

To: City Executive Board

Date: 23rd July 2008

Item No:

Report of: Head of Community Housing and Community Development

Title of Report: Aston's Eyot – Proposed Lease from Christ Church

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report:

To advise the City Executive Board (CEB) of the recommendation from East Area Parliament that the Council negotiate a lease for Aston's Eyot from Christ Church College

Key decision: No

Executive lead member: Councillor Bob Timbs

Report Approved by:

Finance: Andy Collett

Legal: Lindsay Cane

Policy Framework: Improving the environment

Recommendations

The City Executive Board is recommended not to support the recommendation from East Area Parliament that a lease be agreed for Aston's Eyot with Christ Church, but to support further feasibility work into improved management, external funding options and the possibility of creating a cycle link to East Oxford.

BACKGROUND

1. In March 2008 the East Area Parliament considered a report on Aston's Eyot (appendix 1). The Area Parliament minute is set out below:

"The following observations were made: -

- (1) A Nature Conservancy strategy for Oxford designated Astons Eyot as a site of local importance.*
- (2) It was first opened to the public in 1974, and for 10 years the City Council leased the land from Christ Church College. It appears that the College is now willing to enter into another lease. The City Council was urged to give consideration to this, as it was felt that the condition of Astons Eyot had deteriorated over the past few years.*
- (2) Astons Eyot suffered from Japanese Knotweed, which would require treatment for several years. The willows had been pollarded, and the Shirelake Ditch had been dredged at one time, but was now blocked.*
- (3) Local people carried out some minor clearance work on Astons Eyot, but some things were beyond their scope. The old Iffley Fields Community Planning Group, now dormant, could be revived. Over 40 people turned out for the Oxclean weekend to give attention to Astons Eyot. It would be useful for the City Council to take over this land, and speak to Christ Church about linking it with the Long Meadow and The Kidneys nature reserve.*
- (4) There were some potential hazards present, since Astons Eyot was a Victorian "tip", and there was concern that there might be discharge into the Shirelake Ditch. However, if the land was taken on, paths should be cut to the width of a bridleway at least.*
- (5) Perhaps Christ Church should be asked to give the land to the City Council to care for, or alternatively grant it a 99-year lease, so that the Council's interests were protected. It was noted that the report recommended that the City Council did not become involved with looking after this land, given its current condition and potential to be a financial burden; and members of the Area Parliament expressed some disappointment at this view.*

Resolved:-

- (1) To note all points made;*

- (2) *That a report outlining all costs and care options for Astons Eyot be compiled;*
- (3) *To recommend to Executive Board that the City Council enters into a short term management agreement for Astons Eyot, to allow time for sources of funding for the upkeep of this land, should it eventually be leased by the City Council, to be identified, and to enable interested community groups to become involved;***
- (4) *Should Executive Board refuse this request, this item would return to the Parliament for further consideration;*
- (5) *To approach Christ Church College about the current upkeep of the Long Meadow, and further request that they carry out maintenance work on trees bordering the New Cut as they have overgrown the waterway, making the passage of punts and other boats difficult;*
- (6) *Give consideration to the Parliament funding a strimmer for use by community groups.”*
2. On 19th June 2008 a letter was received with 14 signatures, (appendix 2) asking the Council to negotiate a lease with Christ Church, and offering to then set up a management group to seek external funding to develop the area for wildlife and community use.

THE PRESENT POSITION

3. The Parks Manager has now visited Aston's Eyot and reviewed the site management issues and costs as set out below (plan attached as appendix 3):

Initial Costs

Pollard c 25 willows along the bank of the Cherwell new cut @ £200	£5,000
Reduction or clear felling of 11 large poplars overhanging adjacent property @ £450 each	£4,950
Eradication of Japanese knotweed 3 x foliar sprayings @ £160	£480

Total initial costs **£10,430**

Ongoing Costs

Path mowing 7 x per year with tractor and flail	£210
Weekly site visits removal of litter and fly tipping	£1,560
Path clearing 2 x per year	£120

Total ongoing costs **£1,890**

4. The East Area Parliament has a capital budget of approximately £15,000 for 2008/09 and a revenue budget of £12,000 unallocated for the same period and so could fund the costs above. It should be noted that the annual revenue costs will increase with inflation each year.
5. The proposed management arrangements could involve the Council in leasing the land from Christ Church as previously, funding the annual maintenance programme as above, and involving a local community group in management and external funding bids to improve public access and awareness of the site.
6. Potential sources of funding (see appendix 2) include Awards for All, Parks for People, Community Spaces, Tudor Trust, Johnson Wax Charitable Trust and the Rowan Bentall Charitable Trust. It is anticipated that there is a good chance that some of these bids will be successful and so help the development of the site as a reserve for wildlife and as an attractive place for people to enjoy.
7. Officers consider that there is a need to consider further options for the improvement of Aston's Eyot with Christ Church, including the potential for the development of cycle links, and do not support the proposal to enter in to a lease at the present time. More discussions with Christ Church are needed over responsibility for the costs identified in paragraph 2 above.

RECOMMENDATION

8. The City Executive Board is recommended not to support the recommendation from East Area Parliament that a lease be agreed for Aston's Eyot with Christ Church, but to support further feasibility work into improved management, external funding options and the possibility of creating a cycle link to East Oxford.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Report to East Area Parliament March 2008

Appendix 2 – Letter

Appendix 3 – Plan

Name and contact details of author:

Fergus Lapage

Tel 01865 252249

E mail flapage@oxford.gov.uk

Background papers: None

Version number:2.