

Statement from Meyrick Williams, Winchfield Parish Council

Agenda Item 9

Winchfield Parish Council requests that our comments with regard to Item 9, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, are raised on our behalf at the Cabinet meeting on 1 Dec.

We welcome the proposal of a Stakeholder Engagement Plan for Odiham Common but we are disappointed that the Parish Council was not consulted before it was to be presented to Cabinet. The document has been written to address all 16 sites in the District and notes that each site has its own peculiarities. You will recall our conversation following the recent meeting in the Council offices with myself and Councillor Angela McFarlane of Odiham Parish Council regarding the proposed plan and the specific issues that are unique to Odiham Common. Totalling 115 hectares this is one of the few examples of wood pasture outside the New Forest.

The first observation is that Table 1, which lists the countryside sites in the parish they are within, is incorrect. Parts of Odiham Common lie within Winchfield parish. I have attached the map which illustrates the relationship between Odiham Common and the Winchfield parish boundary and it is evident that two other SSSIs, one in Bagwell Green and the other at Bailey's Farm are directly linked to the Odiham Common SSSI. This is further affirmed in that when the common land was designated as an SSSI in 1992 it was declared to be joined with Bagwell Green and Shaw SSSI which used to form part of Winchfield Common. The two Commons run side-by-side lining the route to Wilkes Water. Winchfield should therefore be declared as a joint parish area in Table 1 of the Plan along with Odiham.

We welcome the statement that “the area site ranger will formally meet with representatives from the parish council to discuss present and future works on site”. However there is an inherent danger that if these meetings are allowed to be less frequent than every quarter the whole process can begin to unravel. The dialogue will fail if both parties are not formally required to meet on a regular basis. We do not agree with the statement “We aim for these meetings to take place every quarter as a maximum but may be less if both parties agree”

Most importantly, the Plan makes no reference to how any actions that are decided by the District Council that impact the SSSI are debated and agreed with the Parish Councils. It is not satisfactory to publish the Engagement Plan without also preparing a Management Plan which specifies not only the District and Parish Council representations but also those specialist agencies that have a direct interest and a responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the SSSI and the terms of reference of such a forum. An Odiham Common Management plan should be published concurrently with the Stakeholder Engagement Plan.

We request that our comments are shared with all members of the Cabinet, copied in the minutes of the meeting, and that due weight is applied to our observations at the meeting.