

# HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Executive Decision Record

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Executive Member for Countryside and Regulatory Services
<b>Date:</b>	31 July 2023
<b>Title:</b>	Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve Future Management and Haven House
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Universal Services

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### 1. The decision:

- 1.1. That the Executive Member for Countryside and Regulatory Services declines the bid for Haven House received from Titchfield Haven Community Hub (THCH), for the reasons set out in the report.
- 1.2. That the Executive Member for Countryside and Regulatory Services declines the proposal received from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT) to enter into a 3-year partnership agreement, for the reasons set out in the report.
- 1.3. That the County Council works with HIWWT to develop a stronger working relationship for the benefit of future land management and nature recovery in the wider Titchfield area.
- 1.4. That the Executive Member for Countryside and Regulatory Services notes that the existing decisions made by the Executive Member for Policy, Resources and Economic Development at the Decision Day on 8 December 2022 will now be implemented.
- 1.5. That the Executive Member for Countryside and Regulatory Services notes the hard work that has been done by both THCH and HIWWT in exploring options and in the development of the proposals submitted.

### 2. Reasons for the decision:

- 2.1. Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve, comprising Haven House, Haven Cottage and 135 Hectares of National Nature Reserve, is owned and managed by Hampshire County Council for the benefit of local residents and wider visitors. Proposals which set out to increase investment and protection for this internationally important National Nature Reserve were considered and approved by the [Executive Member for Countryside, Culture and Communities at the Decision Day on 8 December 2022](#) and by the [Executive Member for Policy, Resources and Economic Development at the Decision Day](#) on the same day.
- 2.2. At the 8 December Decision Days, recommendations were approved to close the visitor centre, café and shop located in Haven House, to sell the building and thus removing the liabilities from the County Council. The management of the National

Nature Reserve would be retained and the capital receipt from the sale ring fenced for investment in the Reserve. The report also sets out plans for the development of a longer-term strategy for land management in the wider Titchfield area to prioritise nature and the long-term financial sustainability of the Reserve. It was acknowledged that the primary aim must be to prioritise limited funds into the conservation of the National Nature Reserve, to meet statutory obligations rather than maintaining the facilities at Haven House.

- 2.3. Following this decision, a 6-month moratorium was imposed on implementing this decision to allow the local community to submit proposals regarding the future management of Haven House as an Asset of Community Value and the National Nature Reserve.
- 2.4. Hampshire County Council has received two separate proposals in relation to Titchfield Haven, one bid from the Titchfield Haven Community Hub (THCH), a Community Benefit Society, solely for Haven House, and a second proposal from HIWWT that only refers to the National Nature Reserve. HIWWT concluded that they are not interested in taking over Haven House.
- 2.5. The THCH bid assumes a transfer of Haven House at nil consideration to provide community facilities alongside holiday accommodation. The business plan relies on ambitious income targets to meet revenue costs with no guarantee of a contribution to the running of the National Nature Reserve. Whilst funding has been secured to meet the capital requirements identified, this equates to less than 50% of what is required to achieve the THCH business plan.
- 2.6. Notwithstanding the identified community benefit which could be delivered by the THCH bid, when assessed as a standalone bid for an Asset of Community Value, it does not meet the test of ensuring best use of public resources as the identified community benefits do not outweigh the previously identified need to invest in the reserve, which is an asset of national importance.
- 2.7. It also needs to be considered within the context of the extremely challenging financial position for the County Council overall and the ongoing county-wide budget consultation. A transfer of Haven House at nil consideration would remove from the County Council the ability to make the previously identified and necessary capital investment in the National Nature Reserve (NNR), for which any capital receipt from the sale of Haven House has been ring-fenced.
- 2.8. HIWWT's proposal does not involve an immediate transfer of the NNR but presents a high-level vision which sets out a wider landscape scale approach in the Titchfield and Meon Valley area and requests a formal 3-year partnership agreement in order to develop this and assess its feasibility. It does not provide any financial details as to how the NNR would be managed nor their intentions for investment in the Reserve. HIWWT acknowledge that the proposal requires further work and consideration.
- 2.9. It is considered that, in the absence of a detailed cost comparison and other due diligence, the County Council would risk failing in its fiduciary duty and failing to

take account of relevant considerations if it were to enter into an agreement at this stage that included guarantees for HIWWT which could result in financial disadvantage or have legal implications for Hampshire County Council.

2.10. It is recognised that both THCH and HIWWT have put considerable effort into developing the proposals submitted to Hampshire County Council and these have been carefully considered by the County Council against the published criteria. However, neither submission meets the criterion of being viable and fully costed, they do not meet the financial sustainability objectives of the THNNR, they are not cost neutral for Hampshire County Council and do not represent the best use of public resources as set out in this report and therefore the recommendation is to decline both proposals and proceed with the decision made at the Decision Days on 8 December 2022.

2.11. Hampshire County Council is committed to meeting its obligations in managing Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve and taking forward plans that will enable investment in the National Nature Reserve ensuring its long-term sustainability. The County Council is keen to work with HIWWT and other organisations for the benefit of future land management and nature recovery in the lower Meon Valley area.

### 3. Other options considered and rejected:

3.1.

Option	Assessment
<b>Proceed with THCH bid and HIWWT proposal</b>	Transfer of Haven House asset does not release capital for investment in THNNR nor is there a guarantee of transferring the reserve to remove HCC's statutory responsibilities.
<b>Proceed with THCH bid and decline HIWWT proposal</b>	Would transfer all liabilities of Haven House but the level of investment remaining for the reserve (from sale of Haven Cottage only) is too little to cover the investment needed to manage our statutory responsibilities.
<b>Proceed with HIWWT proposal and decline THCH bid</b>	Potential to transfer the NNR in the future, although interim plan would be required with no guarantee of asset transfer, dependent on further feasibility. Land transfer requirements identified, and likely financial implications to HCC as well as other relevant considerations cannot be assessed at this stage.

### 4. Conflicts of interest:

4.1. Conflicts of interest declared by the decision-maker: None

4.2. Conflicts of interest declared by other Executive Members consulted: None

5. Dispensation granted by the Conduct Advisory Panel: None

6. Reason(s) for the matter being dealt with if urgent: Not Applicable

**7. Statement from the Decision Maker:**

**Approved by:**

**Date:**

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**31 July 2023**

**Executive Member for Countryside and  
Regulatory Services  
Councillor Russell Oppenheimer**