

A Strategic Development Plan for Stanwick Lakes

Rockingham Forest Trust (RFT) is a Charitable Trust (No. 1050157) which manages the Stanwick Lakes nature reserve and countryside attraction as a social enterprise. Income from our visitors directly supports the costs of running the site which is self-financing. There is a wholly owned subsidiary 'RF Trust Enterprises Ltd' (No. 06581652) which runs all commercial activity on the site and donates all profits made back to the charity.

Stanwick Lakes covers some 750 acres – it is a Site of Specialist Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Protection Area (SPA) and a wetland of international importance (RAMSAR). This means that it is protected for Conservation and managed in such a way to conserve and safeguard the ecological balance for future generations, whilst still offering an active recreational site with a host of choices to keep our visitors engaged for a full day and have the opportunity to explore this unique habitat.

Following recent Heritage Development work and a Governance Review, RFT is looking ahead to its future sustainability and planning site development in the short, middle and long term. This brief is for a **high level 'Options Appraisal'** report which explores possible options and opportunities whilst mitigating constraints to recommend a **preferred option for strategic site development** providing RFT with a direction of travel and future organisational sustainability.

RFT is therefore looking to appoint a specialist individual or collaborative team with significant and demonstrable experience of developing and delivering exceptional, ambitious and impactful sitewide strategic planning for an environmental, heritage and visitor attraction venue.

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1 Summary and Context

Rockingham Forest Trust (RFT) is embarking on an exciting next stage in its development to review and confirm the site infrastructure required to meet continued audience growth to 2030 and beyond and maximise its income generation potential.

Following a recent Heritage Development Report, itself a product of the development of heritage activities on site over the past ten years, RFT has confirmed that natural and cultural heritage is an essential part of the site's history, public engagement and future delivery potential.

Added to this, the Charity's work in promoting education, learning, social inclusion, inclusiveness and community wellbeing has attracted a number of strong commercial partners, who are amongst a growing number of organisations wishing to hire and use the facilities for a range of commercial purposes, and these also offer future potential.

But with this initial success comes constraints. RFT has a number of limited spaces to hire to these multiple audiences, and clashes are becoming more frequent, meaning RFT is reaching the point where bookings and therefore income has to be declined. This is problematic especially when decisions are between taking a commercial hire and the greater income that would bring, versus providing a community group a free space as part of our own charitable objectives.

RFT and its Board of Trustees therefore needs to move to a position quickly where sites across Stanwick Lakes which have been identified for development and growth are expertly assessed and independent advice is given on their possible use, with indicative timescales and resources adding to a single development plan.

Some of these sites have more constraints than others owing to the protections on site. Some may have multiple functions or potential audience uses, whilst others might only have limited income generation or audience development potential – by exploring each of these sites together, a clear way forward for functions and audiences can be achieved.

2 The Commission

RFT are looking to appoint an experienced specialist or collaborative team to **develop high-level recommendations and preferred options** for establishing the direction of travel and site and funding infrastructure requirements for Stanwick Lakes, aligning site delivery, local needs and Trustee aspirations into a coherent and aligned Options Appraisal Report.

Throughout this work, it is essential that the appointed specialist explores the current various aspects of organisational delivery, existing venues across the site, land availability, resources and organisational potential, and existing and potential audiences.

Through this commissioning process, RFT are keen to demonstrate the value that Stanwick Lakes can bring to residents and visitors and how cultural, economic and social benefits can enhance a place and its people with its unique local and national stories.

Aims for this initial stage of work can be summarised as:

- Deliver an Options Appraisal of potential Sites for Development across Stanwick Lakes, to act as a clear direction of travel from which to allocate future RFT and partner resources and to strategically secure external resources.
- To work closely with RFT Staff, Trustees and identified Partners, in the development of options, being mindful to adequate representation of the diversity and geography of our communities that visit or might visit Stanwick Lakes in future.
- To undertake a range of partner and stakeholder consultation, responding to ideas, suggestions and aspirations to inform and evidence options for future and aligned strategic delivery.
- Through this work, identify one or more options for future infrastructure provision, outlining any benefits and drawbacks, and any preferred option.
- Address and mitigate any environmental impact of the commission in line with RFT's ambitions to reduce environmental impact in the work it undertakes.

3 Considerations

- The appointed applicant will be expected to work closely with the Senior Management Team and in particular the RFT CEO who will oversee all aspects of production and delivery.
- Sufficient time and resource should be allocated to partner engagement from the outset. Public engagement and consultation is not required at this stage.
- Options should also consider any future sustainability and funding needs – particularly considering the high competition for external funds RFT is seeing, including for capital infrastructure requirements.
- Options should also consider existing delivery which could be adapted or used to evidence infrastructure development in future.
- Initial strategic work by RFT has highlighted the following areas as potential sites for development and inclusion in the report:
 - **The 'Central Hub'** – containing the Visitor Information Centre (Café, Shop, Staff Offices, Meeting Rooms and Discovery Zone Learning Space); the Rangers Hut; the Main Kiosk, the Adventure Playground and some commercial concessions (Bike Hire). This is the core area of the site without environmental protections.
 - **The 'Heritage Hub'** – located adjacent to the Central Hub, a new and developing area of small heritage barns, structures, garden spaces, craft uses and Bronze Age Barrow Scheduled Monument.
 - **The 'Cultural Hub'** – Outdoor Theatre, Performance and Cultural events space, adaptable for commercial events and shows.
 - **Site Entrance Field** – Under utilised space owned by partner, and part of the SSI designation, it currently delivers a range of activity based events.

- A number of outlying smaller spaces across our extensive site also exist and are programmed for specific events trail routes, and activities related to nature, heritage or adventure. Thought should be given to these and any impact that the options appraisal might have on their continued audience use and specialist function.
- Special consideration should also be given to the cycle and walking route acting as a north-south level access across our site. This 'Greenway' cycle route connects Rushden, Higham Ferrers, Irthlingborough, and Stanwick Lakes, offering a safe and accessible path for walking and cycling. Stanwick Lakes itself has over 7 miles of cycle paths, including a 4-mile linear route along a former railway line towards Thrapston.

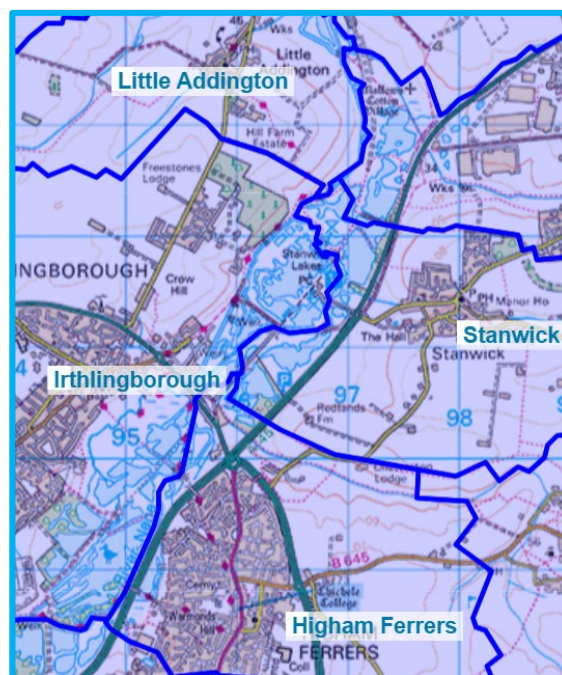


A full-scale map can be found here: [Reserve Maps | Stanwick Lakes | Nature, Heritage, Adventure](#)

4 Stakeholder and Local Partner Engagement

The expected Partners, Stakeholders and other consultees expected for this work are:

- Natural England
- The Environment Agency
- North Northants Council
- The Parishes of Stanwick, Raunds, Irthlingborough, Higham Ferrers and Little Addington as summarised by the map (right)
- RoSS consultant on current resilience bid
- Key members of Stanwick Lakes team
- Individual trustees



Other stakeholders may arise as part of these initial discussions to follow up and include in the report.

5 Budget

A fully inclusive fee of **£5,000** to include all costs, travel and materials, is available to the successful applicant to deliver this initial Options Appraisal.

6 Selection Process and Exclusions

Applicants should understand the context and aspirations of the commission and then submit a proposal via b.passchier@rfrtrust.org.uk To make a submission please submit the information outlined below under How to Apply.

We will not accept proposals that do not meet the timescales/budget or approaches that do not respond to the requirements of the brief as outlined.

7 Marketing and Communications

The appointed specialist/practice will be required to work with RFT's Marketing and Comms team to co-ordinate delivery of any marketing and communications messages.

8 Evaluation

The successful applicant is required to show qualitative and quantitative evaluation methodologies throughout their report to capture feedback and data from the outset.

9 Additional Support

A dedicated Project Manager from RFT will be assigned to support delivery.

10 How to Apply

If you are interested in this opportunity please submit the following information:

- An outline of your approach to this brief – max **2 sides of A4**.
- Provide up to 3 examples of previous relevant commissions (pdf or jpg file types only) with information about each project – in total, max **4 sides of A4**. Please include indicative budget spend for each example and images.
- An indicative budget breakdown and timeline of activity.
- Current Curriculum Vitae or practice profile.
- Letter confirming your availability and contact details for 2 referees (email and telephone) – note: preferably from recent commissioners.
- Evidence of insurance cover at required levels.

Please do not exceed 6MB in file size.

All applications must be emailed to b.passchier@rfttrust.org.uk by the deadline specified.]

All enquiries should be addressed to Billie Passchier, RFT CEO and emailed to b.passchier@rfttrust.org.uk

Submissions will be assessed according to the following criteria:

Approach (30%) – A which responds to identified themes, aims and objectives, with the ability to research and respond creatively to the Brief.

Quality of previous projects (20%) – A proven track record of high-quality delivery, working in collaboration with communities and partners to develop and deliver exceptional, innovative, and engaging artworks within the public realm.

Experience (10%) – successful delivery of projects of similar scale and budget, demonstrable experience of working collaboratively with diverse communities, partners

and stakeholders, excellent communication skills with the ability to articulate ideas and processes.

Cost (40%) – a fully detailed budget to include individual Day Rate(s) all fees and materials.

11 Deadline

The deadline for applications is Monday 15th September, 2025

12 Additional Documents

The Heritage Report and Initial Strategic Plan will be shared with the successful applicant.

Final Version 1
11 August 2025