

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

meeting date: THURSDAY 12TH JANUARY 2023
title: ALSTON WETLAND NATURE RESERVE
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
principal author: DAVID HEWITT, COUNTRYSIDE OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek authority from Members to release the Section 106 contribution to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), following receipt of the contribution, to facilitate improvements at the Alston Wetland nature reserve.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities
 - Community Objectives – To sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley.
 - To protect and enhance the existing environmental quality of our area.
 - Corporate Priorities - To ensure best use of council resources.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 When planning permission was granted for the erection of 34 dwellings and associated works at Spout Farm Preston Road, Longridge the associated Section 106 Agreement included an offsite contribution of £17,000 for a predator fence around the Alston Wetland nature reserve.
- 2.2 The Section 106 Agreement, dated the 17 December 2020, states:

To pay Biodiversity Contribution to the Council prior to the occupation of the 10th dwelling. Not to allow occupation of the 10th dwelling until the biodiversity contribution has been paid to the Council.
- 2.3 Our monitoring indicates that 10 dwellings have now been occupied at the Spout Farm development in Longridge. As a result, the trigger has been reached, therefore the developer, Create Homes, have been invoiced for the £17,000.

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 The following matters have been identified by the RSPB.
- 3.2 Alston Wetland is a small (7.5 hectare) but high value site providing a refuge for a surprisingly broad range of wildlife from surrounding intensively managed farmland and encroaching development. The entire site is designated as a Biological Heritage Site for its bird and botanical interest.
- 3.3 There are three viewing screens and a predator fence which is now in need of replacement as posts are rotting, it is a high maintenance battery operated system and a newer more

effective mains powered design is required to be more effective and less of a drain on time and resources. The predator fence is primarily designed to exclude foxes from the Wetland as research has identified these as the primary cause of breeding failure of ground nesting waders.

- 3.4 The RSPB have received two quotations for a predator fence; one for £19,984.67 and one for £17,472 plus materials and although the £17,000 Section 106 contribution will go some way to covering some of the costs the RSPB will be making an application to the Forest of Bowland AONB Farming in Protected Landscaped Fund.
- 3.5 On completion of construction of the predator fence a verification site inspection will be carried out by the Countryside Officer.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – A sum of £17,000 section 106 money has been secured for the predator fence. Whilst an invoice has been sent (October 2022) for the contribution it has yet to be paid.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The construction of the fence will protect species of conservation concern from predators and accord with the stipulations of the legal agreement.
- Political – N/A
- Reputation – The Section 106 money demonstrates the Council's commitment to safeguarding an important nature reserve.
- Equality & Diversity – N/A

5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

5.1 Authorise payment of £17,000 to the RSPB for the construction of a predator fence, following receipt of the contribution and on completion of the works.

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