

## Agenda item 4

### For decision – Purchase of Land at Adderwell

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### Summary

The wetland meadow located behind the Retreat is available for purchase. The owners have planning permission for five houses in the area next to the road but are looking to sell the water meadow that borders the river Frome and which extends almost to the Network Rail bridge (and the new boardwalk that extends to Knights Malting.)

The land has strategic value for the community of Frome in that it:

- Is the last remaining stretch of river frontage as it passes through Frome with one side not publicly accessible. Securing this for the residents of Frome would mean an accessible river corridor could be curated in perpetuity.
- As a flooding water meadow, it has very high habitat and biodiversity value – it is Rodden Meadow with even higher wildlife value.
- It has the potential to be a possible landing site for a future bridge from Edmund Park. This separate project is subject to a great many considerations but the purchase of this land has the clear benefit of markedly reducing what are very high levels complexity and materially improving the possible chances of a project taking place.
- The purchase price for the land is £75k and would be funded by a combination of FTC, Friends of the River Frome (FoRF), private fund and crowdfunding. The FTC element for decision today is £30k, together with underwriting a further £20k of crowdfunding. Further operational costs are explained.

The four images below provide a visual overview of the land in question.

*Figure 1 Map of proposed land for purchase*

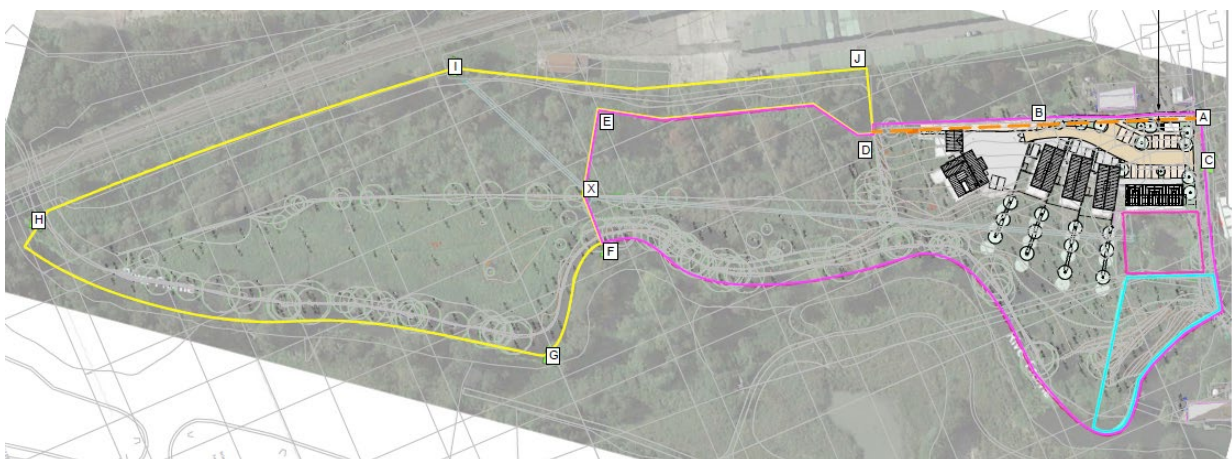
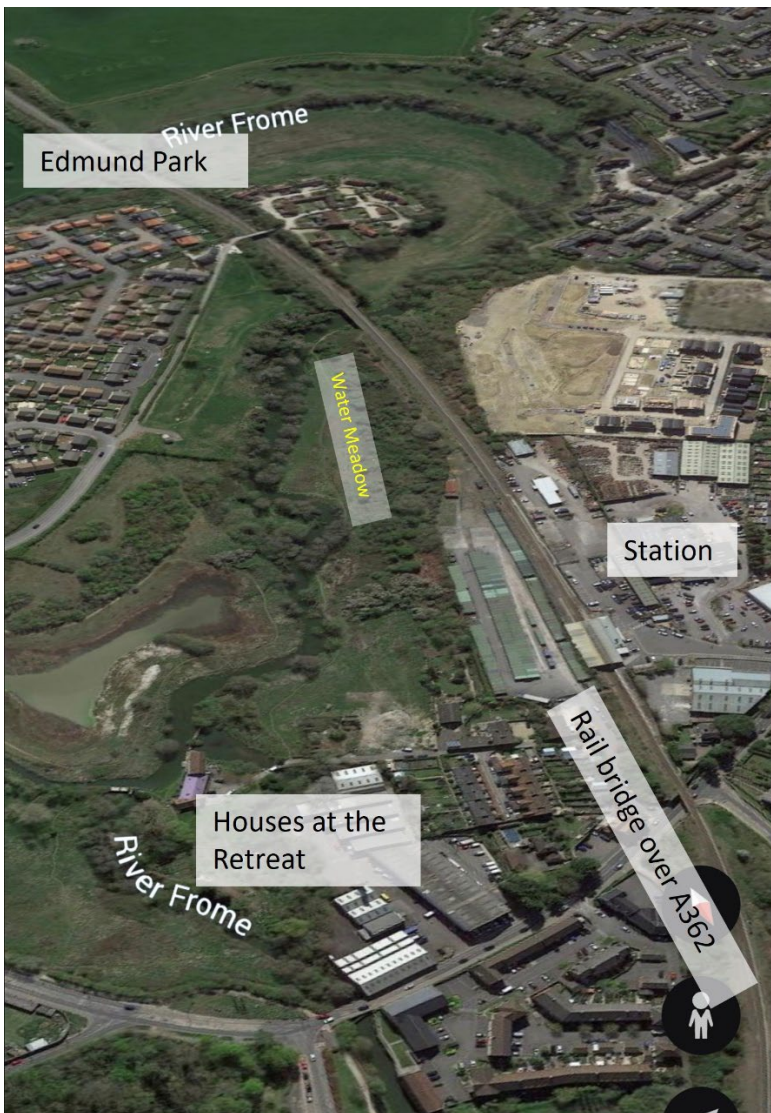


Figure 2 Aerial view of land for purchase



Figure 3 - The proposed land in context of surrounding land



*Figure 4 View across meadow after recently cut*



## Background

The land that would be sold is shown in the map below (figure 6), outlined in yellow. The site is approx 1.5ha and consists of a surfaced track running briefly parallel to the railway line and then sloping down to a water meadow adjacent to the river.

The site is accessed by pedestrians along a surfaced track approx 85m from the tarmac road that runs past the Retreat – points D-B-A on the map below. This track does not form part of the sale but comes with a permanent right of pedestrian access. There would be vehicle access along a new surfaced path to be created: C-A. This track is also not part of the sale but the purchase would come with guaranteed access for vehicles undertaking site management.

## Access

There is currently an application to establish a public right of way along the river to the Retreat and beyond to the road (DMMO application numbers 860 and 943). These are likely to be determined by Somerset Council in 2024 though could be the subject of an appeal lasting many years. Before the outcome of this determination there is no public right of way. The site is however regularly accessed from a boardwalk from Knights Malting and from the Retreat.

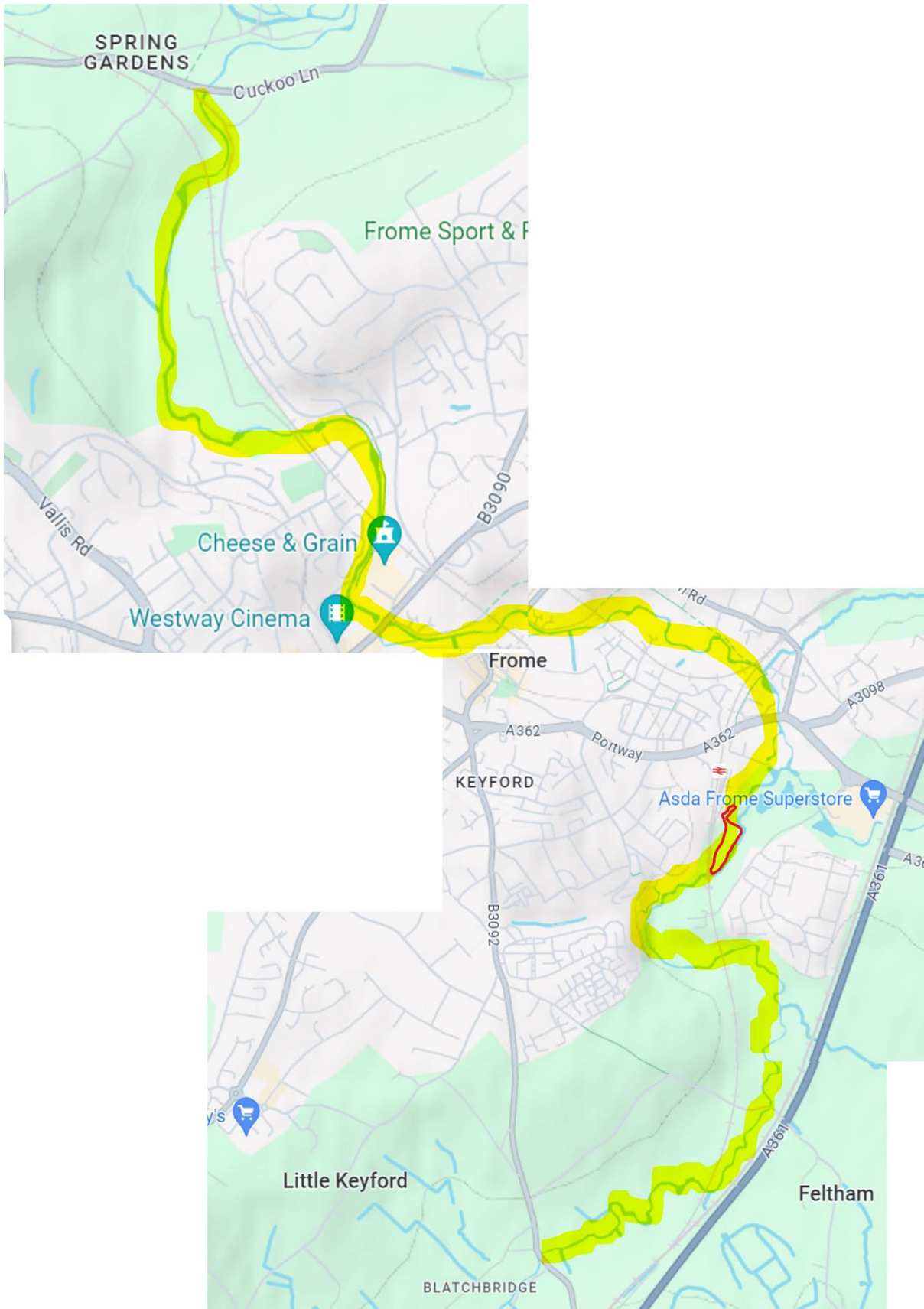
The land which follows the river would, if purchased, form part of a continuous run of accessible land, in public ownership or with unhindered public access, which stretches from Spring Gardens, all the way through town to the far side of Frome at Blatchbridge (near Little Keyford) – see figure 6 below. Ensuring that the entirety of this route is publicly accessible in perpetuity is one of the main community benefits of purchasing this land.

The extensive open meadow land with woodland fringes also has the potential for other outdoor community use such as nature themed events celebrating the river and wildlife and possibly other educational activities such as forest school.

*Figure 5 – Current surfaced access track at point E in figure 1*



Figure 6 - The footpath network following the river Frome



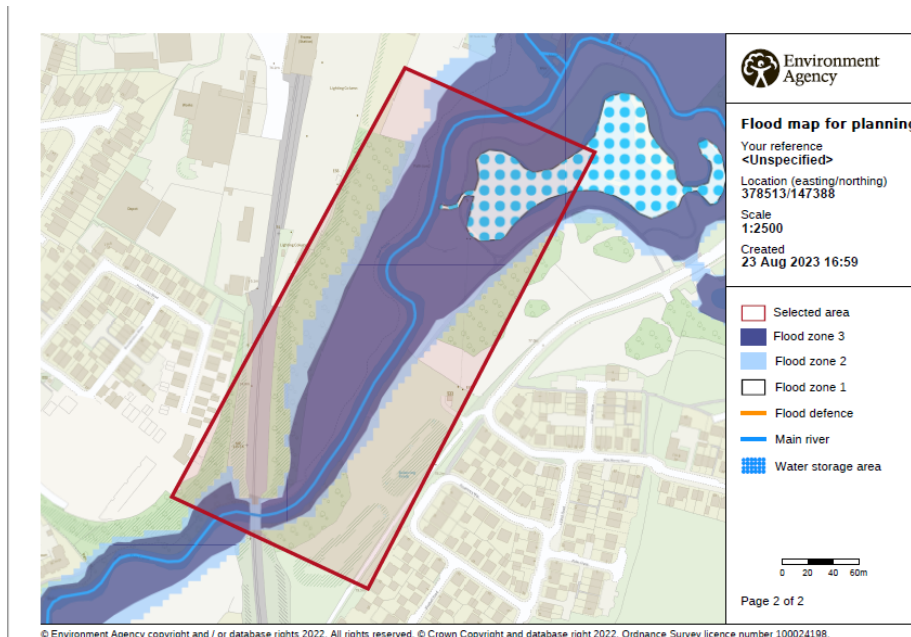
One condition of purchase, which aligns with the Frome Town Council aims of creating a valued community space, is to establish a permissive path along the already-surfaced route F-X-D in figure 1. Also to keep the route where it runs along the river (G-H) accessible and free from obstruction. For information - any works FTC do to establish a permissive path will not impact on the right of way application.

### Habitat Value

The site has very high habitat potential. The Natural England assessment is that this land forms part of the Avon and Vales National Character Area (definition [here](#)) and this site specifically is characterised as lowland seasonally wet pastures and woodlands. The soil is slowly permeable, seasonally wet with slightly acid base-rich loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage. Botanically, Natural England rate this habitat as being of high value for species, wetland habitat quality and overall condition.

The site regularly floods (Environment Agency flood zone 3, the highest likelihood of flooding – see below), which adds to its value for wetland species.

Figure 7 - Flood map covering the purchased land



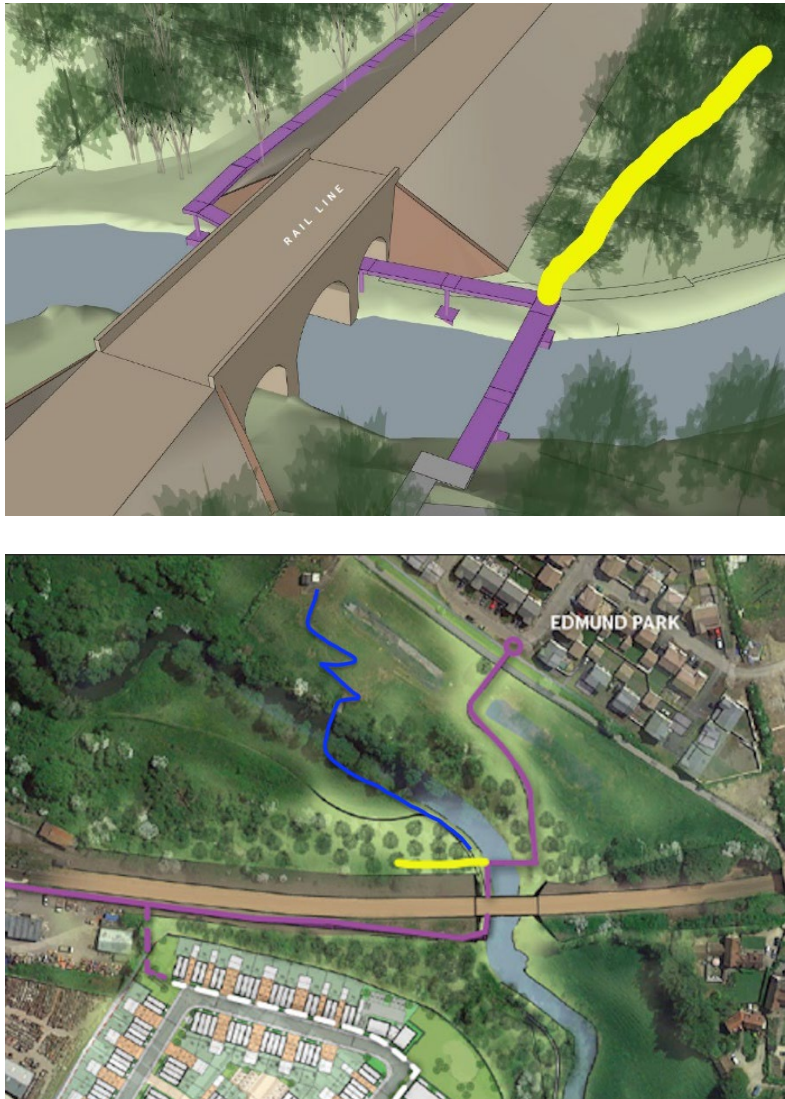
This high habitat potential places it in a similar context to Rodden Meadow but of even greater wildlife value.

### Relevance to possible bridge from Edmund Park

This section of land could also have a strategic value for a separate possible project that is being reviewed of creating a pedestrian bridge from Edmund Park. The scope of this project lies outside of this proposal except to say that the purchase of this land might be a key enabling factor.

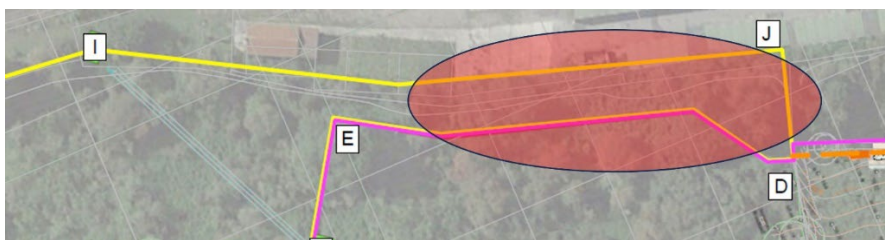
In the current draft plans for a bridge, one option being considered is that on the Frome side of the river the bridge would start/end on Network Rail land and cross the river *underneath* a Network Rail bridge (see Figure 8 below). While this option is technically possible it is complex, expensive and requiring multiple landowner permissions. An alternative landing site could be on the proposed purchase land: the reduction in complexity and cost could be sufficient to markedly improve the likelihood that the project becomes viable (see indicative yellow line or blue line options that connect to the proposed land in the schematics below).

*Figure 8 - Schematics showing possible bridge and footpaths routes from Edmund Park*



#### Other considerations

Knotweed. In an area stretching from D to over halfway to the point E there is some well established Knotweed.

*Figure 9 - Approximate area of Knotweed*

This has already had some active management but will require continued active management with a specialist contractor for a number of years, possibly 5 or even longer. There will be a cost that gradually declines, of approximately £1k/year- likely max total £5k. Note: the Knotweed extends beyond the site boundary. FTC will not retain any responsibility for the Knotweed not on the proposed purchase land but will co-ordinate a contractor to manage the site as one area. The adjoining landowner will be responsible for the contractor costs for work on their land.

**Fencing.** In purchasing this land FTC will install a wooden post and 3 rail fence along the line D-B-A, approx 85m, with a pedestrian access gate at point A. This is not on the land that would be purchased but is the route of the permissive pedestrian access granted as part of the purchase. FTC would not be responsible for the maintenance of the track, the fence, gate or the insurance for the land.

Also FTC would install a stock fencing with 2 strands of plain wire along the route D-E-X-F, on the FTC side of the boundary, approx 125m. This would terminate by the river with a vehicle gate. FTC would have sole control over this vehicle gate and the intention would be to leave this gate permanently open. There would be a wooden return from the gate extending out to the river bank. There would be a covenant requiring FTC to keep the fence in adequate condition. The approximate fencing and gates costs would be £5k covered from the annual Open Spaces budget (see funding summary below).

### Constraints

- The land would have vehicle access for site management as needed though any out of hours powered machinery work would need 1 weeks written notice
- Events would be allowed on the land but a covenant would require agreement with the owners of the adjoining land before any amplified music was allowed.

### Legals

There would be the usual legal fees to agree heads of terms and effect the legal transfer of approximately £5k.

### Funding

The £75k purchase price would be made up as follows:

- FTC £30k
- Friends of River Frome £20k



- Additional pledges – Approx £5k
- £20k balance to be sourced from a FoRF managed Crowdfunding campaign. This sum to be paid upfront by FTC to enable the purchase to go ahead and any shortfall in the campaign to be underwritten by FTC

### Ownership

Although part of the funding would come from FoRF and a Crowdsourcing campaign, FTC would take on the ownership for the benefit of Frome and to allow it to undertake all future land management to ensure public access and maintain high wildlife value and with suitable safeguards to ensure no future sale.

### Additional Costs

- Fencing - £5k (Upfront from Outdoor budget)
- Knotweed - £5k (£1k/yr over 5 years, from Outdoor budget)
- Legals - £5k (from Legals budget)
- Annual maintenance costs for footpath, river works, meadow habitat management - £3-5k/year (Outdoor Budget)
- Ranger time to keep footpath open and other works – approx 3hrs/fortnight in growing months = approx 1 person week/year.

### Pros

- Secure pedestrian access to the iconic river route after which the town is named, that runs through the middle of Frome
- Enable the people of Frome to have access to a rural natural setting of great scenic beauty within easy reach of Frome, including possible educational use
- Ensure the protection and quality management of a lowland wetland site of high habitat value
- Enable the possibility of a more viable/less complex bridge option from Edmund park to be explored
- Working with Friends of the River Frome and the people of Frome directly to share costs

### Cons

- Initial outlay of purchase costs
- Legal costs
- Additional capital expenditure costs for fence and gates
- Ongoing revenue costs and manpower to manage Knotweed and the footpath, river frontage and habitat

## Timescales

If approved, we have an agreement in principal that is ready to be used as the basis for a Head of Terms document, leading to final legal terms. The sale could be finalised within a matter of months.

### Recommendations

1. Note the financial breakdown in the report
2. Purchase the freehold of the land at Adderwell for £75k with £30k funding from existing budgets and
3. Underwrite the FoRF crowdfunding campaign up to £20k if required. This amount to be drawn from the General Reserve which is sufficient.
4. Agree operational funding for initial set-up (Knotweed, Fencing, Legals and ongoing maintenance) as detailed in the report.