

18.4 Motion with Notice - Field River

Report Reference	GC220125F18.4
Council Member	Councillor – Maggie Duncan

CONFIDENTIAL MOTION

That pursuant to Section 90(2) and (3)(b)(i) and (ii) and (d)(i) and (ii) of the *Local Government Act 1999*, the Council orders that all persons present, with the exception of the following persons: Chief Executive Officer, General Manager City Services, General Manager City Development, General Manager Corporate Services, Manager Office of the Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer, Manager Engineering, Assets and Environment, Unit Manager Engineering, Water Resources Coordinator, Media and Engagement Advisor, Unit Manager Governance and Council Support, be excluded from the meeting as the Council receives and considers information relating to Motion with Notice – Field River, upon the basis that the Council is satisfied that the requirement for the meeting to be conducted in a place open to the public has been outweighed by the need to keep consideration of the matter confidential given the information relates to the contribution towards land purchase.

MOTION

That Council:

1. Notes that the State Government is in advanced negotiations to purchase private portions of the Field River Valley from its private landowners to incorporate into the broader Glenthorne National Park precinct.
2. Endorses a contribution from the City of Marion of up to \$350,000 towards the purchase price, subject to the following conditions being agreed:
 - a. Council is not responsible for any maintenance, risk or future expenditure on this land.
 - b. DEW agrees to provide the City of Marion with an ongoing licence over a sufficient section of the Field River to allow Council to construct and maintain a wetland along the river.
 - c. If a wetland is constructed and if environmental flows allow, the City of Marion will exclusively be able to take water from the wetland to irrigate Council-owned reserves and sports facilities
 - d. The decision whether or not to obtain a licence, or to build a wetland, remains at the discretion of the City of Marion.
3. In accordance with Section 91(7) and (9) of the *Local Government Act 1999* the Council orders that this report, Motion with Notice – Field River, any appendices and the minutes arising from this report having been considered in confidence under Section 90(2) and (3)(b)(i) and (ii) and (d)(i) and (ii) of the Act, except when required to effect or comply with Council's resolution(s) regarding this matter, be kept confidential and not available for public inspection for a period of 12 months from the date of this meeting. This confidentiality order will be reviewed at the General Council Meeting in December 2022.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION**BACKGROUND**

In 2016, when the Liberal Party, from Opposition, announced that if they formed government, they would secure the future of Glenthorne Farm and create Glenthorne National Park, a broader vision

for environmental protection and restoration was outlined. This vision included bringing the Field River Valley into the parks system and including this in the Glenthorne National Park precinct.

Since 2018, numerous actions have occurred to fulfil the Glenthorne vision including the purchase of Glenthorne Farm from the University of Adelaide in October 2019, the proclamation of Glenthorne National Park in May 2020 and the opening of the park for public enjoyment in August 2020.

Upon proclamation of the park, O'Halloran Hill Recreation Park was extinguished and rolled into the broader national park; significant investment has occurred in the amenity of conservation value of Marino Conservation Park; the RSPCA has announced it will construct its headquarters on the eastern edge of the park at the former O'Halloran Hill Driving Range site; and Happy Valley Reservoir has opened for recreation. Soccer, BMX and mountain biking facilities have been constructed in the park's recreational zone and an upgrade to Majors Road commenced in mid-January 2022.

This leaves the Field River Valley as the last component of the original Glenthorne vision to be significantly advanced. The valley, which comprises 55.3km², some of which is under the ownership of the City of Marion, some held by the Commissioner of Highways (Department for Infrastructure and Transport) and a large portion owned by Longfield Pty Ltd, a private development company which has previously undertaken large scale land developments in the region.

DISCUSSION

The Longfield Pty Ltd land being considered for purchase comprises a number of allotments of land, totalling 136.3 hectares. There is additional land adjacent Reynella which is used by Boral for current mining activity. This land is out of the scope of any purchase and mining activity is envisaged to occur without any negative impact on the broader valley.

The Field River Valley is in various states of environmental condition. The Lower Field River (largely on City of Marion land) is an example of high quality environmental restoration, beginning in 2006 and led by the Friends of the Lower Field River. Land in the upper reaches of the valley (largely owned by the Commissioner for Highways) is in reasonable environmental condition due to its restoration as part of the development of the Southern Expressway, while the large central portions of the valley (largely privately owned) are in poor environmental condition, characterised by woody weed infestations, particularly through the river course.

The valley also has a history of mining extending back to shortly after Europeans arrived in South Australia. The state heritage listed Worthing Mine is found in the southern part of the valley, close to Hallett Cove Heights. This heritage is worthy of protection and its story told.

The river is likely to have significance to the Kaurna people, with plentiful fresh water, sheltered rock faces and its proximity to the sea making it a potentially attractive area for Aboriginal people to occupy and visit.

Despite environmental degradation, there are considerable tracts of surviving native shrubs and grasses throughout the valley, while large river red gums are found along parts of the river's course. The size of the valley and its position with a large corridor of open space and native vegetation (the broader Glenthorne National Park precinct) mean that the area plays an important habitat for birdlife, including small and medium sized raptors, and potentially small animals into the future. The improving water quality of the Field River over recent times means that native fish and frogs are likely to do well in the river.

Given the environmental strategic nature of this tract of land, in February 2021 the Minister for Environment and Water, Hon David Speirs MP, established a taskforce under the auspices of Green Adelaide, to explore opportunities to bring all or part of the Field River Valley into public

ownership. The taskforce is chaired by Minister Speirs has representatives from the Attorney-General's Department, Department for Infrastructure and Transport, Department for Energy and Mining, Department for Environment and Water, Green Adelaide and City of Onkaparinga. The City of Marion is represented on the taskforce by Chief Executive, Tony Harrison.

Work is underway to transfer the land owned by the Commissioner for Highways to the Minister for Environment and Water for eventual incorporation into the parks estate. A range of other works have been undertaken including botanical and biological surveys of species in the valley, prescribed burns on land owned by the City of Marion and the Commissioner for Highways, woody weed removal on the land where prescribed burns have taken place, as well as follow up revegetation. Trees for Life (SA) was recently contracted to undertake further weed removal and revegetation on targeted areas of land owned by the Commissioner for Highways.

Carbon sequestration opportunities associated with weed removal and revegetation of the Field River Valley are being actively investigated by the taskforce and provide opportunities for carbon offsets/neutrality for organisations including the City of Marion.

The taskforce has identified the significant environmental, recreational and community development opportunities that would be presented by bringing the Longfield Pty Ltd land into the parks estate. Bringing the land into public ownership would also provide opportunities to actively manage the site, particularly mitigating fire risk, identifying problems associated with legacy mining activities, and securing the future of heritage buildings (eg, the Worthing Mine site).

The focus of environmental restoration works would likely initially be on the Field River's course, removing the infestation of woody weeds and establishing a linear trail along the river, creating trail heads in the north and south of the valley, and developing a long term weed removal and revegetation plan for the entire valley.

There is a valuable opportunity to establish a wetland in the southern portion of the valley, potentially adjacent the City of Marion's Skipper Close Reserve in Hallett Cove Heights. This wetland would provide a significant environmental benefit, allowing sediment and other pollutants within the Field River to settle and be removed prior to water entering Gulf St Vincent. Boardwalks and interpretative resources could be located in and around a wetland and water could be harvested to water local reserves and Hallett Cove's Oval Road sporting complex, providing a cost offset to council. The wetland could be established on land licensed or leased to the City of Marion from the Minister for Environment and Water, with any project likely to be favourably viewed by Green Adelaide's Water Sustainability Grants.

Commercial in confidence negotiations are ongoing between the state government and Longfield Pty Ltd. A purchase price of \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million is likely to be agreed on within the coming days.

Response Received From	Water Resource Coordinator – Glynn Ricketts
Corporate Manager	Manager Engineering, Assets and Environment – Mat Allen
General Manager	General Manager City Services - Tony Lines

STAFF COMMENTS

Land Acquisition

The Longfield Group has from time to time tried to sell five connecting titles incorporating natural landscapes, wildlife and a scattering of ruins from the Worthing mine site of the 1850's. Attachment 1 shows the boundary of the private land parcels within the Marion Local Government Area.

There has been no investment by the current owners to maintain the land. Consequently, the land has many liabilities associated with it and is in very poor condition. Staff agree that the Longfield land would be better in public ownership rather than private, subject to the conditions presented in the Motion that Council has no ongoing financial liabilities for the remediation and ongoing management of the land parcels.

Staff also agree that the opportunity to purchase the land is unique and is now time critical. The opportunity to transfer the land to public ownership is unlikely to eventuate again in the short to medium term.

The key driver for public ownership is the environmental, social, historical, and recreational values. The entire corridor has illegal public access via informal tracks and trails. Anti-social behaviour generates regular complaints. Transferring the land to the Department for Environment and Water will deliver widescale woody weed control, revegetation, other ecological improvements and improve public access. An active fire management program and other public safety deliverables such as preventing access to dangerous sites like the historic kiln and mine will also be delivered.

Staff consider that there is limited opportunity for economically viable carbon sequestration within the Field River corridor. This was discussed in some detail at the Elected Member Forum on 9 November 2021. A report is being prepared to present to Council in February on wider opportunities for carbon sequestration.

Staff therefore recommend that the decision to invest in a contribution for land purchase should be considered outside of the possible benefits from carbon sequestration.

Land Acquisition Cost

There is currently no funding set aside in the 2021-22 Annual Business Plan for a contribution towards the acquisition of private portions of land at the Field River Valley. Should Council support the motion an allocation of up to \$350,000 will be required through Council's 2021-22 Budget review process. The allocation of funding could be sourced from funding set aside in Council's Open Space Reserve Fund.

Proposed new Wetland for Marion

Various studies have proposed wetland(s) for the Field River Valley. Contributing to the cost of the State Government buying the Longfield Group land would secure Marion an ongoing licence to construct and generate a wetland in the Field River Valley.

The potential for stormwater harvesting, treatment and storage is considered low, but a feasibility and preferred site selection study (site 3 on Attachment 1 is the current preferred site) should be undertaken in conjunction with the Field River Task Force.

Staff suggest that a wetland should be considered separately from a decision to invest in a contribution for land purchase.

A wetland would provide improved water quality outcomes (low flow treatment only). The concept is likely to be supported by a wide range of stakeholders, including Green Adelaide. However, the construction of a wetland is logistically challenging due to poor access and bedrock and likely to result in high capex costs.

There would be low water security as a result of using a tributary as opposed to the main river (main river is already affected by Water Proofing the South/Happy Valley Reservoir). The wetland is likely to be dry in the Summer. The construction of a wetland may in fact not be viable.

The potential wetland is currently an unfunded initiative. An offline low flow wetland could cost \$1M. Should a Stormwater Harvesting scheme be justified this could cost approximately \$3M to secure most of the water for the Hallett Cove Sports Complex.

The annual operating budget for a wetland is estimated at \$6,000 p/a. The operating cost for a small scale stormwater harvesting wetland is estimated at \$30,000 p/a. Assuming any surplus water from the Field River (in addition to required downstream environmental flows) meets or exceeds demand, future potable water savings may exceed \$50,000 p/a.




There is the possibility of working in partnership with the City of Onkaparinga to deliver savings for both CapEx and OpEx and this would be explored via the Field River Task Force

ATTACHMENTS

1. Attachment 1 [**18.4.1** - 1 page]



Longfield Pty Ltd Properties

-  Longfield Pty Ltd Property
-  Marion Council Boundary
-  Wetlands