**Response to Consultation**

Purpose of Note

To set out the views of the Friends of the Meadows Committee to the Handbridge Neighbourhood Plan Survey 2023.

Background

The Committee understands that the Council is responsible for managing the Meadows for the recreation of the people of Chester under the conditions they were endowed to the Council. The Friend’s role is to support the Council in its agreed management plan. We can also try to influence the Council’s attitudes and plans.

The Committee believe that the Friend’s wider membership is keen to see the Meadows preserved as a recreational space which has the special feature that it is an area where the natural environment can be sustained. Arresting the decline of nature (by 2030) is a national objective and of course adds to physical and mental wellbeing in an increasingly urban environment.

Current Issues of Concern

There have been pressures on the Meadows; population growth exacerbated by covid lock downs and increased dog ownership; cuts to local authority funding especially since the financial crisis in 2008; sewage pollution incidents; changes to the grassland and vegetation with the loss of grazing and scrub encroachment. All this is affecting the look of the Meadows, its flora and fauna and raises questions about future plans and actions.

Actions by the Friends

The Friends have tried to address these issues by helping to

1. Inform the public (quarterly newsletters; information boards; walks.)
2. Protect grassland (Clearing invasive species (willow and Himalayan balsam; monitoring grass cutting contracts.)
3. Raise pollution alerts, and clear litter including bagged dog faeces.
4. Encourage wild life to remain or return (Bat and barn owl boxes)
5. Liaise with other interested parties (Adjacent landowners including the Council itself through its other departments; participation in the Handbridge Neighbourhood Plan; Chester Zoo.)

Response to Neighbourhood Plan Questions.

7- *Do you agree with the draft vision?*

The Committee would prefer to see a vision that specifically includes conserving and improving the natural environment which is an international, national and local priority.

8- *Do you agree with Objective 1?*

Yes if the draft vision includes the suggested amendment. There would then be a clear link with the overall vision for the Neighbourhood.

9- *Do you agree with Objective 2?*

Yes. The Meadows {area e)} is included. However, issues might arise in future around proposed development for recreational purposes in a green space.

24- *Would you support the designation of the following sites as designated Local Green Spaces?*

Yes. Certainly for Earl’s Eye Field (the Meadows) and from a wild life sustainability and public wellbeing point of view, the other sites as well.

*Are there other green spaces that you think should be included*?

 A more general comment is related to the threat to the decline in nature on the Meadows. The Committee’s concerns about pressures, outlined above, can only be addressed by ensuring that there is open access from those areas further up the river. In particular between e) and b) the allotment gardens.

25-*Comments and Updates on Progress*

Following on from the link between the Meadows and the land immediately adjacent, there is a case for considering the whole of the land up river until it joins the Eaton Road by the Duke’s Drive Woods

The Committee feels that this an important wildlife corridor that helps reduce the environmental decline on the Meadows and on towards the Westminster Bridge. It also would help with the creation of wildlife corridors such as those being developed by Chester Zoo in the Plan area.

There may be possible links and nature corridors between other proposed green spaces. Apart from countering the decline in nature this would strengthen Handbridge’s attractiveness as an area to live work and visit.