

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	26 NOVEMBER 2013	AGENDA ITEM:	12
TITLE:	SECURING THE FUTURE OF READNG'S WOODLANDS CONSULTATION - REVIEW		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLORS	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
	TONY PAGE		
	PAUL GITTINGS		CULTURE, SPORT AND CONSUMER SERVICES.
	LIZ TERRY		NEIGHBOURHOODS
SERVICE:	ENVIRONMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	GILES SUTTON BEN STANESBY	TEL:	0118 937 3045
JOB TITLE:	PLANNING ECOLOGIST	E-MAIL:	Giles.Sutton.reading.gov.uk
	PARKS MANAGER		Ben.stanesby@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report identifies the outcome of the recent consultation undertaken to establish the views of the general public & associated interest groups in respect of newly developed woodland management plans.
- 1.2 To seek approval to further progress proposals as officer recommendations set out within section 5 of the report.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Committee note the content of the report in respect of public comment and officer recommendations to amend the proposed management plans as per points 4.4.1 to 4.4.9 of this report.
- 2.2 That the woodland management plans be adopted.

### 3. POLICY CONTEXT:

The Council's Biodiversity Action Plan (2005) identified both the need to develop a tree strategy as referred to above but also identifies the need to undertake active management of broadleaved woodland.

The Council's Tree Strategy highlighted that the quality of many of the nation's, (including Reading's), small woodlands have declined over recent decades. The management of this landscape has changed as a consequence of a fall in demand for home grown woodland products such as; Timber, Charcoal and Firewood. This has greatly decreased the value of these woodlands for biodiversity. The strategy also identified the lack of active woodland management as the most significant threat to the future of the Borough's woodlands.

The strategy therefore identified a number of objectives and these included:

- Maintaining the important landscape characteristics of Reading, namely the river valleys, wooded ridges, woodlands, open spaces and public spaces of the town;
- Protecting trees and woodlands, particularly ancient or veteran trees and important woodlands;
- Writing and implementing woodland management plans;

It also identified that management plans would be developed and implemented in consultation with Natural England, The Forestry Commission and the Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum.

### 4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1.1 There is often a perception that undertaking no work in woodlands is the best method of maintaining the health of individual trees and woodland. There are significant amounts of research and literature that shows this is not the case. This was summarised within the consultation information and is referenced in background papers.
- 4.1.2 The cessation of activities such as coppicing, timber removal, charcoal burning has led to a gradual decline in the structural and habitat diversity of the woodlands.
- 4.1.3 There has been a gradual decline in the health of our woodlands as the tree canopies close reducing light, and dominant species such as holly and bramble smother other flora. This reduces the ecological and social value of the woodlands. If the situation is left unchecked, the value of the woodlands for both people and wildlife will continue to decline. Their longevity will also be reduced. As time passes the work required to rejuvenate the woodland becomes more significant.
- 4.1.4 Healthy woodlands require a mix of different habitats such as, glades, a range of tree ages, standing and fallen dead wood, open areas, rides, etc. To achieve this will involve the thinning and felling of trees in a number of the woodlands.
- 4.1.5 For a number of years, Friends of Groups have undertaken limited piecemeal works and requested more support from the Council. In partnership with the Forestry Commission the Council has taken individual local management plans, produced with Friends Groups over a number of years, and developed a comprehensive series of draft woodland management plan for 90 hectares of its woodlands (across 17 sites). These plans are in line with National, Regional and local policy, and best practice woodland management.

- 4.1.6 Implementation of these management plans will have significant biodiversity, amenity and community benefits and the Forestry Commission will part fund the works through the England Woodland Grant Scheme with the remainder funded through the sale of timber removed from the woodlands to create an appropriate variety of woodland habitats.
- 4.1.7 These draft plans were published and used to undertake a consultation identified below in section 4.2 of this report

## CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

- 4.1.8 **METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** The consultation period ran from the 26<sup>th</sup> August to 11<sup>th</sup> October 2013 and was delivered through a number of initiatives aimed at ensuring maximum publicity, affording significant opportunity for the general public and local interest groups to respond. Methods used were as follows:
- 4.1.9 **Press release-** A press release was organised ahead of the consultation period to raise public awareness. This was accompanied by an article within the Reading Neighbourhood Network Newsletter.
- 4.1.10 **Posters placed prominently on site and in libraries -** Posters were placed at and around each site advising of the consultation and methods of contact; including details of locally arranged public meetings. These were also displayed at libraries.
- 4.1.11 **Online -** Full details of proposals and a feedback form were made available for completion on the Council's website.
- 4.1.12 **Leaflet -** The consultation leaflet was made available at libraries and community centres.
- 4.1.13 **Email/letter to local interest groups -** The below groups were sent either a letter or an email drawing their attention to proposals and inviting their participation in the consultation exercise.
- Residents associations
  - Friends of parks groups
  - Tree Warden Network
  - Berkshire Local Nature Partnership
  - Reading Naturalists Society
  - Berkshire Ornithological Club
  - All Reading Globe Groups
- 4.1.14 **Presentation to Globe Groups -** The offer of a detailed presentation was made to all Reading based Globe Groups and the offer was taken up by:
- Tilehurst Globe on 18<sup>th</sup> September.
  - New Town Globe on 3<sup>rd</sup> October.
- 4.1.15 **Drop in community sessions (featuring presentation) -** Were delivered by Council officers as follows:
- South Reading Community Centre - 19 September

- Tilehurst Methodists Church - 21 September
- Mapledurham Pavilion - 26 September

## RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

4.2 During the consultation period a total of 74 responses were received.

- 16 x Emails
- 10 x Letters
- 48 x Forms (either web based or from the meetings).

4.3 **Approval Rating:**

The overwhelming majority of responses received through the online consultation were supportive, with 94% of respondents stating that they were in favour of the proposals.

During the consultation period a total of 69 individual responses were received from members of the public. The following organisations/ local groups also responded:

- Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust -supported the proposals
- The Berkshire Local Nature Partnership - supported the proposals
- Caversham and District Residents Association - supported the proposals
- Friends of Clayfield Copse - strongly support the Clayfield proposals
- Reading Urban Wildlife Group - in support of the proposals
- Tilehurst Globe - in support of the proposals
- Caversham Globe - broadly in support but have some concerns about elements of the proposals
- Reading Tree Wardens - have some concerns about elements of the proposals, in relation to loss of tree cover

The concerns raised by the above groups are covered in greater detail within section 4.4 below, along with an appraisal of these and resulting recommendations.

A full breakdown of the responses is given in appendix A with summary statistics provided in appendix B.

4.4 Below is a summary of comments received in relation to each woodland management plan, accompanied by the proposed action to address the issues raised:

4.4.1 No concerns were raised in respect of the following management plans:

- Arthur Newbury & McIlroys Park (appendix c)
- Blundells Copse (appendix d)
- Bugs Bottom & Furzeplat (appendix e)
- Kings Meadow (Thames Woodlands) (appendix K)
- Lousehill Copse (appendix h)
- Prospect Park & Devil's Dip (appendix i)
- Southcote Linear Park (appendix j)
- Warren Woodlands (appendix m)

It is therefore proposed that these management plans be adopted and implemented with only minor amendments where clarification of the proposals is required (e.g. the location of the new pond in Lousehill Copse and the Council's approach in relation to roosting bats).

Where requests for additional works to trees have been made by neighbours which do not necessitate amendments to plans, these are being addressed individually.

4.4.2 **Rotherfield Way Copse (appendix g):**

Local residents raised concern that the proposals would result in the loss of the holly screen adjacent to their residential properties, increasing the potential risk of burglary.

**Proposed action:**

The Council has amended the woodland plan for this site to ensure that no holly removal works occur within 10 metres of residential boundaries.

4.4.3 **Hills Meadow (appendix k):**

A local resident requested that additional tree planting is considered within the management plan boundary.

**Proposed action:**

This work, if undertaken, would be in addition to the woodland works proposed within the management plan. This will be addressed when the Hills Meadow Landscape Plan is next reviewed.

4.4.4 **Furzeplat (appendix e):**

Caversham Globe raised concern about the limited amount of regeneration currently evident in this woodland and that the woodland may not regenerate if the sycamore is felled.

**Proposed action:**

Officers inspected the woodland with the Forestry Commission officials prior to the production of the management plan. It is both their, and Council officers considered opinion, that sycamore will out-compete the hazel coppice and that it is best practice to remove the sycamore. No amendments are proposed to the management plan and officers will advise Caversham Globe of their reasoning.

An application will be made to undertake work to trees with Tree Preservation Orders. This will ensure all work not only meets best practice in terms of woodland management, but also meets the Council's other policy requirements.

4.4.5 **Beech Wood (appendix g)**

Caversham Globe and Reading Tree Wardens raised concerns about proposals to fell trees in this woodland and augment the mix of species, would have an adverse affect on this woodland. They perceived this action as being excessive.

The Globe group also raised concerns about the impact on bluebells.

**Proposed action:**

Research suggests that beech trees are likely to decline in the south-east of England in the future as a result of climate change. Best practice suggests that resilience should be built into beech woodlands by increasing the mix of species.

The management plan has been amended to make it clear that a limited number of the mature beech trees (a maximum of 6) will be felled and works are to be kept clear of bluebell areas. The revised plan also accommodates the Caversham Globe suggestion to re-stock the woodland using species such as cherry.

4.4.6 **Balmore Walk (appendix g)**

Concerns were raised about proposals to thin trees at Balmore Walk, a woodland that was planted in memory of a local journalist who passed away at a young age.

A member of the public also requested that the plan be altered so that the woodland edge is rotationally flailed (thereby improving its wildlife value).

**Proposed actions:**

Officers have spoken to the family and principles of the management plan have been agreed. Further meetings will be held with the family to agree the detail of works prior to any work commencing.

The management plan has been amended to include the flailing of the woodland boundary on a rotational basis.

**4.4.7 View Island (appendix k):**

Caversham Globe voiced concern that all of the sycamore trees adjacent to the old tennis court might be felled, whilst other residents requested that they all be removed.

**Proposed action:**

The management plan has been amended to clarify the Council's intent to thin and selectively fell sycamore trees, rather than remove all sycamore trees.

**4.4.8 Clayfield Copse (appendix f):**

The friends of Clayfield Copse fully support the management plans, however the Reading Tree Wardens are concerned that the management will alter the character of the woodland.

Concern has been raised about the loss of bat roosts and foraging habitat by a member of the Berkshire and South Bucks bat group.

A request for the restoration of a pond at Clayfield Copse was received from a local entomologist and previously from friends of Clayfield Copse. The pond would encourage damselflies and enhance wider biodiversity.

**Proposed action:**

It is the considered opinion of the Forestry Commission and Council Officers that the proposed woodland management will result in a positive change in the woodland habitat and structural diversity, delivering significant benefits to wildlife. The approach taken is also endorsed by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, The Berkshire Local Nature Partnership and other conservation organisations, and will help to deliver local, regional and national biodiversity outcomes. It is not intended to alter the management plan. Officers will undertake a site inspection with the Tree Wardens and other groups to identify important specimen trees to be retained such as the wild service trees.

The approach to the protection of bat roosts has been clarified within the management plans. This will ensure that bats and their roosts are not harmed as a result of the proposals.

The management plan has been amended to include the restoration of the pond.

**4.4.9 The Cowsey (appendix l)**

A member of the public has raised concern about the proposed flood attenuation pond.

**Proposed Action:**

This project is part of a Highways scheme providing essential flood alleviation in South Reading. The woodland plan will not be altered but the Highway Team will respond to the consultee prior to implementation.

**5. PROPOSAL:**

- 5.1 That the management plans appended to this report are adopted and implemented subject to the amendments identified in paragraphs 4.4.1 to 4.4.9.
- 5.2 To present proposals to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013 for approval and adoption.
- 5.3 It is intended to ensure that members of the public and interest groups can see that their views have been taken in to account and assisted in shaping the detail of proposals.
- 5.4 To publish the results with a report to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee and on the Council's website.
- 5.5 To contact interest groups as well as residents that have participated in the consultation with a personalised response addressing their comments.

**6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

- 6.1 Implementation of the woodland management plans will be budget neutral.

**7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 None.

**8. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 8.1 As body of report.

**9. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

- 9.1 Tree Strategy June 2010.
- 9.2 The Reading Biodiversity Action Plan 2005.

**10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1 Securing the future of Reading's woodlands - Cabinet Briefing May 2013.
- 10.2 Woodland Plan Consultation information

## Appendices

- a. Consultation responses
- b. Statistics from the responses

Appendices c to m will be available @ <http://www.reading.gov.uk/council/Consultations/this-year-s-closed-consultations/> or in hard copy from the Parks Team, Prospect Park Pavilion, Liebenrood Road, Reading RG30 2ND

- c. Arthur Newbery Park and McIlroy Park Management Plan
- d. Blundell's Copse Management Plan
- e. Bugs Bottom and Furzeplat Management Plan
- f. Clayfield Copse Management Plan
- g. Beechwood, Rotherfield Way Copse and Balmore Walk Management Plan
- h. Lousehill Copse Management Plan
- i. Prospect Park and Devils Dip Management Plan
- j. Southcote Linear Park Management Plan
- k. Thames Woodlands Management Plan
- l. The Cowsey Management Plan
- m. The Warren Woodland Management Plan