

**Blaby District Council**  
**Council**

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	16 July 2024
<b>Title of Report</b>	<b>Fosse Meadows Lease of Land</b> This is not a Key Decision and is not on the Forward Plan
<b>Lead Member</b>	<b>Cllr. Nigel Grundy - Neighbourhood Services &amp; Assets</b>
<b>Report Author</b>	Executive Director (Section 151 Officer)
<b>Strategic Themes</b>	Enhancing and maintaining our natural and built environment

**1. What is this report about?**

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to lease Fosse Meadows Strategic Park to Green Circle Community Interest Company (CIC) in order to facilitate investment and further improvements to the site.

**2. Recommendation(s) to Council**

- 2.1 That approval is given to the principal of entering into a long term lease of the land at Fosse Meadows Strategic Park to Green Circle CIC.
- 2.2 That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director (S151 Officer) in consultation with the Neighbourhood Services and Assets Portfolio Holder to agree terms and conclude the legal arrangements.

**3. Reason for Decisions Recommended**

- 3.1 The leasing of Fosse Meadows Strategic Park will enable Green Circle CIC to make improvements to the site; enable grant applications to be made and resources to be available to restore and conserve the site for biodiversity whilst also providing an accessible site for people to connect with nature. The Council will also benefit from revenue savings and this initiative supports the site becoming financially sustainable.
- 3.2 The agreement of terms and legal arrangements will allow the Council to benefit from the lease arrangements whilst protecting its interest in the park.

**4. Matters to consider**

- 4.1 Background

The Council's Parks and Open Space Strategy 2024-2034 which was adopted in January of this year includes the vision to ensure Blaby District Council

owned parks and open spaces are sustainable, high quality, accessible and continue to provide value to people, place, and nature.

Fosse Meadows is identified within the document as one of the strategic sites and the strategy specifically details engaging with third sector organisations to undertake specialist maintenance, land management and community educational events and activities in addition to looking at ways in making the site financially sustainable.

The Council has been working with Green Circle Nature Regeneration at Fosse Meadows on an informal basis for over 18 months. During this time Green Circle have provided advice to the open spaces team on site and utilised Community Payback hours to deliver benefits to the site at no extra cost to the Council.

Green Circle Nature Regeneration is a Community Interest Company (CIC). This is a special type of limited company which exists to benefit the community rather than private shareholders. Its board members include a Professor at the University of Leicester, a finance professional, an educator by profession and an operational practitioner. Together they bring experience securing external funding, connections with the University and passion to create a genuine synergy between their work to improve the environment, and their social goals that engender in people a true understanding and appreciation of the value of nature.

Green Circle Nature Regeneration CIC exists to restore and conserve sites for biodiversity, and through engagement with people from across the social spectrum, to reconnect them with nature through experience and education.

As a result of Green Circle's involvement, resource has been provided (E.g. some 600 hours per month in April) which has increased the capacity for non-intrusive management of the site contributing to the increased biodiversity across a range of habitats on site. Such capacity is not, within the Council's open space workforce due to funding constraints.

#### 4.2 Proposal(s)

Through their work at Fosse Meadows Green Circle have built up considerable knowledge of the site and have identified potential improvements that could be made benefiting the community at the same time as further improving the biodiversity. Green Circle have identified funding streams to facilitate the improvements, however these funding streams are not open to the Council to apply for. Green Circle have approached the Council to take custodianship of Fosse Meadows to enable them to continue the work they have been doing on site and apply for grant funding for the benefit of the site and the community. In effect this would be a lease to Green Circle for a suggested period of 20 years which would enable them to apply for the grants.

Leasing the site to Green Circle would deliver on a number of points within the Parks and Open Space Strategy in that:

- Their plans for Fosse Meadows seek funding opportunities to deliver an education zone, including a discovery centre.
- They have specific plans for areas of the park to increase biodiversity, reduce formal maintenance but encourage footfall in a well-managed manner.
- They have investigated opportunities to obtain funding to provide for capital projects that the Council may otherwise be required to fund.

Should Council be supportive of the proposal to lease the site to Green Circle it is proposed to protect the Council's interest in the Strategic Site through the formation of a joint board ensuring the vision and themes within the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy are followed.

#### 4.3 Relevant Consultations

Members of the Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet Members have been consulted regarding these proposals.

#### 4.4 Significant Issues

Officers have engaged with the Welland Procurement Unit who have confirmed that this arrangement does not constitute a procurement and falls outside of procurement regulations.

### 5. What will it cost and are there opportunities for savings?

- 5.1 Green Circle have demonstrated their ability to deliver park improvements through funds raised through the use of the Community Payback scheme which has been ploughed back into the initiatives they have carried out on site to date. Their ability to access funds which are not open to Blaby DC provides opportunity for the site to undergo improvement which might otherwise not be affordable for the Council.

It is estimated that approx. £25k of revenue spend will be saved from the transfer of the park and an estimated 200 hours of the parks and open spaces operative hours being freed up to utilise elsewhere within the open spaces within the district.

### 6. What are the risks and how can they be reduced?

#### 6.1

Current Risk	Actions to reduce the risks
That the Council has insufficient financial resources to deliver	Leasing the park to Green Circle will provide the opportunity to deliver both physical resources and

improvements at Fosse Meadows Strategic Site.	financial investment through grant funding to carry out improvements to the park.
That Green Circle are unable to maintain the park for public use.	<p>Green Circle have been working with the Council on site for approx. 18 months. This has enabled them to understand the nature of the costs of the site and their ability to resource the maintenance of the site.</p> <p>Should Green Circle not be able to meet the obligations within the lease agreement the Council would be able to terminate the lease.</p>
That Council lose influence regarding the use and improvements of Fosse Meadows Strategic Park.	Green Circle core aims align with the themes that run through the Parks and Open Space Strategy. Through the setting up of a board structure Blaby District Council will continue to influence the use of the site.
That Fosse Meadows site will be used for financial gain by Green Circle CIC.	As a CIC Green Circle has an 'asset lock' - a legal promise stating that the company's assets will only be used for its social objectives. Thus, as a CIC Green Circle cannot by law financialise any aspect of Fosse Meadows Country Park.

## **7. Other options considered**

- 7.1 An approach was made to an alternative provider to understand if there may be other routes to achieve the same outcome as that proposed by Green Circle. The alternative provider worked on a basis of a long-term lease with the authority providing an upfront endowment from which interest was earned that then funded the works on site. With Fosse Meadows being a site of 39ha it was suggested that an upfront endowment of up to £3m may be necessary for the alternative provider to consider taking on the custodianship of the site. Given the extent of the investment required this option was dismissed.

The option to do nothing was also dismissed given the potential benefits the lease of Fosse Meadows Strategic Park to Green Circle brings.

## **8. Environmental impact**

- 8.1 The work that Green Circle has carried out on site has already contributed to the increased biodiversity across a range of habitats on site. Their plan for the site is to sustain and increase biodiversity through utilisation of their expertise and non-intrusive management of the site.

## **9. Other significant issues**

- 9.1 In preparing this report, the author has considered issues related to Human Rights, Legal Matters, Human Resources, Equalities, Public Health Inequalities, and Climate Local and there are no areas of concern.

9.2 Significant issues relating to procurement regulations have been addressed at paragraph 4.4.

**10. Appendix**

10.1 Appendix A – Plan of Fosse Meadows Site

**11. Background paper(s)**

11.1 None

**12. Report author's contact details**

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