

## **WOODLANDS STRATEGY RESOURCES**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with details of the current initiatives that are being considered to continue the development of the Council's Woodlands and also identifies the additional resources that are required to undertake these projects.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 A report detailing a draft Woodlands Strategy was presented at the meeting of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13 March 2003 (min.129/03) and was duly supported by Members.
- 2.2 The strategy contained a summary of what had been achieved in recent years in relation to Hockley, Grove, Betts and Kingley Woods, the new development of the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park and also the programme of works and initiatives that would continue to develop the Woodlands in the future.
- 2.3 The strategy was produced not only with consideration to the key issues and projects but also to link in with the objectives made out in the Council's Corporate Plan.
- 2.4 A key part of this strategy was section four, which highlighted the additional resources that it was felt were required in order to achieve the various aims and objectives outlined in the strategy.
- 2.5 A report detailing the extra posts and associated funding is now presented to Committee for consideration.

### **3 INITIATIVES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

- 3.1 The Woodlands Officer is continuing to liaise with both English Nature and the Forestry Authority, in order to agree the programmes for the next five year woodland initiatives. On completion, these would give the Council grants totalling approximately £11,000 per year for the five years. These would be broken down as approximately £6,000 from English Nature and approximately £5,000 from the Forestry Authority.
- 3.2 Development works are continuing at the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park as the project moves into the next phases of the overall business plan. The construction of the lake is complete and is now awaiting filling, pending

authorisation from the Environment Agency. The Country Park has also reached the stage where ongoing maintenance is required.

- 3.3 The extent of the works could also be increased in the future if the Council is successful in expanding the current area of the park. This is dependent on being able to purchase adjacent land from the B1013 to abutting Edwards Hall Wood, as detailed in the Local Plan. This would create a resource of regional stature South East of the County, which could be further enhanced, if able to link the country park to Hockley Woods by also using the footpath network.
- 3.4 There are also a number of other funding opportunities that are potentially available to the Council, linked to particular schemes, for which the Woodland Officer is currently researching.
- 3.5 One such opportunity is the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (WFAG), who are a well established charity who help farmers combine their farming practices with sustainable conservation. They have a proven track record at securing grant under the DEFRA managed Countryside Stewardship Scheme.
- 3.6 Although quite complicated, this scheme could provide worthwhile economic returns and would be suitable for a country park. If the Council became a member of the charity, the subscription for which would be £500 per year for five years. FWAG would then provide all the information, support and guidance required for a successful grant bid. This grant could be up to £50,000 over ten years.
- 3.7 Another funding opportunity could be a joint scheme with English Nature and Essex Wildlife Trust in Hockley Woods, to create a sustainable central site for the heath fritillary butterfly from which it could disperse via maintained wide vegetation rides.
- 3.8 Linked to this work will be the regeneration of the large derelict pond and the provision of educational material in the form of information boards on the relevant areas. The potential grant aid that could be generated for this project could be a one-off payment of £10,000.
- 3.9 We are now also receiving a Farm Woodland Premiership Grant for Cherry Orchard of £300 per hectare (12 hectares) for 15 years, although this is not part of the current revenue estimates. Total additional funding of £3,600.

#### **4 ADDITIONAL RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS**

- 4.1 As can be seen from the initiatives detailed in section three of the report, there are currently a number of opportunities for the Woodlands Section to get involved in, which could have an extremely positive effect on the Council's Woodlands.

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4.2 In order to take full advantage of these opportunities, various additional resources have been identified that were also highlighted in the draft Woodlands Strategy.

**4.3 Woodlands Assistant – Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park**

4.3.1 As works have progressed on the creation of the Country Park, it is now at the stage where regular maintenance of the area is required to help facilitate its continued growth and development. It is proposed that the most effective method to carry out the required maintenance would be to employ another Woodlands Assistant.

4.3.2 Whilst their role would be carrying out works at Cherry Orchard, it would also provide the section with greater efficiency and flexibility, particularly when the other woodlands staff have either holiday or sickness.

4.3.3 In terms of the works required at the Country Park, more could be done with our own member of staff than bringing in external contractors and there would be a much greater degree of control.

**4.4 Environmental Liaison Officer**

4.4.1 We are about to submit the grant application to English Nature for the funding of this post. It is a scheme that they themselves promote and we are very hopeful of the application being successful. The funding is expected to pay for all the salary costs (up to £20,000 p.a.) for a period of five years, leaving the Authority to provide the mainly one-off costs for office furniture and appropriate I.T. estimated to cost in the region of £5,000-£6,000. This can be met from current year's estimates.

4.4.2 It is envisaged that the post would be based in the portacabin at Hockley Woods and would be able to provide a pro-active approach to the marketing of the Council's Woodland areas by way of guided walks, talks, school visits and other general means of promotion.

**4.5 Arboricultural Officer**

4.5.1 Due to the considerable extra workload placed on the Woodlands Officer in carrying out the Cherry Orchard project, it has been identified in the Woodlands Strategy that the appointment of an Arboricultural Officer would be required, in order to carry out all the work and initiatives within the section.

4.5.2 The post would carry out many of the site visits and provide technical advice related to Tree Preservation Orders and planning issues, in addition to assisting in many of the other Woodland management issues.

4.5.3 At present in order to carry out this function, backfill monies are being used from the Country Park budget to have the inspections carried out by an

external contractor. Whilst this has worked well, there is still more work required of the Woodlands Officer than if they were carried out by our own Arboricultural Officer. The backfill monies have also been used to fund a temporary administrative assistant and therefore if an Arboricultural Officer were to be appointed, increasing the technical experience within the section, then both of the backfill items would no longer be required.

4.5.4 A summary of the on-going costs and potential income are as follows :

<b>Cost</b>	<b>£</b>
Woodlands Assistant – scale 3 ( £16,093 - £17,220) inclusive of on-costs	17,220
Environmental Liaison Officer – scale 4 (£17,558 - £19,570) inclusive of on-costs	19,570
Arboricultural Officer – scale 5/6 (£20,078 - £24,256) inclusive of on-costs	24,256
Subscription	500
<b>Total cost</b>	<b>61,546</b>
<b>Resources</b>	
Current budget provision	31,500
English Nature – Funding of post (Environmental Liaison Officer)	20,000
Farm Woodlands Premiership Grant	3,600
<b>Total potential resources</b>	<b>55,100</b>

## **5 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Operational Risk**

- 5.1.1 Without the Woodlands Assistant post for Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park, it would not be possible to carry out the necessary maintenance works that are now required.
- 5.1.2 The Arboricultural Officer will release resources to help ensure long term development of the Woodlands and Country Park.

## **6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The further development and progress of the Woodlands Section's initiatives, as detailed in the draft strategy, would contribute significantly to the environmental standards that exist in the District.

## **7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 From the above the total of existing revenue provision and potential grant funding will cover the majority of the cost. Members will be aware that the previous history of grant funding relating to the Woodlands has been good and there is a degree of confidence regarding the attraction of additional funding. The appointment of the Environmental Liaison Officer would be subject to the approval of the grant application. It is considered that the net cost of around £6,500 can be approved in advance of the next budget strategy.

## **8 RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

- (1) To agree to the appointment of an Environmental Liaison Officer scale 4, pending a successful grant application to English Nature.
- (2) To agree to the appointment of a Woodlands Assistant scale 3 for Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park.
- (3) To agree to the appointment of an Arboricultural Officer scale 5/6.
- (4) To approve the annual subscription for a period of five years to the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, in order to achieve a significant grant under the countryside stewardship scheme.

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### **Background Papers:**

None.

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