

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

BELTON FIELDS – HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">1.1 To report on the opportunity to work in partnership with Belton Town Council to enhance parts of the historic strip field system at Belton Fields.1.2 To consider whether the council should help to fund the management of the historic strip fields. |
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2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The historic Isle of Axholme strip field farming system is of national importance. It is the largest surviving example of this type of farming in the country. The system creates a landscape type of thin unfenced strips of farmed land. This system of farming dates back at least a thousand years.
- 2.2 In recent times with changes in farming practice where larger fields are used and also with the demands of 'horse keeping', the patterns of the strips have eroded.
- 2.3 The council has worked with local landowners in trying to keep both the landscape and the historic, organisational, and cultural pattern of land management traditions associated with it. This is because it is considered a unique asset to North Lincolnshire. Work has involved studies resulting in a Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) of the Isle of Axholme. This has increased our knowledge and understanding of this important heritage asset. It has further formed the basis for special conservation projects in partnership with Department of Environment Farming and Rural Affairs(DEFRA).
- 2.4 These activities have brought significant funding together with local employment opportunities to this rural area. Using the HLC as the basis for a landscape strategy, the council has encouraged local landowners to manage land in accord with the ancient system, when possible. On our own land at Epworth the council has an agreed tenancy arrangement based upon a requirement that the land is farmed in strips. This brings in funding through a higher level agricultural stewardship scheme.

- 2.4 One of the major surviving examples of this medieval farming system based upon common land holding in large open fields is the Belton Open Field. As part of the above strategy the council worked with Belton Town Council to purchase and actively manage strips of land in the field. Belton Town Council had the vision to retain this historically important asset. We have secured a total of 3.69 hectares under appropriate management to date via this method.
- 2.5 We have supported the Parish in successfully securing a payment from the Rural Payments Agency to assist with appropriate management. Unfortunately, due to an administrative error this funding was lost. We are unable to re-apply for funding at this time.
- 2.6 This “lost” funding equates to approximately the same value as the rental value of the land. This currently stands at £190 per hectare. Property Services officers assessed this value as the ‘going rate’.

3. **OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 3.1 **Option One:** The council could choose to help support the appropriate management of the strips in Belton Fields by renting them. This would amount to an annual payment of £701 to safeguard all of the strips that Belton Town council have under management. The Environment Team’s budgets would meet this cost.
- 3.2 **Option Two:** Do nothing.

4. **ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

- 4.1 We could chose to do nothing and not support this initiative. This would have the effect of taking the strips out and enlarging the field. This would have a negative effect upon the historic landscape. This is therefore not the preferred option.
- 4.2 We could choose to support the strip system by leasing the land and develop a wider community project based around local food production. This is suggested as the best option.

5. **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

5.1 **Financial**

- 5.1.1 Leasing the land will cost the Environment Team budget £701 per year.

5.2 **Staffing**

- 5.2.1 There are no staffing issues from the implementation of this report.

5.3 Property

5.3.1 There are no additional property implications other than the fact that we will lease an area of land for landscape conservation purposes.

5.4 IT

5.4.1 There are no IT issues associated with this report.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

6.1 Statutory

6.1.1 There are no statutory implications as a result of implementing the recommendations in this report.

6.2 Environmental

6.2.1 The Isle of Axholme is recognised as the largest landscape scale medieval strip farming system still remaining in the country. As such, we designated the Isle landscape as an area of special historic landscape in the North Lincolnshire local plan.

6.2.2 Safeguarding the strip system is therefore considered of prime importance.

6.3 Diversity

6.3.1 There are no diversity implication as a result of implementing this report.

6.4 Section 17

6.4.1 There are no Section 17 implications as a result of implementing the recommendations in this report.

6.5 Risk and Other Implications

6.5.1 There are no risks associated with the implementation of this report.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

7.1 Internal consultations were undertaken with relevant services. Any advice given was incorporated into this report.

7.2 We consulted Natural England and English Heritage. They raised no issues of concern.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That the Cabinet member agrees to the council leasing land, as outlined in paragraph 5.1.1 above.

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

- North Lincolnshire Local Plan – particularly policies protecting the historic landscape
- Isle of Axholme Historic Landscape Study.
- North Lincolnshire Councils Landscape Guidelines.