

COMMITTEE REPORT

Subject:	<i>Woodlands School proposal to lease a section of the Folly woodland at Bemerton Heath</i>
Committee:	<i>Full Council</i>
Item Number:	<i>13</i>
Date:	<i>14 September 2026</i>
Author:	<i>Jay Gawthorpe, Head of Environment</i>
Report status:	<i>Decision</i>
Confidential / Exempt:	<i>No</i>

1. Report Summary

- 1.1 This report has been prepared in response to a request from Woodlands School to extend its playing field area by incorporating a section of Folly Woodland under a lease arrangement. The additional land would be used to establish an outdoor woodland learning area, providing enhanced educational opportunities and supporting the health, wellbeing and development of pupils.
- 1.2 Members are requested to determine whether the Council should agree, in principle, to the lease of part of the woodland area. This would enable the school to undertake further investigations to establish the extent of land required and subsequently submit a detailed proposal for the Council's consideration.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Full Council:

- 2.1 Members are asked to agree, in principle, to the proposal, thereby enabling the school to undertake initial investigations, explore options, and assess budget requirements. The school would then return to the Council with a detailed plan and formal proposal for consideration.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Folly Woodland is a Local Nature Reserve located at Bemerton Heath and is adjacent to the playing fields of Woodlands school.

- 3.2 Woodland learning areas and Forest School initiatives have become increasingly popular in recent years. They are widely recognised for supporting the wellbeing, confidence and resilience of young people, while also providing valuable opportunities for outdoor learning and environmental education.

4. Proposal

- 4.1 Woodland's school is seeking an agreement in principle from Members to lease a section of the Folly Woodland to enhance its facilities and provide additional learning opportunities for its pupils.
- 4.2 Should Members approve this request in principle, the school will undertake further investigations, work closely with Salisbury City Council officers, and develop a detailed plan setting out the extent of the land required, proposed use, management arrangements, and associated costs. The school would then submit a formal proposal for Members' consideration at a later date.

5. Additional Relevant Information

- 5.1 The Folly Woodland is owned by Salisbury City Council and therefore it is within the Council's remit to determine whether a section of the site can be leased to the school. Although the woodland is designated as a Local Nature Reserve, this proposal does not seek to alter the reserve's boundary, designation, or primary purpose. Instead, it proposes leasing a defined area to the school and restricting public access to that section, while maintaining the land's existing environmental and educational function and ensuring compliance with any relevant statutory and management requirements.
- 5.2 If this proposal were to proceed and the Council decided to lease the land, the legal covenants affecting the site would be reviewed by Hampshire Council's Legal Services Team as part of the lease preparation process to determine whether the land can be used for the proposed purpose. The school would be responsible for meeting all legal costs and fees associated with this matter.
- 5.3 Woodland's school believes that incorporating a woodland learning area within their grounds would greatly enhance the lives of their pupils.

6. Financial Position

- 6.1 There would be no cost to the Council.
- 6.2 Should the Council decide, at a later date, to progress a proposal submitted by the School, the School will be required to meet all legal costs associated with the transaction, including those relating to the preparation, negotiation, and completion of any lease documentation. Responsibility for the future maintenance and management of the area leased to the school would rest with the school.

7. Legal and Governance Considerations

- 7.1 If this initiative progresses to a formal proposal for the Council's consideration, the land would be subject to a review of any legal covenants affecting the site to determine whether it can be used for the proposed purpose. Any costs associated with this review, including legal fees, would be met by the school.

8. Consultation and Engagement

8.1 Internal officers engaged:

- Head of Environment
- Estates Manager

8.2 External:

- Staff and Governors from Woodland's School

9. Strategic and Policy Alignment

- 9.1 The proposal is consistent with the Council's strategic objectives relating to the protection, retention and sustainable use of woodland areas and the promotion of biodiversity, whilst also providing potential educational and wellbeing benefits for school pupils.

10. Next Steps

Subject to approval by Full Council:

- Woodland's school will further investigate this opportunity.
- Officers will assist and advise staff from the school regarding this matter.
- Woodland's school will return to Full Council with a detailed proposal for their consideration.

11. Implications

Implication Area	Impact	Comments / Mitigation
Financial	Low	Any costs associated with the development of the proposal, including surveys, legal costs, and implementation costs, would be met by the school.
Legal	High	The land would be subject to a review of any legal covenants and restrictions to determine whether the proposed use is permissible. Any legal costs incurred would be borne by the school.
Risk	Medium	Approval at this stage is sought only in principle. Any future proposal would be subject to detailed assessment, with risks relating to land use, management, and liability considered as part of the decision-making process.
Personnel	Low	Officer involvement can be accommodated within existing resources and would primarily be limited to supporting the school in developing a detailed

		proposal.
Environmental Impact	Medium	Any future proposal would need to demonstrate that the ecological and environmental value of the woodland is protected and appropriately managed.
Equalities Impact Statement	High	The proposal has the potential to provide pupils with access to additional outdoor learning facilities, supporting educational opportunities, wellbeing, and personal development.
Community / Public Impact	Medium	The impact on the wider community would depend on the extent and location of the land required and any effect on public access to the woodland.
Procurement / Contractual	Low	Should the proposal proceed, the Council's appointed legal advisers would be instructed to provide legal advice and prepare the necessary lease documentation.
Property / Asset	Medium	The proposal relates to a Council-owned asset. Any lease arrangement would be needed to ensure that the Council's long-term interests and responsibilities as landowner are protected.
Data Protection	Low	Standard data handling arrangements apply.