from the impacts of public access, construction works and the neighbouring estate through access management and engagement with the developer and the public.**

* Create natural barriers to the Eco Lake to protect the breeding bird population and other sensitive wildlife, while allowing for a dynamic viewing experience created by different coppice stages.
* Support the installation of a bird hide as the only access point to the Eco Lake to allow visitors to enjoy the view of the lake without causing disturbance to sensitive birds and other species.
* Manage the central area of the Northern Meadow as a pedestrian free area to prevent impact from dogs on bird and reptile populations, while providing access for visitors around the perimeter of the Northern meadow and along the river Stour.
* Support the creation and enforcement of a *Public Space Protection Order* (PSPO) and other instruments of zoning.
* Positively influence and engage with the public through regular presence on site and engagement events, focussing on local residents, dog walkers and other regular site users.
* Monitor the impact of construction works and the neighbouring estate and liaise with the developer to prevent and remedy negative outcomes for sensitive habitats and its wildlife.

1. **Engagement with the general public, and specifically the local residents and visitors, to promote ownership and protection of the Country Park as well as to create a legacy of its continuous care**

* Run yearly events to engage with the public with a strong initial focus on local residents and regular visitors.
* Engage with the residents of the Conningbrook Lakes estate through various channels, online as well as face to face.
* Inspire and support the creation of a self-led Conningbrook Lakes Action Group.

1. **Manage and improve the riparian and lake habitat to benefit bird and fish populations as well as dragonflies, water voles and otters.**

* Improve hydromorphology of the river to increase flow diversity and to achieve a greater presence of pools, riffles and sediment bars for the benefit of fish, invertebrate and plant populations.
* Enhance riverbank structure and vegetation to improve waterflow during dry periods, increase flood storage during wet periods, and to restore habitat for water voles, otters, and riparian birds.
* Implement effective invasive species control through joint efforts with neighbouring landowners and land managers (e.g. KSCP).
* Run regular litter cleans along the riverbanks as well as from within the river itself through joint efforts with Pirate Canoe Club and other clubs and organisations
* Improve marginal and floating vegetation of lakes to improve habitat for breeding and migrating birds as well as for dragonflies.

1. **Skills and Expertise Requirements**

The successful bidder must demonstrate that key personnel employed by their organisation possess the skills and expertise required to implement the management requirements (outlined above) and to successfully implement and achieve the objectives of the Management Plan and Management Objectives.

In particular, the person appointed as *Park Warden* should demonstrate:

* Aptitude and enthusiasm for working with people, including leading/managing volunteers and working with partners to achieve results through consensus;
* Knowledge of wildlife and a relevant degree in ecology, nature conservation or a related subject;
* An ability to deliver practical wildlife conservation work including nature conservation management techniques, natural history and biological monitoring and surveying techniques;
* Experience of community engagement work;
* Excellent IT and communication skills and an ability to write reports and work/management plans;
* A good understanding of health and safety issues and experience in preparing risk assessments;
* Certificates of competence in chain saw and brush-cutter operation and first aid
* Full driving licence (including trailer)

The following experience is also desirable:

* Organising public engagement events
* Livestock management
* Managing contracts and contractors

**Background Documents**

* AS27 River Great Stour Ashford to Fordwich Kent Local Wildlife Site *(Citation, KWT, 2006)*
* AS27 River Great Stour near Ashford Plan - Kent Local Wildlife Site *(Kent Wildlife Trust, 2006)*
* Land at Conningbrook Lakes - Ecological Management Strategy *(Bioscan, 2012)*
* Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Ecological Management Plan *(Ashford Borough Council, Feb 2014)*
* Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Management Plan 2016-2020 (Ashford Borough Council/ Kent Wildlife Trust, 2016) – under revision
* Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Management Objectives 2021-25 (Ashford Borough Council)

1. The Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Management Plan 2016-20 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Conningbrook Lakes Management Objectives 2021-25 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)