

20 November 2018

Policy, Projects and Resources

Woodland Management Grant

Report of: *Alan Marsh, Arboricultural Assistant*

Wards Affected: *Warley, Brentwood West, Brentwood South, Hutton South, Hutton North, Hutton East, Hutton Central, Shenfield*

This report is: *Public*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Members are reminded of the paper agreed by the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee (PFR) on 21st June 2016 Min where it was resolved:
 - i. That the Committee agrees to grant delegated authority to the Head of Paid Service in consultation with Group Leaders (or their nominated deputy) to enter into a contract with the Forestry Commission to provide a Woodland Management Plan and maintenance for 10 years, providing adherence to procurement rules of the Council are followed.
 - ii. That the Committee agree that further opportunities to generate business and income are developed by a detailed business plan.
- 1.2 Following the agreement at PF& R Cttee on the 21st June 2016 the Council has been successful in the application for a grant to implement a 5-year woodland management plan. The grant is for £46,000.
- 1.3 This work will deliver a number of improvements in the management of the woodland estate including planned maintenance to improve risk management and a method to tackle some of the Ash disease.
- 1.4 This report asks members to confirm acceptance of the £46,000 grant and note the areas/woodland to be worked on over a 5-year period.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the committee agrees to grant authority to accept the financial grant offered which commits to undertaking the 5-year plan. Appendix A contains detail of the woodlands that this proposal supports and the timescale.**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 At the Policy, Finance & Resources Committee on the 21st June 2016 it was agreed that:
- i. That the Committee agrees to grant delegated authority to the Head of Paid Service in consultation with Group Leaders (or their nominated deputy) to enter into a contract with the Forestry Commission to provide a Woodland Management Plan and maintenance for 10 years, providing adherence to procurement rules of the Council are followed.
 - ii. That the Committee agree that further opportunities to generate business and income are developed by a detailed business plan.
- 3.2 National authorities, Forestry Commission, Natural England and Rural Payments Agency have offered a five-year financial grant of £46,000 towards the woodland management plan which does not require match funding.
- 3.3 The grant covers 71.95 Ha. of council owned woodland within the Borough.
- 3.4 The woodlands supported by the scheme are Ancient Semi Natural Woodland which is a precious national resource forming only 3% of the land coverage of the UK. Good management will enhance and help to protect this resource against climate change, disease and public pressure. It improves biodiversity, carbon sequestration and sustainability.
- 3.5 Further the Council receive a number of complaints each year relating to subsidence, damage, overhang and shading, which would in a large part be addressed by the proposed Management Plans in the supported woodlands see Appendix A. The Management Plan will also indicate to insurers that the council is aware of and managing its risk in this area.

- 3.6 The woodlands which will be dealt with in the Management Plan is set out in Appendix A as highlighted. This also sets out the proposed timelines to undertake the work.
- 3.7 The proposed work includes two areas of woodland which, have a high incidence of Ash disease, Warley Country Park and Hutton Poplars. It is likely that the felling of trees within these areas will be required to reduce the possibility of spread of Ash disease from these sites. These trees will be replaced with other suitable species. Should these trees not be dealt with under this scheme they will become a safety risk which the Council will be required to deal with on an ad-hoc basis. Potentially as the disease progresses, the Forestry Authority could require the Council to remove them under a Plant Health Notice.
- 3.8 The grant being offered will ensure work will be covered by the existing arboricultural resource negating the need for the council to increase any budget for the duration of the grant.
- 3.9 By accepting the offer of this grant the council will ensure that the status of its woodlands will be improved in the provision of biodiversity, carbon sequestration, future proofing and sustainability. The harvested produce, where possible, could provide a range of products from firewood to oak beams which could be sold to the commercial market.
- 3.10 As identified in 3.5, the management of the woodland will demonstrate its improvement towards the councils management of risk.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 Works undertaken within the Management Plan will require the felling of tree cover to enable light penetration to the woodland floor. This encourages regeneration and biodiversity. The adoption of established forestry principles is a sustainable way in which to manage the Council's woodlands in line with other local authorities such as Essex C.C. and Rochford.
- 4.2 Tree felling always receives a mixed emotive reaction from the public. The fact that the council's plans have for two years been scrutinised by the Forestry commission, Natural England and DEFRA and approved unaltered, is a strong endorsement of the benefits derived from these forestry operations.
- 4.3 Should the woodlands remain in an unmanaged condition, the risk to the council will increase due to the declining health of the ageing tree population. This could result in the woodlands becoming colonised by non-native invasive species.

- 4.4 The management of the woodlands would follow the timeline as set out in the approved Management Plan with diseased Ash removal a priority.
- 4.5 The Borough consists of 89.1% greenbelt, taking a proactive approach to its management of woodlands the Borough is leading the way for private landowners to likewise ensure the future protection of their woodlands
- 4.6 Public health benefits will also derive from the work of the Management Plan which will increase canopy structure. These benefits have been demonstrated in medical research throughout the world such as decreased risk of heart disease, improved recovery rates and decreased risk of mental illness.
- 4.7 There are two further points to be considered with this proposal. These are:
- The Council under the terms of the grant need to carry out the set works in the Management Plan. If the Council fail to deliver this, the Council will be liable to pay back the grant plus accrued interest.
 - Further, if the Council do not take up the offer of the grant, the Council will need to have to address the management of trees at some point which will be a cost to the Council directly.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 To ensure that council assets are properly maintained, and appropriate risk protection is afforded to the council and its residents.

6. Consultation

Planning Department, Forestry Commission, Natural England.

7. References to Corporate Plan

- 7.1 Maximise council assets to deliver corporate objectives and ensure community benefit
- 7.2 Develop new approaches to grant funding, and the use of community assets.
- 7.3 Develop effective partnership arrangements with key agencies to deliver services.
- 7.4 Explore alternative methods of delivering street scene services.

8. Implications

Financial Implications

Name & Title: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts – Interim Chief Finance Officer

Tel & Email 01277 312829/jacqueline.vanmellaerts@brentwood.gov.uk

- 8.1 Entry into the contract is on a performance basis. Non-performance will result in reclamation of grant. Grants have to be accounted for upon receipt of the Grant. This grant will be reported on the Council's Register and monitored through our Budget monitoring processes.

Legal Implications

Name & Title: Daniel Toohey – Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal Services

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- 8.2 Legal implications are set out in the body of the report.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

- 8.3 Health and Safety will be improved by sustained woodland management.

- 8.4 Risk management is improved by the attainment of well managed woodland adjacent to the urban fringe.

9. Background Papers (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

- 9.1 Woodland Management Plan.

- 9.2 Countryside stewardship Agreement Document

10. Appendices to this report

Appendix A - List of Woodlands and timescale

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