

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**SAFER, GREENER AND CLEANER PLACES
CABINET MEMBER**

EPWORTH FIELD REEVES

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 North Lincolnshire Council to take ownership of the remaining meres in Epworth.
- 1.2 The Isle of Axholme and Hatfield Chase Landscape Partnership (IoAHC LP) to run a small project focused on Epworth's Field Reeves.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Epworth Town Council have been approached by HSR Law on behalf of the Epworth Field Reeves, with a view to transferring the "ownership" of the various pieces of land with the responsibilities for management, maintenance and insurance. The pieces of land are known as meres and form part of the medieval Open Field system.
- 2.2 Epworth Town Council discussed the issue at a meeting on Tuesday 6 September 2016 and agreed to refer the matter to North Lincolnshire Council.
- 2.3 From the early Medieval times, the arable parts of England were covered by a complex system of cultivating the land in strips. These strips were divided up among the farmers, sometimes on an annual basis but more often in a manner that ensured all received parcels of mixed productivity. The strips were aggregated into furlongs and then into fields. Hedges were few, giving us the term 'Open Field'.
- 2.4 The task of managing Epworth's open fields fell to the Field Reeves. Their job was to keep in order any fences or ditches and regulated the times during which animals were permitted to pasture. The reeves ensured the crop was varied and generally maintained and managed the field subject to the notions of the owner. They resolved any issues or disputes and managed the letting or sale of the individual strips.

- 2.5 In recent times, the job of Field Reeve has fallen to local farmers, landowners and members of the community who are keen to keep alive this traditional way of managing the landscape. Today, Epworth's own Field Reeves have three surviving members. It is of great importance to pass down these customs now to prevent them disappearing. These such customs are the historic fabric of the area making Epworth unique and distinguishing.
- 2.6 The aim of the IoAHC LP is to re-connect local people with their landscape and heritage.
- 2.7 The IoAHC LP will therefore run a project that will help to promote the history of Field Reeves and also engage volunteers helping to train them in aspects of mere maintenance.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Option 1: It is recommended that North Lincolnshire Council to take ownership of the proposed meres and for IoAHC LP to run a small project focused on Epworth Field Reeves.
- 3.2 Option 2: Ownership of the meres remains with the Epworth Field Reeves.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 It is recommended that option 1 is approved, which would give the following outcomes:

- Improved condition of habitat and early signs of functioning mere system
- Better understanding of the landscape's heritage
- Communities will feel more connected to their heritage
- Communities will have better skills to sustainably manage their heritage

4.2 Approving option 3.2 would give the following outcomes:

- Some local heritage will be lost
- Work of the Epworth Field Reeves is coming to an end, unless ownership is maintained many of the meres will be lost into the existing field system

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

5.1. Financial

- 5.1.1. North Lincolnshire Council are already responsible for maintenance of these pieces of land due to them being public rights of way. Taking ownership will not add to this burden.

5.1.2. Volunteering activity and interpretation will be provided within the existing loAHC LP budget.

5.2. Staffing

5.2.1. No additional staffing is needed; the project will be delivered by the existing loAHC LP Staff.

5.3. Property

5.3.1. There are no implications for Council property.

6. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

6.1 Not applicable.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That the Cabinet Members approves that North Lincolnshire Council takes ownership of the proposed meres in Epworth and the loAHC project runs a small project focused on Epworth's Field Reeves.

DIRECTOR: OPERATIONS

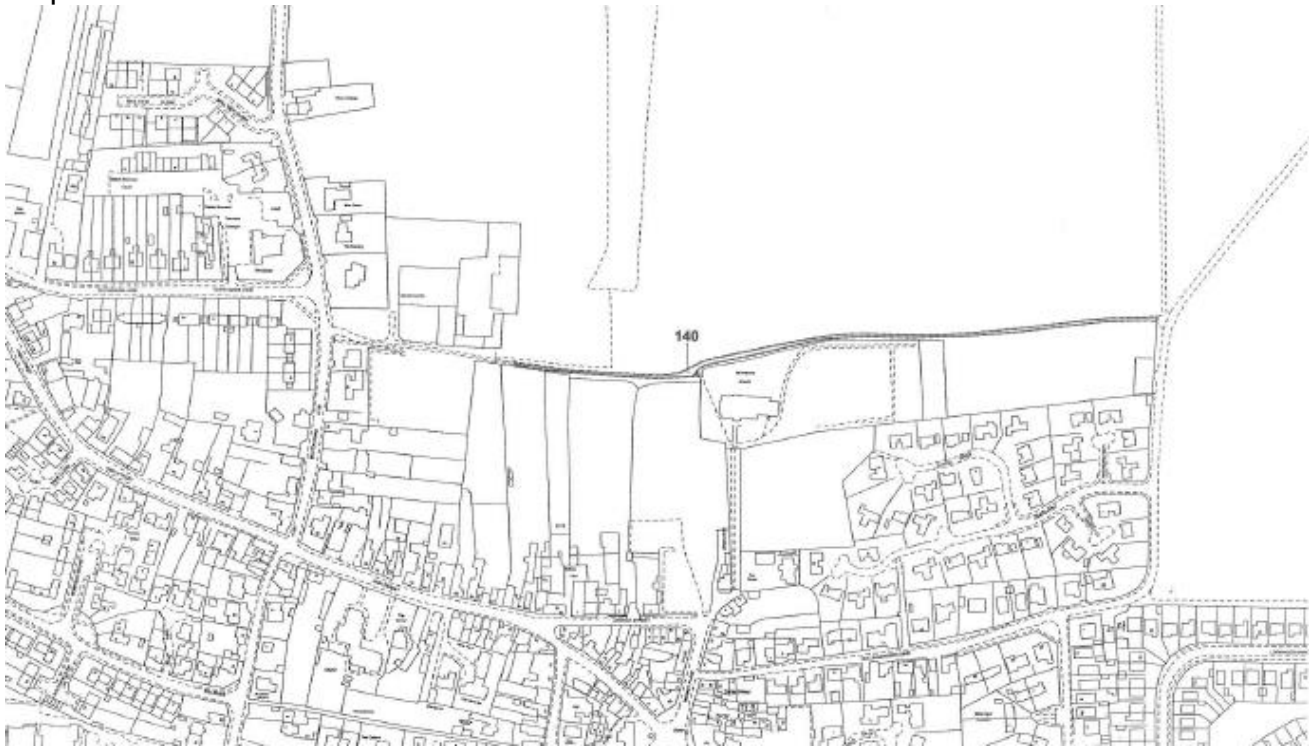
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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report None

Appendix- Maps of Meres in Epworth

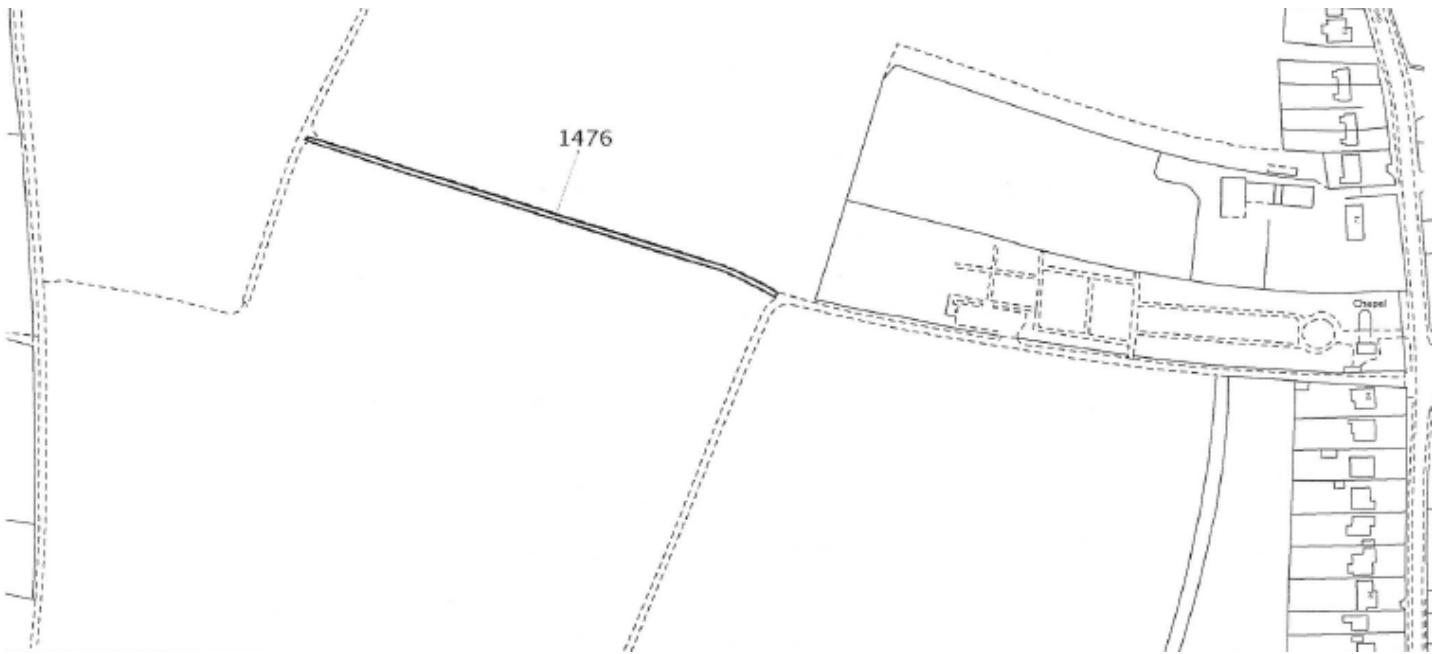
Map 1



Map 2



Map 3



Map4

