



Westfields Wetlands

Consultation Workshop Report

November 29th, 2019

Doody Facilitation & Consulting Ltd



INTRODUCTION

Westfield Wetlands in Limerick City covers 26 hectares and is part of the Lower River Shannon Special Area of Conservation (SAC). It is bounded to the south by the embankment of the River Shannon and the Condell Road and, to the north, by private housing. The Wetlands is widely used as an amenity by local people and is host to a variety of wildlife, including rare migrating wildfowl that visit the area. This area is a regular feature each year in the City Centre Tidy Towns Application under the wildlife and natural amenities category. The Wetlands is regarded as a “unique feature in a major city and an invaluable recreational and amenity resource”¹.

In 2018, in light of concerns relating to sustainability and conservation, Invas Biosecurity was commissioned by Limerick City and County Council (LCCC) to conduct a survey of the Wetlands’ reeds and invasive alien species (IAS) vegetation. These concerns relate to, among others, the level of water supply, water quality conditions, the spread of IAS and the encroachment of reeds into the lake.

PRE-CONSULTATION PROCESS

Arising from a decision of the Climate Action, Biodiversity and Environment Strategic Policy Committee, LCCC proposes to develop a management plan for the Wetlands to protect and enhance its biodiversity and to improve visitor experience. An external consultant will be commissioned in 2020 to prepare the plan.

In line with good practice in public participation, the Council’s project team held a pre-consultation workshop with key stakeholders in November 2019. The goal was to involve stakeholders as early as possible in the development of the management plan to ensure their views were taken into consideration. The purpose of the workshop was to enable stakeholders to feed into the terms of reference for the consultant tendering process. The findings of the workshop will inform the project team’s final decisions on the scope of the terms of reference, within the context of the Council’s role and resources.

This document is a report of the workshop. It was independently facilitated by Doody Facilitation and Consulting Limited.

¹ *Report on the Status of Reeds and Invasive Alien Species in the Westfield Wetlands SAC and a Proposed Management Plan*, Invas Biosecurity, May 2018

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

After a round of introductions and review of the workshop outline, stakeholders were asked to consider the potential geographic scope of the management plan. The following suggestions emerged from this discussion:

- The plan's geographic scope should be:
 - On the southside of Condell Road: from St. Michael's Rowing Club to Barrington's Pier, and
 - On the northside of the Condell Road: from Ted Russell Park to Fernbank
- While the management plan will recognise Westfields Wetlands as part of a wider wetlands' ecosystem in Limerick City, its scope will be limited to the geographic boundary identified in the terms of reference.

WETLANDS' MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Stakeholders were asked to identify and describe possible issues for inclusion in the terms of reference. The following points emerged from this discussion:

1. REED ENCROACHMENT AND INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES (IAS)

- 1.1 Identify and prioritise areas for reed removal
- 1.2 Identify viable methods of reed removal and disposal and recommend the most appropriate method in the context of all considerations
- 1.3 Identify IAS in the Wetlands and, where appropriate, make recommendations regarding their control and/or ongoing management, including identifying training needs of stakeholder groups
- 1.4 Outline factors to be considered for scheduling of reed and IAS removal and disposal in the context of seasonal considerations
- 1.5 Identify and make recommendations regarding the ongoing management of reeds

2. WATER LEVEL AND QUALITY

- 2.1 Undertake sampling at multiple points in order to assess water quality
- 2.2 Make recommendations regarding ideal water depth and management of water levels, including an assessment of water flow
- 2.3 Make recommendations regarding maintaining and expanding the open water area
- 2.4 Identify sources of pollution and make recommendations for their reduction and/or elimination. Potential pollution sources include:
 - storm waters
 - river in-flow
 - road drains

- unauthorised outflow pipes from residential area
- re-mobilisation of nutrients from sediments

3. BIODIVERSITY

- 3.1 Undertake a habitat mapping of the Wetlands and a survey of flora and fauna and make recommendations for appropriate habitat improvements, including provision for pollinators with reference to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan
- 3.2 Identify prevalence of invasive alien fauna, including mink and zebra mussels and make recommendations regarding their control, in line with National Parks and Wildlife Service guidelines
- 3.3 Advise on appropriate tree planting and maintenance
- 3.4 Consider best use and development of central and western areas

4. AMENITY AND RECREATIONAL VALUE

- 4.1 Explore opportunities for enhancement of the Wetlands' amenity and recreational value while maintaining and enhancing biodiversity as a key objective
- 4.2 Identify potential infrastructural developments to improve the amenity and educational value, including:
 - upgrading of existing walkways
 - provision of additional walkways
 - improved pedestrian access from the road
 - improved accessibility and family-friendly features
 - provision of sympathetic signage
 - security enhancements, such as lighting and CCTV
 - links to other walking routes in the City
- 4.3 Ensure recommended infrastructural developments minimise negative impacts on habitats and have adequate regard to protection of biodiversity
- 4.4 Explore and document opportunities for synergies with relevant local, regional and national strategies, such as Healthy Ireland

5. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 5.1 As part of the development of the management plan, undertake a comprehensive engagement process with stakeholders and the general public to seek their views and input
- 5.2 Conduct stakeholder mapping to identify stakeholders, public and private, and provide an outline of their respective roles and responsibilities. Identify mechanisms to facilitate

ongoing engagement with all stakeholders in relation to management, protection and use of the Wetlands

- 5.3 Develop an annual maintenance schedule for the Wetlands within the context of stakeholder roles, responsibilities and resources
- 5.4 Explore funding mechanisms to facilitate sustainable management of the Wetlands, including provision of a ranger
- 5.5 Ensure the management plan has regard to all national and European policies and frameworks relating to nature and biodiversity

CONCLUSION

- a) Stakeholders were advised that LCCC will draft a terms of reference for the tender process within the budget available. While every effort will be made to reflect stakeholders' input, the final decision regarding the scope of the terms of reference lies with the Council, within the context of its role and resources. In this regard, stakeholders identified the following priority areas:
 - o Reed removal
 - o Water body management
 - o Enhancement of the amenity value
- b) The long-term success of the management plan will be dependent on commitment and support from all stakeholders. It was agreed that a multi-agency stakeholder forum should be established to facilitate ongoing communication and coordination.
- c) Stakeholders agreed that reed control measures should be undertaken as necessary, in advance of completion of the management plan, in order to minimise reed encroachment.
- d) It was noted that LCCC must comply with national and European procurement guidelines in relation to commissioning external consultants. In this regard, it is expected that the tendering process will be completed and a consultant appointed by late Spring 2020. The duration of the planning process is subject to seasonal considerations.
- e) It was agreed that the draft terms of reference will be circulated to stakeholders for final comment.