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## **CHERRY ORCHARD JUBILEE PARK – PROGRESS REPORT**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1. This report updates Members on the progress to date of implementing the first phase of the Park development.

### **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1. A design has now been agreed in principle by Members for the scheme. This incorporates a significant tree planting project for which the Council has attracted a grant from the Forestry Commission.
- 2.2. Sums from the capital programme were released by Council on 23 October 2001 and 18 December 2001 in respect of the following:-

	£
Preparatory works	20,000
Temporary staffing	31,000
Other works	<u>26,000</u>
TOTAL	<u>77,000</u>

- 2.3. In addition to the above, capital grant has been authorised by the Forestry Commission of £90,000, payable at £70,000 on completion of works and the remaining £20,000 after one year.
- 2.4. As a result of receiving the above mentioned grant, the Council becomes eligible for the Farm Premiership Woodland Scheme grant which is calculated at £300 per hectare annually for 15 years. This is, therefore a grant of £4,200 per annum, the first payment of which is due in November.

### **3 WORKS CARRIED OUT TO DATE**

- 3.1 At the present time preparatory works in respect of weed killing and drainage improvements, surveys, ground preparation works, Hockley Woods accommodation and emergency tree works have been carried out at a cost of £40,474.
- 3.2 Approximately 80% of the required tree planting has been achieved. At present, £15,068 of works have been committed in respect of grant monies.

- 3.3 Other grant works which are now outstanding and which need to be completed before the end of November are:-

- Remaining tree planting
- Seeding
- Fencing
- Information boards
- Bridleway works (Essex County Council)
- Conducting six guided walks

- 3.4 Of the outstanding works, the most significant element of cost will be the fencing. Essex County Council will be responsible for the bridleway.

#### **4 TEMPORARY STAFFING**

- 4.1. Our strategy has been to look at using additional funding to facilitate specific project on site and backfilling other jobs.
- 4.2. The temporary staffing required for backfilling purposes is an arboriculturist and a clerical assistant for six months.
- 4.3. No expenditure has yet been incurred in respect of the temporary staffing budget of £31,000.
- 4.4. One of the key problems encountered has been the ability to engage on a temporary basis a qualified arboriculturist. This type of person is required to carry out work essential on Tree Preservation Orders and giving advice in respect of planning applications to enable staff to give priority to the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park project.
- 4.5. Contact has been made with two agencies. In addition, enquiries have been made with private contractors that may be able to carry out the above type of work.
- 4.6. One contractor was identified who was prepared to carry out inspections and provide a report. Costs would have been in the region of £110 for a sample report. Whilst this solution would provide a resource for the actual inspection, the report would still need to be analysed and there would be no back up or continuity. This solution was therefore expensive and would only be contemplated if it were impossible to engage an arboriculturist.
- 4.7. A positive response has been received from one of the agencies and a qualified arboriculturist will be interviewed on 19 April for a six month contract. It is anticipated that the cost for the six month period will be in the region of £11,000. A verbal update will be given at the meeting in respect of the interview.

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- 4.8. The engagement of a temporary clerical assistant for six months is estimated to cost around £8,000.
- 4.9. Finally, it will be necessary to contract out some items of work such as drawing up strategies in order to apply for grants. Costings for this type of work will be obtained as and when necessary.

## **5 CURRENT ISSUES**

- 5.1. As a result of the delay in appointing an arboriculturist, it was necessary to reprioritise the work of the Woodlands Section. Whilst the works on the Park are regarded as high priority, there are also statutory timetables to be met in respect of Tree Preservation Order appeal work and advice on planning applications.
- 5.2. In assessing the statutory workload, it was necessary to identify a period to withdraw resources from the Country Park project, whilst ensuring that the work qualifying for grant purposes was not unduly delayed. Staff were withdrawn in late March from the site and programmed to restart on 18 April. This will ensure that the cessation will not adversely impact upon the overall work programme envisaged and the ability to claim grants. Priority will be given to grant funded work as it is in this area that the Council is required to adhere to a set timescale for the works to be carried out.
- 5.3. Once all of the grant aided works are completed, it will be necessary to agree the next phase of the development and release of funds from the capital programme.

## **6 RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee notes the progress of works to date. A further update on the work programme will be presented to Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee in the summer cycle of meetings. (CD(&ES))

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