

43. LINLITHGOW LOCH CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

The Council Executive considered a joint report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Planning & Economic Development and Head of Operational Services advising of the ongoing work being undertaken by the Linlithgow Loch Catchment Management Group.

The report advised that Linlithgow Loch was formed from a block of ice left behind by retreating glaciers at the end of the last ice age and was one of only two remaining natural lowland lochs in the Lothian's and provided the setting for Linlithgow Palace. It was also a key part of the tourist destination experience and was well used by local residents.

The report continued to advise that the Loch was a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest by Scottish Natural Heritage for its botanical interests that were characteristic of a naturally eutrophic loch and was owned and administered by Historic Scotland.

The report went on to advise that in recent years the appearance of a seasonal blue/green algal bloom on the surface of the loch had led to concerns about potential public health issues and a serious deterioration in water quality that had led to the formation of the blooms.

A working group of stakeholders was therefore established to tackle the algal bloom issue and to provide a forum to allow environmental issues relating to the loch to be explored.

The working group met quarterly and it was noted that the following items had formed the basis of many discussions over the years and included :-

- Two academic studies of Linlithgow Loch;
- Linlithgow Loch Flood Risk Management issues;
- Yellow Fish Campaign;
- Future issues and the way forward – establishment of a charitable trust; and
- Awareness raising

In conclusion the report advised that Linlithgow Loch was an important asset to the town and to West Lothian generally. However, its location, previous uses and complex series of interrelated issues had affected the water quality of the loch and under certain conditions there could also be a risk of flooding to some surrounding property.

The Linlithgow Loch Catchment Group had been working to better understand these issues and where possible, progress improvements. After the completion of recent academic studies, now may be the time to establish a more formal vehicle, such as a Linlithgow Loch Trust dedicated to raising awareness and securing funds to improve water quality.

It was recommended that the Council Executive note :-

- The update on the two recent studies related to Linlithgow Loch; and
- The Environment PDSP's consideration that the potential formation of a charitable trust would be effective in promoting improvements in water quality and the environment of the Loch and that officers would report back on the legal and fundraising potential of such a trust.

Decision

To note the terms of the report.