

WOODLANDS ENVIRONMENTAL LIAISON OFFICER /RESOURCE UPDATE

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on specific issues related to Council's Woodlands Section, with particular reference to Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park and the planned appointment of an Environmental Liaison Officer.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In March 2003 a Woodlands Strategy was presented to a meeting of Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee. This strategy gave an overview of the areas of woodlands that are managed by the District Council, including Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park and also gave details and proposals for their future development.
- 2.2 Within this strategy, it was highlighted that an application was being considered for external grant funding from English Nature to finance the appointment of an Environmental Liaison Officer. At that time it was envisaged that the funding would cover the salary costs of this post for a period of five years.
- 2.3 In terms of staff resources, the strategy also discussed possible future appointments of an Arboricultural Officer and a Woodlands Assistant for Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park.

3 ENVIRONMENTAL LIAISON OFFICER

- 3.1 The English Nature funding stream that was potentially available for the funding of this post at the time of producing the strategy, was stopped some time ago. Since that time, the Council's Woodlands & Environmental Officer has explored a number of alternative options, in an attempt to gain funding for this sort of post, including Thames Gateway. Unfortunately none of these options have come to fruition.
- 3.2 The current situation is that the Woodlands Officer is in dialogue with the English Nature office at Grantham regarding general funding availability, as he has been made aware that there could be some available monies that English Nature need to allocate in the near future.
- 3.3 As and when there is any positive news / progress on this matter, Members will be updated via the Members Bulletin.

4 OTHER STAFF RESOURCES

- 4.1 As previously mentioned, the appointment of a Woodlands Assistant specifically for Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park was highlighted in the strategy. This additional resource proved to be extremely useful and beneficial to the operation and development of the country park and although the postholder has recently left the Authority for alternative employment, a new appointment has just been made.
- 4.2 The Arboricultural Officer post that was also mentioned in the strategy was advertised on two separate occasions but unfortunately it was not possible to make an appointment of a suitably qualified person on both occasions.
- 4.3 The post was subsequently regarded. Unfortunately further advertising again failed to produce suitable applications. At the time of writing this report, the Council is in the middle of another recruitment process which has a closing date for applications of 1 April 2005.

5 CHERRY ORCHARD JUBILEE COUNTRY PARK

- 5.1 The development of the country park is progressing well, with this winter's works having now been successfully completed, including additional grant funding from the DEFRA Countryside Stewardship scheme.
- 5.2 The construction of the lake has been completed for some time. Various ground works continue to take place and the implementation of information boards and signage is near to completion.
- 5.3 The Countryside Stewardship scheme relates to both capital and annual management works that will produce a minimum of approx. £80,000 for the Council in grant funding over the next 15 years.
- 5.4 Next winter's work will focus on the replacement and restoration of the hedgerows that have been removed or neglected across the site over the last 50 years and these works will form one specific part of the Country Stewardship scheme. Included in this replanting / landscape restoration will be 200 quality English oaks.
- 5.5 These oak trees will actually have special significance this autumn, as it is suggested that their planting is used to celebrate and commemorate the Battle of Trafalgar (where many sailors including Lord Nelson lost their lives) which this autumn will be 200 years ago and the fact that the fleets were constructed of oak. The 200 specimen oak trees will therefore recognise the sacrifice made 200 years ago.

- 5.6 It is estimated that the cost of the 200 specimen oak trees will be in the region of £8,000 and can be funded from the Cherry Orchard capital works programme.
- 5.7 If Members agree to this recognition it would be the intention to offer the public the opportunity to sponsor one of these oaks, with a specially prepared record book produced to keep details of the sponsors, who would also receive a certificate to commemorate the event.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The salary costs of the Arboricultural Officer have already been included within the Council's budget and the appointment of an Environmental Liaison Officer is still subject to the Council receiving external grant funding.
- 6.2 There is sufficient funding for the provision of the 200 specimen oak trees within the Cherry Orchard capital works programme.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**
- (1) That Members note the content of this report and agree to using the planting of the 200 oak trees to commemorate the Battle of Trafalgar.
 - (2) That Members agree to the provision of 200 English specimen oak trees at a cost of approx. £8,000 funded through the Cherry Orchard capital works programme.

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Background Papers:-

None

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