# Conningbrook – Management of nature conservation areas

### CONTRACT NUMBER

Conningbrook/21/1

## VALUE OF CONTRACT

£ 150,000

## PROCUREMENT

Open tender

### CONTRACT START DATE

1st April 2022

### CONTRACT END DATE

31 March 2027

#### TEAM:

**Lead:** Len Mayatt & Terry Jones

**Key participating departments:** Culture, Tourism & Leisure

#### DESCRIPTION

Ashford Borough Council invites interested organisations and companies to submit tenders for the management of the nature conservation areas of Conningbrook Lakes Country Park (compartments 1, 3 & 4 on the attached plan) in accordance with the Management Plan 2016-2020 [[1]](#endnote-1) (‘Management Plan’) and Management Objectives 2021-26[[2]](#endnote-2) (‘Management Objectives’). Management of the site will include a seasonal conservation-grazing programme.

The Council will offer the successful bidder a five-year contract.

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.

#### BACKGROUND

Following a period of extensive consultation with stakeholders and potential end-users Ashford Borough Council (ABC) formally opened Conningbrook Lakes Country Park in 2015 for ‘early years access’, with limited infrastructure and facilities. From the outset, the plan was to gradually improve and develop the country park with funding generated from the associated housing development. Stakeholders agreed the following vision for the country park:

*“Conningbrook Lakes will be transformed to create a new country park at the gateway to the Stour Valley. It will contain the existing Julie Rose Stadium and will provide opportunities to expand the existing leisure facilities offered to include a range of water-based sports and other activities. The development of the country park will also contribute to biodiversity through the enhancement of habitats throughout the site, and will also provide new links to established public rights of way and cycle routes”.*

The *Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Ecological Management Plan (Feb 2014) [[3]](#endnote-3)* sets out the strategy for managing the country park in the early years and beyond, and in particular the key management roles and responsibilities expected of the respective ‘operating partners’ appointed by ABC to implement this plan.

The country park and associated residential area is comprised of five management compartments. The *Ecological Management Strategy* [[4]](#endnote-4) prepared by Bioscan on behalf of the Brett Group following extensive consultations with ABC and Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT), describes these management compartments and the general framework for ecological management. The strategy also serves as a baseline reference point for the future development of specific management plans for the respective compartments of the country park, which are:

* Compartment 1 – Northern field, lake and adjacent section of river
* Compartment 2 – Residential area
* Compartment 3 – Lake, river and wet woodland within the Local Wildlife Site (LWS)
* Compartment 4 – Southern grasslands and adjacent river
* Compartment 5 – Recreational Lake and activities centre

In order to effectively integrate and coordinate the management of the four compartments that form the country park, in 2015 ABC negotiated Management Agreements with three ‘Operating Partners’, each with specialist expertise, skills and resources: -

* Ashford Leisure Trust (now Freedom Leisure) - to manage the activity programme, including water sports and other recreational activities and to manage and maintain the compartment set aside for leisure and recreation (Compartment 5)
* Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT) - to manage and enhance all the areas set aside for nature conservation (Compartments 1, 3 & 4), including the ‘eco-lake’ and wet woodland, riverside habitats and northern meadow / ecological mitigation area – and to provide a part-time warden and public engagement role and volunteer programme;
* Mid Kent Fisheries (MKF) – to manage fishing in the main lake and provide water bailiff duties and to assist and advise ABC in all matters related to the management of water quality in the main lake.

An Operating Partners’ Steering Group meets regularly to ensure close coordination between the respective operating partners.

*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 (KWT, 2006)
* Land at Conningbrook Lakes - Ecological Management Strategy (Bioscan, 2012)
* Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Ecological Management Plan (ABC, Feb 2014)
* Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Management Plan (ABC/KWT, 2016 – 2020)
* Conningbrook Lakes Management Objectives (2021-25)

#### 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 2016-20 to incorporate the ‘Management Objectives 2021-25’ 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, 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 and Management Objectives, 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 the targets set for delivery of the volunteer and community engagement programmes.

#### OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS:

The broad aim of the Management Plan and Management Objectives for the nature conservation areas of the country park is to protect and enhance habitats and to achieve long-term biodiversity gain.

**Wet woodland areas**: The habitat quality of the wet woodland areas surrounding the lakes will improve for the benefit of breeding and migrating bird populations, as well as for reptiles, amphibians, dragonfliesand other invertebrate populations. Regular coppicing and scrub management will create a varied age structure of trees and provide more nesting and roosting sites as well as feeding sources for birds, and better basking, breeding and feeding conditions for reptiles, amphibians and dragonflies. Management of reed beds to control water levels and reverse natural succession will create a better structure and balance of young and mature reeds. Another important outcome will be the control of invasive species, notably Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) and Lucerne (*Medicago sativa*).

**Improved habitats for butterflies and dragonflies, and amphibians & reptiles**

Management of improved, semi-improved and wet grasslands, including ponds and pools, will provide a varied structure of biodiverse grasslands favourable to reptiles and other target species. Encouragement of native flowering species will increase sources of nectar for insects, while the creation of areas of wet grassland, including pools and ponds will promote greater species diversity.

**Protecting sensitive habitats and wildlife**

Sensitive habitat and wildlife will be protected from the impacts of public access, construction works and the neighbouring estate through access management and engagement with the developer and the public. Creation of natural barriers to the Eco Lake will protect the breeding bird population and other sensitive wildlife. The planned installation of a bird hide will provide 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. The management of the central area of the Northern Meadow as a pedestrian free zone will prevent impact from dogs on bird and reptile populations, while providing visitor access around the perimeter of the Northern meadow and along the River Stour. A programme of community engagement focussing on local residents, dog walkers and other visitors to the country park will raise public awareness of the importance of protecting sensitive habitats and species.

**Community engagement**

The programme of community engagement with local residents and visitors will promote ownership and protection of the Country Park and create a legacy of its continuous care. This will include annual events to engage with the public with an initial focus on local residents and regular visitors. The programme will also involve engage with the residents of the Conningbrook Lakes estate through various channels, including social media and face to face.

**Improvement of riparian and lake habitat to benefit wildlife**

Management of the riparian and lakeside habitats will focus on bird and fish populations as well as dragonflies, water voles and otters. This will include improving the 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. The enhancement of riverbank structure and vegetation will improve water flow during dry periods and increase flood storage during wet periods, and restore habitat for water voles, otters, and riparian birds. The implementation of an invasive species control programme through joint efforts with neighbouring landowners and land managers (e.g. KSCP) will contribute to improving habitats. The community engagement programme will include regular litter cleans along the riverbanks as well as from within the river itself through joint efforts with groups that use the lake for water sports activities and angling. Improvements to marginal and floating vegetation on the three lakes will provide ideal habitat for breeding and migrating birds as well as for dragonflies.

#### CONTRACT PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The appointed contractor will fulfil the detailed requirements as set out in Section 4 above and implement the Management Plan with the aim of achieving the outcomes and benefits specified in Section 5. The Council will measure the performance of the contractor as follows:-

* The Contract will be monitored by the Nature Conservation Officer at Ashford Borough Council (or other officer designated by the Council)
* The appointed Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Warden (the Warden) will act as the named point of contact with the Council, and be available to respond to any issues that might arise at the Country Park;
* The contractor will 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)
* The Warden (and/or other representative of the Contractor) will attend quarterly contract management meetings with ABC to review delivery of key requirements and to evaluate progress in implementing the Management Plan and the targets set for delivery of the volunteer and community engagement programmes.
* The contractor will present an annual review of progress in implementing the Management Plan, including any recommendations to modify the plan. This review will include an assessment of biodiversity indicators for the Country Park highlighting any pressures or threats and the state of species and ecosystems.

#### PROCUREMENT ASSESSMENT:

For this contract the assessment will be based on evaluation of a bid submission followed by an invitation of the top three highest scoring applications to interview for formal presentation, then selection of the successful contractor.

A panel of Ashford Borough Council Officers will evaluate the tenders and score then individually. The scores will then be moderated.

It is expected that bids that come forward will be within the available budget of £150,000 over the five years of the contract term.

We will be evaluating response to the brief and will apply the following scores to the quality criteria listed below, which are weighted accordingly.

Please adhere to the page limit requested, and provide your response in no less than Arial 10 font.

#### BID EVALUATION:

Your bid will be assessed as follows;

Tender Submission - 80% (Quality 80% / Price 20% = 100% converted to 80%)

Interview evaluation - 20%

#### SCORING CRITERIA:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Score for Assessed Questions** | **Criteria** | **Judgement** |
| **10** | Statement exceeds requirements and adds significant value | Excellent |
| **8** | Statement exceeds requirements and adds some value | Good |
| **6** | Statement meets all the requirements (“par”) | Satisfactory |
| **4** | Statement fails to meet requirements in some way | Unsatisfactory |
| **2** | Statement fails to meet requirements in a significant way | Poor |
| **0** | Statement is unsuitable and / or suggests unacceptable risk | Not to be considered |

#### QUALITY CRITERIA:

* 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.
* Nominated ‘park warden’ to have relevant experience and expertise in nature conservation and ecology (at least to Degree Level). All personnel leading volunteer programmes to be suitably qualified and licenced in the use of chain saws, strimmers, etc. and possess recognised qualifications in tree safety and inspections (i.e. LANTRA or equivalent). Experience of managing livestock is also desirable, as is Full driving (clean) licence including use of trailer, and access to 4x4 vehicle especially during winter months.
* Expertise and practical experience in monitoring and recording flora and fauna species
* Experience in organising and leading groups of volunteers, and in public/community engagement.

Your bid will be evaluated using the following criteria;

Please adhere to the page limit requested, and provide your response in no less than Arial 10 font.

* Quality / impact (= 100% weighting (converted to 80%)
  1. Lead partner expertise - 30% - (1No. double side A4)
  2. Rationale & Strategic Fit - 25% - (1No. double side A4)
  3. Use of budget available - 20% - (1No. double side A4)
  4. Likely Economic Impact - 15%- (1No. double side A4)
  5. Expected outcomes - 10% - (1No. double side A4)

#### INTERVIEW:

The top ranked suppliers, maximum of 3, will be invited to present their proposal and will be evaluated by a panel, including Ashford Borough Council officers.

Prior to interview a credit check will be undertaken by Ashford Borough Council using Dunn and Bradstreet data.

#### CONTRACT AWARD

#### Your bid will attract 80% of the score and interview 20%. Scores for each element will be added together, and the supplier who has attained the highest will be awarded the contract.

#### FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Using the budget provided, the Council expects the Contractor to provide a full breakdown of the costs involved on submission of the proposal. This should include an indicative breakdown of the portion of time each individual will contribute to the services.

Preferred staged payments should be indicated referring to clause 10 (Payment) but tenderers should note that the final decision regarding stages for payment will be at the absolute discretion of the Council.

#### CONTRACT

The Contract will be the Management Agreement attached to the opportunity.

#### TIMETABLE

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Date** |
| ITT issue: | 20th December 2021 |
| Clarification Ends | 20th January 2022 – 12:00hrs |
| ITT return | 27th January 2022 – 14:00hrs |
| Evaluation of Tenders: | From 27th January 2022 |
| Interviews: | w/c 7th February 2022 |
| Standstill Period | 10 calendar days |
| Contract Award | End Feb 2022 |
| Contract Start: | 1st April 2022 |
| Contract Completion: | 31st March 2027 |

1. Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Management Plan (ABC/KWT, 2016 – 2020)’ [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Conningbrook Lakes Management Objectives (2021-25) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Ecological Management Plan (ABC, Feb 2014)*  [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Land at Conningbrook Lakes, Ecological Management Strategy (Bioscan, 2012) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)