

Committee: Environment Committee

Agenda Item

Date: 16 March 2010

14

Title: Birchanger Wood

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Item for decision

Summary

This report asks Members whether the Committee will make a financial contribution to the Management Trust towards the costs of urgent works required to trees bordering the A120 in the interests of highway safety.

Recommendations

1. Members determine the request

Background Papers

2. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

E mails from the Chairman of the Trust received 25 and 27 February 2010.

Impact

- 3.

Communication/Consultation	
Community Safety	
Equalities	
Finance	No budget provision
Health and Safety	
Human Rights/Legal Implications	
Sustainability	
Ward-specific impacts	Birchanger
Workforce/Workplace	

Situation

4. Parts of Birchanger Wood are owned and managed by a Management Trust as an access woodland. The wood lies within Birchanger parish and abuts the built up area of Bishop's Stortford. It is bisected by the A120. The Council appoints one of the trustees. The Council's current nominee is Cllr Godwin. Other Councils appointing trustees are Birchanger Parish Council, Bishop's Stortford Town Council and Hertfordshire County Council.
5. The Trust has been advised by the Woodland Officer, Essex County Council, that immediate action is necessary to make safe trees in the wood bordering the A120 road. The trees in question have been assessed as at risk of falling across the road and thus endangering road users. Failure to carry out this work could result in the Trust being served with a notice under Section 154 of the Highways Act 1980.
6. Essex County Council required action by the 28th February. The Trust obtained quotes for the work. The total estimated cost is some £8,500. It has so far authorised work to some £2,100, which is the limit of its resources.
7. The Chairman of the Trustees has written to enquire if the Council, as one of the signatories to the Trust deed, can consider making a contribution towards this urgent work. He has also approached the other Councils who are signatories to the Trust to seek contributions.
8. No authority has so far been able to commit to any contribution. It may be that the Hertfordshire authorities will be able to find £3,000 to £4,000 in total.
9. The Council's Landscape Officer has discussed the issue with Essex County Council's Woodland Officer. The Trust has recently received a Forestry Commission grant for access works and one possibility is that, with the Commission's agreement this could be redirected to the urgent works. The Trust's Forester, however, believes that it is unlikely the Commission would agree. The Trust has sought estimates for cutting down the trees posing the risk in sections, to avoid other trees being damaged during the work. However, it is the Landscape Officer's view that this may well be unnecessary. Clearly, the cost of the necessary work would be significantly reduced if trees are not taken down in stages. It is however likely that traffic management would be required to be in place during the works. If a tree surgeon is carrying out the work then they will normally sort out these requirements with the highways authority.
10. The Landscape Officer is of the view that coppicing would improve the wood's structure and not cause any damage to the woodland flora. With regards to the Birch trees which need to be taken down, this, as the Woodlands Officer suggests, will effectively be coppicing. One would anticipate that many of these subjects will regenerate following the works. Birch is a species which traditionally was coppiced and whilst the birch in this particular case have not been previously coppiced it can be expected that new growth will occur even if stumps are cut as low as 100mm.

11. The Trust may also be able to obtain support in kind from tree surgeons prepared to help it out. Support may also be available from other charitable sources.

Risk Analysis

12.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Trees fall onto the highway	2 Risk identified by Woodland Officer ECC	3 Possibility of trees falling onto the road	Advice to Trust Contribute to necessary works

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.