

CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL
COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

COMMITTEE:	Council		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	22nd January 2026 7.00 pm	LOCATION	Congleton Town Hall
REPORT FROM	Chief Officer		
AGENDA ITEM	9		
REPORT TITLE	Astbury Mere		
BACKGROUND	<p>Astbury Mere falls under the authority of the Astbury Mere Trustees, who previously had a contract with Cheshire East Council/Ansa for the provision of a Park Ranger Service. This service undertook the overall maintenance and management of the site, except for the Lake.</p> <p>As Cheshire East Council/Ansa started to review its services, discussions took place about the value of the contract and the services being provided.</p> <p>The Trustees agreed that they would explore other options, which resulted in Ruth Burgess, our previous Streetscape Development Manager, providing a quote for Streetscape to provide those services. The quote provided by Ruth mirrored the existing contract they had with CEC / Ansa, which was circa £26,000 pa. This was approved in principle, and it to be reviewed after a year.</p> <p>Shortly after commencing this service, Ruth moved into her new role in early June 2025, leaving a void. It was a difficult time for both ourselves and the trustees, and it became apparent to us quite quickly that the £26,000 was not adequate, as well as the principle of taking on extra work only in the winter months was not being applied, creating capacity issues for delivering our current Streetscape contract.</p> <p>We felt an obligation to support the Trustees as they had made a decision to leave CEC / Ansa and work with the Town Council</p>		
UPDATE	<p>In July 2025, we arranged and agreed on a programme of works to see them through the summer on an agreed hourly rate and basically stuttered through to the end of the growing season. At this point, we engaged our replacement Streetscape Development Manager and started to hold joint meetings to agree on a way forward with regard to the Management and Maintenance of Astbury Mere. We gained clarity on what was required and provided quotes for what we perceived to be the correct value for the contract and how we could service it.</p>		
FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS	<p>The value of the contract that has been agreed is £42,289, which is an increase of £16,289 on the original contract. This cannot be delivered by the current staffing structure, and this is part of the reason for the increase in the streetscape staffing levels. This does not totally cover the</p>		

	<p>cost of a Park Ranger, however, with the current demands on the Streetscape Service, the Park Ranger would undertake further environmental improvement projects across Congleton. It is also worth noting that the Streetscape Development Manager is currently in discussions with an adjoining Parish Council with regard to managing and maintaining large open spaces for them, not dissimilar to Astbury Mere in terms of scale.</p>
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS	<p>Managing Astbury Mere represents a great opportunity to introduce and showcase environmental projects. This will also add to the services that the Town Council provides, which will need to be promoted to residents and visitors. There could be further promotional opportunities for the Town Council and the Town by utilising the Astbury Mere centre, which is currently used for a few meetings a year</p>
EQUALITY CONSIDERATION	<p>The Park Ranger will be required to ensure, wherever possible, there is equal access around Astbury Mere in its current guise, and considered when introducing additional activities and projects.</p>
RISK MANAGEMENT	<p>The agreement on the contract value was agreed just before Christmas, whilst the arrangements appear to be favourable to both sides, we still need to undertake some due diligence on Astbury Mere and have a formal contract in place, namely:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The contract needs to be at least 3 years with an annual review built into it. 2. Asking if a situation occurs, such as a key tenant leaving, means that they have insufficient income to meet the financial agreement. We have questioned how this can be replenished, i.e., can reserves be used to do this, if so, to what level and for how long? <p>We are looking to start this contract at the beginning of the new financial year, and we will advertise the role. Please note we will not engage an officer until we have a satisfactory response to the above</p>
DECISION REQUEST	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To approve the contract with Astbury Mere Trustees of £42,289 for the Management and Maintenance of Astbury Mere, subject to satisfactory outcomes to the points raised in the Risk Management. 2. The decision to progress is delegated to the Chief Officer, the Responsible Financial Officer and the Chair of Finance and Policy.