

# HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Decision Report

<b>Decision Maker</b>	Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities Executive Member for Policy and Resources and Economic Development
<b>Date:</b>	8 December 2022
<b>Title:</b>	Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve - Future Proposals
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Culture, Communities & Business Services

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### Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Executive Member Decisions on proposals regarding the future of Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve and its associated buildings following a period of staff consultation and public engagement.
2. This is a single report but, as a consequence of the constitutional responsibilities of Hampshire County Council Executive Members, the recommendations in paragraphs 3 to 9 need to be considered by the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities and the recommendations in paragraphs 10 to 13 by the Executive Member for Policy, Resources and Economic Development. The decisions for these Executive Members have therefore been scheduled to follow each other and the decisions of the Executive Member for Policy, Resources and Economic Development will be contingent upon the decisions for the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities:

3. Notes the level of local community interest and supports the actions identified in response to the feedback from the public engagement exercise.
4. Notes that Haven House has been listed as an Asset of Community Value which may delay any disposal by up to 6 months.
5. Agrees, during any period when Haven House cannot be sold because of any restriction imposed as a consequence of Haven House being listed as an Asset of Community Value, to consider carefully any viable and fully costed proposals for the future ownership of Haven House and the Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve that meet the objectives set out in paragraph 35 of this report, which are cost-neutral for the County Council and which transfer the statutory responsibilities to the recipient as appropriate.
6. Approves the closure of the café, shop and visitor centre located in Haven House, Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve, with effect from 23 December 2022.
7. Declares Haven House surplus to the requirements of Hampshire County Council's Countryside Service.
8. Recommends to the Executive Member for Policy and Resources and Economic Development to dispose of Haven House ensuring that the County Council achieves best public value in so doing.
9. Recommends to the Executive Member for Policy and Resources and Economic Development to retain the full value of the capital receipt from the sale of Haven House and Haven Cottage to be reinvested in Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Executive Member for Policy and Resources and Economic Development:

10. Approves the disposal of Haven House at Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve, following the decision made by the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities to declare Haven House surplus to service requirements.
11. Agrees that the full value of the capital receipt from the sale of Haven House and Haven Cottage be invested in Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve with any funds that are surplus to the immediate needs held by the County Council for the sole purpose of benefitting the Nature Reserve in the future.

12. Approves the phased investment programme set out in the report, subject to Cabinet approval.
13. Note that work will not commence until a capital receipt has been agreed and that Haven House has been listed as an Asset of Community Value which may delay any disposal by up to 6 months.

## **Executive Summary**

14. Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve (THNNR) has been owned and managed by Hampshire County Council since 1972. It is an internationally important site for wildlife and along with the National Nature Reserve status it is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest and is part of the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area.
15. The reserve includes Haven House which serves as a visitor centre with a café, shop and toilets and Haven Cottage, a Grade II listed building which has been vacant for many years.
16. The current operating model at THNNR is financially unsustainable with increasing net costs to run and manage the site. The current running costs are £641,000. These costs are met through income (£505,000) and an annual cash limit of £136,000 from the Hampshire County Council Countryside Service budget.
17. An analysis of the site's financial position has identified that over the next 3 years the site would cost the County Council an estimated additional £1.8m if no changes are made. This includes increased running costs, the projected investment required for the ageing buildings, and funding required for investment in the nature reserve itself.
18. Haven House requires significant investment to maintain it for the future. The costs of bringing it up to acceptable modern standards alongside ongoing maintenance are estimated to be £411,000. The residential Haven Cottage requires an investment of £263,000.
19. The Nature Reserve also requires investment - two of the most popular bird hides on the site have been closed recently due to their declining state. The projected investment needed for the reserve's infrastructure such as boardwalks and bird hides for the next 3 years are £670,000.
20. A detailed business case with an options analysis for alternative operating models proposed that the management of the National Nature Reserve should be prioritised, that the visitor centre with the café and shop should close, and that Haven House be sold to reduce revenue and capital liabilities and to generate a capital receipt to support the future of the Nature Reserve. The

redacted version of the business case can be found in Appendix E, and an unredacted version of the business case is attached as Appendix F which is an exempt appendix and is therefore not publicly available.

21. In addition, the business case proposed that Haven Cottage (which had been empty for some years) be declared as surplus to requirements and that it be sold in order to reinvest in the Nature Reserve. The decision to declare Haven Cottage as surplus to service requirements and to market for sale was taken by the Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services on 20 July 2022.
22. The affected staff were formally consulted between 27 September 2022 and 27 October 2022. Some adjustments were made to the proposals following the initial feedback and the period of consultation was extended to 14 November 2022.
23. The proposals were made public to seek views and understand the potential impact of the proposed changes on visitors, annual membership holders of the Nature Reserve and the local community. This five-week public engagement exercise commenced on 27 September 2022 and concluded on 1 November 2022. There was a high level of interest and concern expressed by the respondents which is evident from the 2,997 responses that were received, the majority from the local community. These are detailed, with responses, in Appendix D(i).
24. Following the publication of the proposals, the County Council's Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities, and senior County Council officers, have directly and extensively engaged with all interested parties to listen to their views, respond to questions and provide further information as requested. The two Executive Member decision makers have been provided with all emails and letters received since the launch of the engagement process and also all written comments included in the survey response forms.
25. It is clear, and was acknowledged in the original business case, that the visitor centre, café and garden at Haven House are highly valued by local residents specifically in the Titchfield area and the proposals have generated significant interest from people keen to preserve the facilities for the future. The level of response clearly shows the strength of feeling and sense of importance of these facilities within Haven House to the local community and its wellbeing. However, provision of these facilities is not a statutory duty for the County Council, with the community of users not reaching the thresholds relating to the County Council's social care responsibilities. The costs of maintaining this provision for the local community, subsidised by the County Council, have to be balanced with consideration of the financial sustainability of the National Nature Reserve and the prioritisation of the County Council's statutory responsibilities therein. It also needs to be considered within the context of the extremely challenging financial position for the County Council overall.

## Contextual Information

26. Hampshire County Council's Countryside Service aims to inspire people to connect with and enjoy the countryside, while making space for nature to thrive. The Service has several statutory functions including the management of Hampshire's 3,000-mile public rights of way network and 7,400 acres of land for recreation, wildlife and heritage. Around 85% of the land that The Countryside Service manage for HCC is designated for its wildlife or heritage value.
27. THNNR was acquired by Hampshire County Council in 1972 and designated as a National Nature Reserve in 1995. It is an internationally important site for its habitats which support a wide variety of wildlife throughout the year, including many important overwintering bird species. The Nature Reserve has recorded 200 different types of birdlife along with over 300 types of plant, of which six are noted as nationally scarce. It is protected by a number of environmental designations including Special Protection Area (SPA), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR).
28. THNNR covers 135 Hectares with a series of birdwatching hides and boardwalks providing access to the reserve. There are two properties that form part of the HCC holdings at Titchfield Haven, namely Haven House and Haven Cottage, along with a small number of associated parking spaces, a yard and storage area.
29. Haven House is a former private residence (650sqm) constructed in c. 1820. It now serves as the main visitor area comprising a reception area, retail shop, small exhibition area, café/catering space and toilets. The upper level is solely office and meeting space for reserve staff, with a residential flat. A small garden is located to the side of the Visitor Centre. Located behind the Visitor Centre is Haven Cottage (recently Grade II listed in Jan 2022) which has not been used for public access or service delivery and is currently vacant.
30. Titchfield Haven receives around 100,000 visits each year, many of which are repeat visits from regular visitors and annual reserve membership holders (in the survey responses - para 69 below - around 1750 people identified themselves as regular visitors). Admission to the visitor centre (Haven House) is free and represents the majority of the visits (85,000). Visitors wishing to enter the reserve (15,000 visits per annum) pay an admission charge (£6.50 for adults, £3.50 for children) or an annual membership (£60 for an individual adult, £80 for a joint adult and £8 for a child). Currently there are around 650 annual members. The average spend per head in the café is £3.80 and in the shop is 0.75p.
31. Since 2015 the County Council has been investing in Country Parks to create a suite of modern parks that are operationally self-financing. These investments have been based on robust financial business cases for generating greater

income and reducing the reliance on County Council funding. Additional funding has been secured from a variety of sources including the Heritage Lottery Fund which has contributed a total of just over £5m over the past 7 years.

32. The opportunities for generating significantly more income are unfortunately very limited at THNNR, due to the nature and location of the site. Therefore, developing a more financially sustainable way of managing the Nature Reserve for the future has been under consideration by the County Council for a number of years. During this time, the Countryside Service has commissioned several studies to assist with identifying the options for the future management of the nature reserve and associated facilities. Details of these studies can be found in Appendix A.
33. The total cost of running THNNR is currently £641,000. These costs are met through income (£505,000 of which £315,000 is catering) and an annual cash limit of £136,000 from the Hampshire County Council budget. Table 1 of this report sets out the current budget position.
34. An analysis of the site's financial position estimates that over the next 3 years the site will cost the County Council an additional £1.8m if no changes are made. This includes increased running costs, the projected investment required for the ageing buildings, and funding required for investment in the Nature Reserve itself.

## Proposal

35. In order to consider future options for THNNR, four key objectives were developed within the context of Hampshire County Council strategic priorities, statutory responsibilities, and the sustainability of the reserve in the long term. They were that THNNR should be:
  - **Financially sustainable:** Increase economic sustainability, reduce reliance on HCC and ensure the best use of public assets and resources.
  - **Environmentally sustainable:** Develop a future strategy which responds to opportunities for improved habitat management and adapts to be more resilient to climate and coastal change.
  - **Community focused:** To ensure THNNR has a thriving role within the local community and a strong and supported volunteer network.
  - **Visitor experience:** To increase access at a landscape scale level, understanding and engagement of the local environment, climate, and coastal change.
36. After revisiting previous research (Appendix A) and undertaking further analysis the following four options were considered in greater detail and presented in a Business Case.

**Option 1 - Do nothing.** No change to current management of visitor offer. This does not address the increasing financial pressures (as outlined in paragraph 48 - Table 2).

**Option 2 - Develop the Offer.** Invest in the current visitor centre at Haven House or a new visitor centre. This would require significant additional investment with limited revenue return and would not provide investment for the Nature Reserve.

**Option 3 - Transfer to a third party.** This would be considered if a competent organisation could meet the objectives set out in paragraph 35 and remove the financial liability for Haven House and THNNR from the County Council. During the investigation and engagement stages, discussions took place with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT), National Trust and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), but no viable and fully costed proposals have been received to date.

**Option 4 - Change Focus.** Prioritise the reserve and manage it without the café and shop. This is currently the only viable costed option and now forms the approach recommended in this report. It is closely aligned with the four key objectives set out above.

37. Appendix B provides a cost/benefit analysis of each option.

38. **Option 4 - Change Focus** - The key benefits of this option are:

- a) It is the most viable approach to ensure the long-term environmental sustainability of THNNR which is nationally important for wildlife and habitats.
- b) It reduces the revenue costs of THNNR to Hampshire County Council while investing capital to secure the long-term future of the Nature Reserve.
- c) It provides an opportunity to take a wider strategic landscape scale approach and to improve access to the site for the local volunteers and the community.

39. The following changes and actions are proposed. These would enable the County Council to put nature first and prioritise investment in the National Nature Reserve, as an internationally important site for wildlife.

- a) Closure of the café, shop and visitor centre in Haven House;
- b) Disposal of Haven House and Haven Cottage;
- c) Reinvestment of £775,000 from the proceeds from the sale of the properties to establish a low maintenance operational base for staff and volunteers, improve visitor access and complete urgent works;

- d) Reinvestment of the proceeds from the sale of the properties to protect and enhance the special habitats for wildlife, as well as improving visitor access to the reserve;
  - e) Any remaining balance from the sales retained for future investment in THNNR as required.
40. The County Council is committed to meeting its statutory obligations to manage this important National Nature Reserve whilst ensuring the best use of public assets and resources. The corporate policy is for all capital receipts from any sale to be held centrally. However, in this instance the recommended commitment to re-invest all the proceeds from sales of the properties into the Nature Reserve represents a major commitment from the County Council to the future of the reserve.

### **Impacts of the Proposal**

41. It is recommended that the café, shop and visitor centre close with effect from 23 December 2022. Haven House would remain in minimal operational use until a new staff and volunteer base is established to ensure continuity of the management of the reserve. This closure date is proposed to reduce the considerable overhead costs as soon as possible, including utilities and cleaning, and to limit the impact on staff by reducing the period of uncertainty.
42. The closure of the café, shop and visitor centre would mean a reduction in staffing requirements of 6.49 FTE (10 members of staff). THNNR is currently supported by a team of 16 members of staff, equal to 11.15 full time equivalent (FTE) posts. There are 5.05FTE in catering, 3.24FTE supporting the visitor centre and administration, 2.86FTE supporting the reserve. There are also 15 casual working arrangements in place supporting the café and shop.
43. If the proposal is approved, the net operational revenue costs would be reduced from £136,000 to £76,000 making an annual saving of £60,000.
44. The following table shows a revised revenue forecast for the new operating model at Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve, based on the updated recommendations set out in this report. This forecasts a net cash limit reduction of £60,000 to contribute to the Hampshire County Council savings target for 2023.

### **Table 1 - Current budget and proposed budget following implementation of proposals.**



BUDGET	CURRENT (2022/23)	PROPOSAL
<b>Staffing</b>	<b>226,000</b>	<b>139,000</b>
<b>Premises</b>	<b>57,000</b>	<b>30,500</b>
<b>Travel</b>	<b>11,000</b>	<b>9,000</b>
<b>Supplies and Services</b>	<b>63,000</b>	<b>16,000</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>357,000</b>	<b>194,500</b>
Grant Income	(20,000)	(20,000)
Sales	(76,000)	(6,000)
Donations	(5,000)	(5,000)
Admission & Memberships	(57,000)	(57,000)
Rents	(7,000)	(2,500)
Annual SLA	(22,000)	(22,000)
<b>Income</b>	<b>(190,000)</b>	<b>(112,500)</b>
<b>Net</b>	<b>167,000</b>	<b>82,000</b>
<b>Net Catering</b>	<b>(31,000)</b>	<b>(6,000)</b>
<b>Total cost of THNRR</b>	<b>136,000</b>	<b>76,000</b>
<b>Reduction in costs</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>60,000</b>

45. Haven House requires significant investment to maintain it for the future. The costs of bringing it up to acceptable modern standards alongside ongoing maintenance are estimated to be £411,000. The residential Haven Cottage requires an investment of £263,000.
46. The disposal or sale of Haven House and Haven Cottage would remove the unbudgeted asset condition liability to the County Council which is currently £674,000 (includes roof repairs, staircase replacement and window repairs). An additional £226,000 condition liability is forecast over the next 3 years as further works to Haven House would be required.
47. The Nature Reserve also requires investment - two of the most popular bird hides on the site have been closed recently due to their declining state. The projected investment needed for the reserve's infrastructure such as boardwalks and bird hides for the next 3 years is estimated to be £670,000.
48. **Table 2** details the asset liability pressures of £1.57m and the revenue pressures of £261,000 over the next three years without any changes to the current operating model.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Revenue Budget Pressure - SP23	60,000	60,000	60,000	180,000
Building condition liability – Haven House (current)	137,000	274,000		411,000
Building condition liability – Haven Cottage (current)	263,000			263,000
Forecast condition liabilities – Buildings			226,000	226,000
Forecast condition liabilities - Nature Reserve	280,000	280,000	110,000	670,000
Net revenue running cost increase	25,000	27,000	29,000	81,000
<b>Total pressure against budget</b>	<b>765,000</b>	<b>641,000</b>	<b>425,000</b>	<b>1,831,000</b>

49. Haven Cottage was declared surplus to Countryside Service requirements on 20 July 2022 by Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services and is currently being marketed.

50. The capital receipt value from the sale of both properties is expected to be in the region of £2m. This report contains a recommendation to retain 100% of the capital receipts from the sale of Haven House and Haven Cottage to be invested in a low maintenance operational base for staff and volunteers and in the infrastructure of the Nature Reserve. It is recognised that there are external factors that may impact on both the capital receipt and the estimated expenditure, so it is recommended that any funds remaining after the immediate capital investment are ringfenced to assist with the long-term investment and management of the Nature Reserve.

51. The current estimate of the investment required for Phase 1 is £775,000 to fund the replacement operational base, complete urgent works to the reserve and meet the costs for selling the property.

52. Phase 2 will see the remainder of the balance used to support a further programme of work within the National Nature Reserve to ensure compliance with the County Council statutory duties and responsibilities and to build resilience in mitigation of climate change impacts.

53. **Table 3** illustrates the current estimates for capital receipt and expenditure.

Estimates	22/23 '000	23/24 '000	24/25 '000	25/26 '000	Total '000
Haven Cottage capital receipt	500				500
Haven House capital receipt		1,500			1,500
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>1,500</b>			<b>2,000</b>
Phase 1 estimated costs (asset disposal costs, replacement operational base and urgent works)	10	765			775

Estimates	22/23 '000	23/24 '000	24/25 '000	25/26 '000	Total '000
Phase 2 estimated costs (works on the reserve e.g., watercourse management, boardwalks, hides etc.)		135	280	110	525
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>1,300</b>

54. The costs of the staff redundancies will be met from Departmental funds ringfenced to support redundancy costs associated with the savings programme delivery. Other costs related to the closure of the café, shop and visitor centre will be met within the Countryside Service.

## Consultation and Equalities

### Staff Consultation

55. Formal consultation on the proposed future structure and ways of working commenced with Trade Unions and staff on 27 September 2022. The proposed HR processes to be followed and timeline for key activity and decision making was shared. The consultation information stated that any recommendations following consultation would be subject to consideration and approval at the Executive Member's Decision Day scheduled for 8 December 2022.
56. The proposal included potential redundancies and staff and Trade Unions were advised that any meetings to provide formal notice of redundancies would take place after the Executive Member Decision Day.
57. The staff consultation closed on 27 October 2022, however in response to feedback received during this consultation period, some elements of the proposal were amended, and the consultation period was extended until 14 November 2022 for staff affected by these changes. Trade Unions were also advised of the amendment and extension to consultation.
58. As a result of the feedback from **staff** the following detailed amendments have been made to the proposals:
- The staffing structure is changed to provide 7-day cover to support both visitors and volunteers.
  - To establish a dual approach for tickets, with both online and onsite sales.
  - To include signage and wayfinding as part of the changes to maintain visibility for visitors and a public presence for the reserve.
  - To consider the alternative option of utilising the current reception building as the operational base.

- e) A phased delivery, which retains visitor services staff during a 12-month transitional period, including the establishment of online ticketing, to provide support for visitors, members and volunteers.

59. Appendix C outlines the main feedback and outcome of the staff consultation.

## **Public Engagement**

- 60. Detailed information on the feedback received from the public engagement exercise along with the response to concerns and suggestions is shown in Appendix D(i).
- 61. A full pack of the written responses to the public engagement exercise and copies of all other correspondence has been provided to the two Executive Members who will be considering the recommendations in this report. The Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities has confirmed that he has read each piece of correspondence received at the time of receipt.
- 62. The Equalities Impact Assessment (summarised on pages 23-24 and shown in Appendix G) sets out the demographics and equalities characteristics of THNNR users and survey respondents.
- 63. The age range of THNNR members is significantly skewed towards the older age ranges, with the three younger ranges (18-25, 26-35 and 35-45) all below the average for the base population, while 46-55, 56-65 and 66+ are all above average.
- 64. Approximately 3 in 5 members fall into the older half of the age profile while, in contrast, only 1 in 10 falls in the youngest 18-25 range. The most significant variances are in the 26-35 age range (lower by 5%) and the 66+ age range (higher by nearly 8%).
- 65. The County Council engaged with visitors, local residents and other key stakeholders to provide their views on the proposals. A website was produced with comprehensive information on the proposals for THNNR. An electronic and paper questionnaire was designed to collect and evaluate the views of the public in advance of any formal decision. The public engagement exercise was open from 27 September 2022 until 1 November 2022.
- 66. Respondents were asked to share how they used and experienced THNNR; to comment on proposed plans to improve the sustainability of the site and to share their ideas about how the County Council could invest in THNNR for the future.

67. Anyone with an interest in THNNR was invited to help shape the future of the site. This opportunity was promoted via a range of channels including, but not limited to:
- A website presence including all key information, a link to the survey and a 'frequently asked questions' section;
  - Media engagement through press releases (published on [www.hants.gov.uk](http://www.hants.gov.uk)) and media statements;
  - Social media channels (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) which prominently featured the proposal and public engagement;
  - Direct communications to key stakeholders, annual members and volunteers.
  - Posters, business cards (including QR codes) and paper copy surveys on site to ensure casual visitors to the site were made aware
  - The proposals and the opportunity to contribute to the public survey were given additional profile through media coverage including on BBC Online, ITV Meridian, The News and The Daily Echo.
68. A total of 2997 survey responses were received (2677 electronically and 320 on paper). 38% of the respondents were from the immediate Fareham area, with 13% from nearby Gosport and 13% from Eastleigh. Of the remaining responses 27% were from the wider Hampshire County Council area, and 9% outside the Hampshire County Council area.
69. The responses included 1723 who defined themselves as a regular visitor to Titchfield Haven, 246 annual members, 56 volunteers, 8 democratically elected representatives, and 7 organisations, groups or businesses.
70. Whilst respecting the importance of the reserve, many respondents felt that visitor access and facilities should be prioritised as a gateway to appreciating nature and a place to pause and appreciate the beautiful surroundings. There was therefore much concern about the potential loss of the current facilities.
71. The main areas of feedback related to:
- a) impact on the local community;
  - b) changes to the visitor offer including risks to revenue;
  - c) ideas for income generation including parking;
  - d) priorities and suggestions for catering facilities; and
  - e) suggestions for transferring to a third-party and education opportunities.
72. The key points raised are summarised in paragraphs 72 to 92 and subsequently addressed below.

73. **The importance of Haven House to the local community and health benefits.** Many of the respondents lived in the areas surrounding the reserve and were concerned about the impact on the local community – particularly with regards to the closure of Haven House, which was regarded as an important hub that enabled people of all ages and abilities to come together and provided a destination at the end of a walk – benefitting both mental and physical health.
74. Hampshire County Council recognise the value that the local community place on Haven House as a location to come together. There are, however, other venues in the local area that offer a similar provision including Titchfield Community Centre and Titchfield Parish Rooms. There is a pub and café within a 10-minute walk of THNNR and in the heart of the community.
75. The reserve will remain open to the public providing open space for people to benefit physically and mentally from connection with nature. The original proposals have been amended to enhance accessibility including an accessible toilet (including baby changing facilities), an accessible parking space and improvements to the boardwalks and hides.
76. **The reduced revenue income resulting from the closure of the café and a request for alternative catering provision.** The accounts show a £31k net surplus for the café. This is based on accounting for the direct costs of service provision only (food, goods and staff costs). The costs of the premises (Haven House) from which the café operates are accounted for in the overall running costs for Haven House and the café, shop and visitor centre (with 100,000 visits a year) will make up the majority of the electricity, gas, water and cleaning costs (the rest of the premises being used by staff). When the costs of running Haven House are taken into consideration, the overall cost to run the Visitor Centre and cafe gives a net operating loss of around £80k annually.
77. The refreshment needs of those visiting the reserve could be met by the nearby pub and café and could provide additional income to these venues. However, in response to the concerns raised through the engagement, if the recommendations in this report are approved, Hampshire County Council will explore the option for providing a temporary or seasonal catering offer. There would also be the opportunity for Fareham Borough Council to consider offering mobile catering concessions on land in their ownership along the beachfront. There are further planned focus group sessions that would inform the requirements for future catering provision.
78. The likely reduction in visitor numbers to the reserve and reduction in income from entrance charges. There was recognition that the buildings in their current state may not be the best fit for purpose. However, the desire remained, even amongst those who prioritised the reserve, for a visit to incorporate information about the site, places to rest and some form of refreshments and toilet facilities that would enable an extended stay, an extended season and facilitate visits

from further afield. It was feared that without these, visitor numbers and therefore income to support the site may reduce. Hampshire County Council are keen to reduce the risk of a reduction in visitors benefitting from the reserve and have amended proposals to include additional visitor support to mitigate this risk. A phased delivery is now proposed to provide cover 7 days per week for visitor and volunteer support during a 12-month transitional period, including a dual approach for tickets, with both online and onsite sales. Should the buildings be sold, respondents highlighted a long list of features around the reserve, such as signage and wayfinding, that might benefit from additional consideration or investment. Further engagement work with visitors, reserve members, volunteers and interested groups would help to inform how the County Council can best invest in the reserve to encourage and welcome visitors.

79. **Opportunities for income generation.** Respondents put forward a range of suggestions to increase income, including fundraising, introducing new activities, or alternative management options and application for support from grant funding. The most frequent suggestions from respondents related to increasing retail, renting out the residential flat, room hire and education.
80. The space within the building is limited with little opportunity to expand. The site is restrictive for both access and parking for buses/coaches and there is no formal meeting room or other internal space to use for education groups. Opening in the evening for events was also suggested but has associated additional staff and overhead costs. Therefore, whilst there are opportunities to generate some increases in income, the potential for a net surplus is limited and would not address the larger pressures of building condition liability or investment in the reserve.
81. The Countryside Service already benefits from government grant funding and Titchfield Haven has for the last 12 years benefitted from funding from the DEFRA Higher Level Stewardship scheme. Titchfield is also thankful to receive regular donations. However, there is a risk associated with relying on these forms of funding in the long term, as it is not guaranteed.
82. **In the course of the public engagement further exploratory discussions have been held with several organisations but no viable and fully costed proposals have been received.** Hampshire County Council will be open to discussions with any appropriate and competent organisations who have an interest in the future management of THNNR. The Asset of Community Value makes provision for a 6-month moratorium on the sale of Haven House, once an EOI has been received, and therefore a period of time for any such negotiations to take place.
83. **Concern over the future use of Haven House and Haven Cottage once sold.** Respondents raised concerns over what might be done with the land once sold, the disruption of development, and that access would be restricted if

put into private hands. The sale of Haven Cottage was seen as more palatable – particularly if some of the funds could be used to retain visitor facilities. An important aspect of the proposal is to maintain and improve access to the reserve and this has been taken into account when considering the boundaries of both buildings.

84. A range of covenants will be included in any transfer designed to restrict the way in which the Haven Cottage is occupied and the activities which are allowed to take place, reflecting the sensitive location of the cottage. A similar approach is proposed for Haven House, with specific reference to the sensitive location on the edge of the National Nature Reserve. We anticipate that Haven Cottage would likely remain a residential dwelling. Any change of use or alternations of this Grade II listed building would require further permissions to be sought by the purchaser from the local planning authority (Fareham Borough Council) in the usual way as would any change of use for Haven House.
85. **The impact of parking charges levied by Fareham Borough Council on the visitors to the reserve.** A number of respondents asked if the recent introduction of charges had impacted on visitor numbers and if parking income could support Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve. The local car park is managed by Fareham Borough Council, Hampshire County Council do not receive any income from the parking charges.
86. Whilst HCC cannot measure the exact impact this has had on visitor numbers to the café or reserve, there has been a slight overall reduction in visitor numbers when comparing 2021/22 to 2019/20. Fareham Borough Council parking charges apply for both volunteers and staff which has added to the operational costs for THNNR.
87. The County Council will provide for an accessible parking space and the provision of bike racks as part of the proposals for the future operation of the nature reserve.
88. **Lost opportunity to educate.** This was raised by a large number of respondents, specifically the opportunity to educate children about nature, to talk to other site visitors and volunteers and as a space for school activities, talks and events.
89. There is currently no formal schools programme at Titchfield due to a lack of appropriate facilities on site, which is restrictive for both access and parking for buses and there is no education room or other internal space to use as a base. There are group bookings for the reserve but the offer is in line with a regular reserve visit. It is unlikely that a visit to THNNR would be attractive to many schools as the costs of hiring transport for a visit that (even if there were appropriate facilities) would at best be half a day, would be prohibitive. The pressure on school budgets means that they are unlikely to be expanding the



range of external visits they undertake and for these reasons it would be unwise to rely on any additional income coming from this source.

90. As part of the proposals, the need for further investment into information and interpretation in the reserve has been identified. If proposals are approved, focus groups with visitors, members and volunteers will be held to develop the focus of this interpretation for different visitor groups, including families and children.
91. **Suggestions regarding the transfer of the management of Haven House to another organisation.** Discussions have been held with potential organisations over several years, including during this recent engagement period, to consider the current proposals but no viable and fully costed proposals have been received. If a viable and fully costed alternative option was proposed that would meet the objectives set out in paragraph 35 and fully remove the liability of Haven House and the National Nature Reserve from the County Council, it would be given due consideration.
92. **General concerns** about the proposals overall varied amongst different respondent types, reflecting their priorities and their relationship with the site. A key concern across most groups was the impact the proposal could have on the local community:
  - **Café/Haven house visitors**, who used the café/shop monthly or more often, identified impact to the local community as their main concern.
  - **Volunteers** also identified the impact on the local community as a key concern, but also the potential impact on the visitor experience and the risk of reduced visitor numbers.
  - **Annual members** were primarily concerned with the impact this might have on their visit or the visitor experience at the reserve.
  - **Reserve visitors** were concerned with the impact proposals might have on their visit and the local community, and a for a fewer number of reserve visitors who have not used the café in the past year, they identified that investment in the nature reserve should be prioritised and were unconcerned with the closure of the café.
  - **Organisations** that responded identified impact on the local community as their main concern, alongside a loss of the opportunity to educate.
  - **Elected representatives** survey comments recognised the investment needed for the reserve, and also identified concerns about the impact on the local community and risk of losing accessible facilities. Some felt that selling Haven Cottage would be acceptable, the same number were apprehensive about the potential loss of historical buildings.

## Summary of Amendments as a Result of the Public Engagement

93. In summary the following amendments have been included in the final proposal following public engagement:
- a) Accessibility will be enhanced by including an accessible toilet (as per the original proposal), now including baby changing facilities and an accessible parking space. The County Council will provide the provision of bike racks as part of the proposals for the future operation of the nature reserve.
  - b) Hampshire County Council will explore the option for providing a temporary or seasonal catering offer. There are further planned focus group sessions that will inform the requirements for catering provision.
  - c) Proposals have been amended to include additional visitor support during a 12-month transitional period to reduce the risk of a reduction in visitors benefitting from the reserve.
  - d) The County Council is open to discussions with any appropriate and competent organisation who have an interest in the future management of THNNR during any period when Haven House cannot be sold because of any restriction imposed as a consequence of Haven House being listed as an Asset of Community Value and will consider carefully any viable and fully costed proposals for the future ownership of Haven House and the THNNR that meet the objectives set out in paragraph 35 of this report, which are cost-neutral for the County Council, and which transfer the statutory responsibilities to the recipient as appropriate.
  - e) A range of covenants will be included in any transfer designed to restrict the way in which the Haven Cottage is occupied and the activities which are allowed to take place, reflecting the sensitive location of the cottage. A similar approach is proposed for Haven House, with specific reference to the sensitive location on the edge of the National Nature Reserve.
94. It is clear, and was acknowledged in the original business case, that the visitor centre, café and garden at Haven House are highly valued by local residents specifically in the Titchfield area and the proposals have generated significant interest from people keen to preserve the facilities for the future.
95. The level of response clearly shows the strength of feeling and sense of importance of these facilities within Haven House to the local community and its wellbeing. However, provision of these facilities is not a statutory duty for the County Council, with the community of users not reaching the thresholds relating to the County Council's social care responsibilities.
96. The costs of maintaining this provision for the local community, subsidised by the County Council, have to be balanced with consideration of the financial sustainability of the National Nature Reserve and the prioritisation of the

County Council's statutory responsibilities therein. It also needs to be considered within the context of the extremely challenging financial position for the County Council overall.

## **Engagement with Organisations and Elected Representatives**

97. In addition to the public survey, the Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities has met with local organisations, wildlife charities, local elected members and members of parliament to discuss the proposals.
98. These meetings provided an opportunity for more thorough discussions and challenge on the detail of the proposals and a broader exploration to understand if there are any alternative viable solutions.
99. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds confirmed that the acquisition of Haven House is not a strategic priority for them as they are planning on significant investment in their existing nature reserves, and as a charity, they have limited funds and must ensure that their funds are targeted. They are however keen to work in partnership with HCC should the opportunity arise.
100. Discussions have also taken place with the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and the National Trust. Neither of these organisations have confirmed their positions as yet.
101. Hampshire County Council have met with the Hill Head Residents Association who have not, as yet put forward a proposal that meets the objectives set out in paragraph 35 of this report, which are cost-neutral for the County Council and which transfer the statutory responsibilities to the recipient as appropriate.
102. However, the Hill Head Residents Association have indicated their intent to put forward a proposal working with the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust for the future management of the National Nature Reserve and Haven House Visitor Centre.

## **Other Considerations**

### **Petition**

103. A petition entitled "SAVE OUR HAVEN CENTRE", led by the community was received by Hampshire County Council on 24 November 2022 (Appendix H). The verified total number of signatures was 9991 which demonstrates the strength of feeling and sense of importance of these facilities within Haven House to the local community. The number of signatures is below the threshold of 32,000 signatures that would enable the petitioner to request for the matter to be debated at a full Council meeting.

## **Emails and Letters**

104. The content of emails and letters were considered alongside the analysis of the survey returns. In addition, The Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities confirmed that he had sight of all emails and letters as they arrived. A full pack of written responses to the survey, emails and letters was made available to both Executive Member decision makers.

## **Asset of Community Value**

105. On 11 November 2022, an application was accepted by Fareham Borough Council to list Haven House as an 'Asset of Community Value' which gives third-parties or community groups the opportunity to submit a proposal to buy. The nomination was made by Hill Head Residents Association, a local group who also led the application for Haven Cottage to become Grade II listed (January 2022). The County Council chose not to oppose this application.

106. If the County Council expresses an intention to sell the asset, a third-party organisation or community group would be entitled to register their interest to purchase within six weeks. If an interest is registered, this creates a six-month moratorium on the sale of the building to allow time for a proposal to be submitted and considered by the County Council. This has been taken into consideration as part of the recommendations in this report.

## **Climate Change Impact Assessment**

107. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience impacts of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.

108. This climate impact assessment considers two areas of work.

109. Firstly, the proposal to sell the Haven visitor centre and cottage with some of the proceeds re-invested into the provision of a small new depot construction. In principle this will require the use of the carbon mitigation and adaptation tools to make a climate assessment. This would be carried out subject to the outcome of the decision paper and approval of the project. There is an opportunity to improve the climate position for Haven House by future owners upgrading the building to be more climate friendly and potentially reduce the carbon footprint.

110. Secondly, for the management of the NNR an initial assessment of climate change vulnerability was carried out using the adaptation tool. Having completed this the conclusion is that this will have a positive impact on carbon sequestration and climate resilience.

**APPENDICES**

- APPENDIX A - Original Options Studies
- APPENDIX B - Cost Benefit of Options 1-4
- APPENDIX C - Staff Consultation Summary
- APPENDIX D(i) - Public Engagement Summary and D(ii) Survey Analysis
- APPENDIX E - Original Business Case (REDACTED)
- EXEMPT APPENDIX F - Original Business Case (UNREDACTED)
- APPENDIX G - Equalities Impact Assessment
- APPENDIX H - Petition (Online and Paper Front Pages)

**REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:**

**Links to the Strategic Plan**

<b>Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:</b>	yes
<b>People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:</b>	yes
<b>People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:</b>	yes
<b>People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:</b>	yes

**Other Significant Links**

<b>Links to previous Member decisions:</b>	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
<b>Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives</b>	
Titchfield Haven sits within a SPA (Special Protection Area) and a RAMSAR and is a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), LNR (Local Nature Reserve) and NNR (National Nature Reserve)	
NNRs are designated under sections 16-29 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and then strengthened under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. NNRs have the highest level of designation under UK legislation (as opposed to European designations).	

**Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents**

**The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)**

Document

Location

## **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:**

### **1. Equality Duty**

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

### **2. Equalities Impact Assessment**

3. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed to assess the impact of the proposed changes on protected characteristics for both staff and service users.
4. The overall equality impact is judged to be neutral. However, the proposed changes are likely to have a (low) negative impact on age and people with disabilities, due to the Haven House Visitor Centre providing a community space and facilities for those who may have limited mobility, suffer with health problems and as it currently provides a positive impact on wellbeing for people with mental health needs.
5. There would also be an impact on families and children with the loss of a family friendly facility and opportunities to educate/embed a love of nature.

6. However, by investing in the reserve, this ensures that the reserve can continue to be accessed and enjoyed by visitors of all ages now and in the future. The reserve is accessible for those with mobility issues and has benches around the site where people can rest.
7. The impact on rurality was also assessed to be (low) negative because rural communities are ageing faster than urban and, taking into consideration that the majority of Titchfield users fall into the higher age brackets, isolation could be a factor due to the proposal to remove an existing rural service.
8. Conversely, there are other venues in the local area that can provide a similar provision to the visitor centre. Titchfield Community Centre is available to all and the centre is used by many community groups covering a range of recreational, educational and social pursuits and is also available for hire for private functions. Titchfield Parish Rooms also provides this provision.
9. There are also free green spaces within the wider area for people to enjoy along with a pub and café less than a ten-minute walk/short drive from the THNNR, as well as a larger recreation area and café at Alver Valley Country Park run by Gosport Borough Council on the other side of Titchfield.
10. For staff the impacts were judged as negative (low) for sex, age and poverty, as staff are predominantly female, fell into the higher age brackets and the grade profile of staff working at Titchfield Haven is skewed towards the lower grades.
11. The geographical impact has been assessed as all Hampshire, as we know from membership data that people who visit Titchfield Haven live across the county and also live outside of Hampshire Postcode data taken from the survey indicated that 38% of respondents live in Fareham, and concerns raised particularly flagged the detriment to the local community which implies that proposed changes would impact on people living in this particular area within the local authority most significantly.
12. The full EIA can be found in Appendix G.