

**SUBJECT: CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED FELLING LICENCE
APPLICATION 017/4016/2022**

DIRECTORATE: COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT

REPORT AUTHOR: DAVE WALKER, ARBORICULTURAL OFFICER

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide advice relating to the proposed management of priority heathland habitat located within Swanholme Lakes SSSI, by the implementation of limited targeted deforestation and thinning of specified areas.

2. Background

- 2.1 Swanholme Lakes Nature Reserve falls within the City Boundary and is located adjacent to Hartsholme Country Park. The reserve is in the ownership of the City Council and subject to Tree Preservation Order, Doddington Road No1 – Hartsholme Wood.
- 2.2 Swanholme Lakes was designated as a site of Special Scientific Interest in 1985 and became a Local Nature Reserve in 1991.
- 2.3 The site is open to public access and comprises of a variety of habitats including woodland, heathland, and several lakes, which were originally pits formed during the extraction of sand and gravel in the last century.
- 2.4 The tree species forming the woodlands are predominantly Birch, Willow, Pine, Alder, and Oak. The site supports wet and dry heathland, both important habitats supporting a variety of wildlife; the lakes provide suitable conditions for the benefit of several uncommon aquatic species of flora and fauna.
- 2.5 Presently, pioneer species, such as Birch and Willow are encroaching onto the heathland sites, additionally other species such as Pine and Alder are having detrimental effects on the heathland habitat which is located in the vicinity of the area known as Acid Pools. If left unmanaged the presence of these trees will negatively affect the underlying nature of the heathland habitat, leading to the loss of mosses lichens and other desirable heathland species.
- 2.6 Trees growing adjacent to the lakeside banks are currently producing significant shading which has the effect of minimising the habitat potential of the marginal zones. Lakeside trees also influence the level of eutrophication which occurs within individual water bodies due to the shedding of leaves, the deposition of leaves can also have the effect of altering the water chemistry of individual lakes, which in turn could adversely affect the ability of rare plants and marginal species to utilise an otherwise suitable niche.

3. Proposal

3.1 To maintain and manage this diverse site and accommodate the requirements of woodland, heathland, and the lakes in a balanced manner it is proposed to selectively fell, coppice and prune some of the Birch, Willow, Alder, Pine and Oak encroaching onto the existing heathland, or as being identified as being in close proximity to the lakeside edges.

3.2 The Proposed Works Would:

- 1) Prevent woodland encroaching into heathland areas and improve the conditions required for the promotion of heathland species.
- 2) Prevent successional colonisation of the heathland located in the vicinity of Acid Pools by both Pine and alder species, as in line with Natural England guidance.
- 3) Reduce the adverse effects of shading and leaf litter build up within individual lakes whilst encouraging marginal vegetation to colonise and thrive.
- 4) Improve the amenity of the site by opening up viewing areas for the public to observe local wildlife.
- 5) Remove low hanging branches on trees located adjacent to footpaths to provide the public, park rangers and maintenance teams safe and unobstructed access.

4. Additional Information

4.1 As previously stated Swanholme Lakes Nature Reserve is subject to a Tree Preservation Order which prevents any unconsented tree works being undertaken without the local authority's consent, the removal of trees is also controlled via the Forestry Commission and in this case the proposed tree works do not have exemption from the Forestry Commissions Felling Licence legislation.

4.2 As proposed tree removals will produce more than 5 cubic metres of timber per calendar quarter the City Council has a legal obligation to apply to the Forestry Commission for a felling licence to undertake its planned works within the Nature Reserve.

4.3 As the site in question also has SSSI designation the City Council has submitted a Supplementary Notice of Operations (SNO) to the Forestry Commission, this includes detailed information on the protective measures which we will utilise to protect the SSSI interest while we undertake tree felling operations. The SNO also enables Natural England to decide whether to give its SSSI consent to the tree felling work.

4.4 The purpose of a Felling Licence is to ensure that there is no uncontrolled loss of tree cover within designated areas.

4.5 If granted the felling licence negates the requirement of the City Council to apply for tree work via the usual Tree Preservation Order route.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 I consider the proposed works, which have been approved by Natural England, to be both appropriate and beneficial to maintaining the site as a diverse habitat.
- 5.2 It is recommended that members confirm their consent to the above works, and that the officer carries out the requisite procedures to confirm to the Forestry Commission that suitable consultation has taken place.
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How many appendices does the report contain?

None

List of Background Papers:

None

Lead Officer:

Dave Walker, Arboricultural Officer:
dave.walker@lincoln.gov.uk