

Committee(s): Community Environment and Enforcement Committee	Date: 20 June 2022
Subject: Hartswood Access Route and Trail	Wards Affected: Warley, Brentwood South
Report of: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager - Communities, Leisure and Health	Public
Report Author/s: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager - Communities, Leisure and Health Telephone: 01277 312500 E-mail: kim.anderson@brentwood.gov.uk	For Decision

Summary

It is proposed to update the signage and, wayfinding to improve the Hartswood Access trail in Hartswood in King George's Playing Fields. Hartswood is SSSI site so any works will need to be carried out under guidance from Natural England. The proposal is to involve local schools and the Countryside volunteers to be involved in the wayfinding posts and map design.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

R1. Agree to delegate authority to the Director Communities and Environment in consultation with the Chair of Community, Environment and Enforcement Committee to agree scope of works and identify costs and funding

Main Report

Introduction and Background

1. Hartswood is a 30-hectare woodland which is owned and managed by Brentwood Borough Council. It is managed in a way that provides recreational opportunities for the public and a space for wildlife to live. The site forms part of the Thorndon Park site of Special Scientific Interest, a designation it holds due to its woodland pasture habitats and for the rare invertebrate species they support.
2. Hartswood is one of the oldest woodlands in Brentwood, with written records dating back to the 7th Century when it was owned by Barking Abbey. This

ancient wood was also once owned by John Evelyn who was inspired to write the first ever book on forestry "Sylvia" in 1664.

3. A variety of animal and plant species can be seen throughout the woodland, including wood ants and their large nests which can often reach several feet wide, woodpeckers, bluebells and wood anemones.
4. In 1994 an Access Trail, consisting of three routes of varying length, was created through the site so that more people could enjoy the woodland. Even those these routes are surfaced, care should be taken if using the trails in winter as areas can become muddy.
5. The site is provided for quiet recreational enjoyment and is suitable for activities such as walking, cross country running and bird watching. Cycling and horse riding are permitted but only on the waymarked routes in blue. The use of motorbikes and other vehicles is prohibited.
6. It is proposed to look at improving the wayfinding markers so that each of the routes and distances to complete them are clearer and introduce tactile signage to encourage children to find things around the various routes and points of interest to make it much more interactive.

Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

7. As this is a site of Specific Scientific interest (SSSI) then the Council will consult with Natural England on any proposed works within the woodland as part of the woodland management programme.
8. The Council would also look at work alongside the Countryside volunteers to do the majority of the works to install any signage, wayfinding etc. Much of the wood can be sourced locally through the Council's arboriculturist.
9. The Council will also look to work with the operators of Hartswood Pavilion so that information sheets that can be picked up by families and then completed as they go around the various routes in the woods.
10. The weeping beech which is adjacent to the play area which died due to fungal infection common in older beech trees. This is a soil borne infection that invades the tree through damaged roots and has likely been present for 20 years plus. The tree has been made safe and it is proposed subject to funding to work with a tree carver to carve the trunk of the tree.

Reasons for Recommendation

11. The Council's Leisure Strategy 2018-2028 has six workstreams which includes open spaces. The key performance indicators for this workstream are to increase sport and physical activity in the Council's open spaces; Improve awareness of the offer in the Council's open spaces; and increase volunteering.
12. The Brentwood volunteer-run walking organisation - 'Health Trax' has a weekly well-attended walking group which walks through Hartswood that would benefit from an improved pathway and signage.

Consultation

13. The Council is in consultation with Natural England on the design and location of any signage and wayfinding in Hartswood. The Council will also liaise with local schools around what to include in the information sheets and tactile signs.

References to Corporate Plan

14. The Hartswood Trail will sit under the Developing Communities and Protecting our Environment strands of the Corporate Strategy.

Implications

Financial Implications

Name/Title: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Corporate Director (Finance & Resources)
Tel/Email: 01277 312500/jacqueline.vanmellaerts@brentwood.gov.uk

15. The wood carving of the Weeping Beech is estimated between £3-5,000 which the Council will apply for external funding for.
16. The materials for the signs and wayfinding can be locally sourced and the Countryside Volunteers are set up to do most of the labour for installing the signage. There will be some design costs for the updated maps which is estimated at £500-700.

Legal Implications

Name & Title: Amanda Julian, Corporate Director (Law & Governance) and Monitoring Officer
Tel & Email: 01277 312500/amanda.julian@brentwood.gov.uk

17. Any contracts that need to be entered into will be subject to legal advice and opinion.

Economic Implications

Name/Title: Phil Drane, Corporate Director (Planning and Economy)
Tel/Email: 01277 312610/philip.drane@brentwood.gov.uk

18. There are no direct economic implications. It is important that the borough's natural environment is maintained and improved, which can have indirect economic benefits related to place and inward investment.

Equality and Diversity Implications

**Name/Title: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager, Communities, leisure and health
Tel/Email: 01277 312634/kim.anderson@brentwood.gov.uk**

19. The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
 - b. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - c. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
20. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
21. The proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic and will provide an access trail for those with limited mobility.

Risk Management Implications

22. All volunteers will be supervised by operational staff.

Appendices to this report

- Appendix A: Proposed map and sample signage for the Hartswood Trail