

Bath & North East Somerset Council

DECISION MAKER:	Cllr David Dixon, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods with Cllr Paul Crossley, Leader of the Council	
DECISION DATE:	On or after 11th January 2014	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 2606
TITLE:	Beechen Cliff and Other Open Space Areas	
WARD:	Widcombe and Lyncombe wards for Beechen Cliff Abbey, Kingsmead, Lambridge, Lansdown, Midsomer Norton North, Keynsham North, Odd Down, Oldfield, Saltford, Twerton, Walcot, Westmoreland wards for Parks & Green Spaces	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1 – Parks and Green Spaces Programme of Works 2013/2014		

1. THE ISSUE

- 1.1. Investment in the management of the woodland at Beechen Cliff and for improvements to other open spaces in Bath and North East Somerset has previously been approved by the Council in the current 2013/2014 capital programme.
- 1.2. However the proposed mechanism for delivering this through a partnership agreement between the Council and the National Trust has not been possible to deliver as a result of the National Trust's decision not to go ahead with the partnership.
- 1.3. Investment into the management and maintenance of the Beechen Cliff woodland and other open spaces is important to ensure the assets are maintained safely for public access and enjoyment.
- 1.4. This report recognises the importance of proceeding with this work as soon as possible and sets out a revised proposal to mitigate any potential risks arising from failing to manage and maintain the Beechen Cliff woodland and other open spaces in good condition.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1. That the funding allocations for Beechen Cliff and other open spaces within Bath and North East Somerset, as set out in Appendix 1, be approved.

3. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1. £500k for 'Beechen Cliff Woodland and Other Open Spaces Improvement' was included in the 2012/2013 capital programme approval in the February 2012 Council budget, subject to detailed project plan and subject to third party negotiations, to be financed through corporate capital funding (corporate headroom).
- 3.2. £20k of this funding has been spent on urgent tree safety works in Beechen Cliff during 2013, leaving a total budget of £480k remaining.
- 3.3. The project will seek to restore the woodland above the cliff and maintain it to a suitable standard. The balance will be reserved for open space improvements across Bath and North East Somerset as set out in Appendix 1, Parks & Green Spaces – Programme of Works 2013/2014.

4. STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1. All appropriate statutory considerations will be made through the consultation, design and implementation of the proposed programme of works for Beechen Cliff woodland and other open spaces in Bath and North East Somerset.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1. Bath and North East Somerset Council owns approximately 5 hectares of land at Beechen Cliff and is directly responsible for the management and maintenance of the Beechen Cliff woodland and adjoining land, together with a number of other open spaces throughout the district.
- 5.2. Beechen Cliff is a large and prominent area of steep, north facing and generally densely wooded slope used as public open space on the valley side overlooking the city of Bath.
- 5.3. The area is particularly important within the setting of the World Heritage Site, however the current revenue funding and maintenance regime, which is essentially reactive, is insufficient to ensure the effective management, safety, sustainability, conservation and community participation and involvement in the woodland and surrounding habitats.
- 5.4. Initially the project will involve continuing the programme of urgent remedial works and the agreement of a specification for woodland, habitat and land management, planting, aftercare (particularly irrigation) and works procured (preferably to local suppliers) to carry out the works. The timescale for continuing the work at Beechen Cliff is during the current 2013/2014 winter period and on through the following five years until 2018/19 as it is normal to ensure this length of timescale as a minimum when managing and restoring woodlands.
- 5.5. The objective is to use the Council's in-house resources to the best effect and commission an experienced provider of woodland management and ecological services to update the exiting woodland survey and undertake an ecological survey of the habitats within the woodland. This will ensure that necessary continuing safety works are identified and prioritised to ensure public safety and that any potential threat to wildlife within the woodland is identified and mitigated.
- 5.6. This will produce a 5 year work plan which will set out the management actions, when these should be completed and who is responsible for completing the work.

This programme of work will be managed and controlled by professionally qualified and experienced staff within the Council's Parks section.

- 5.7. Subject to officers being satisfied that the woodland is safe, it should be possible to arrange in future a programme of managed volunteer activity involving local residents. This will be coordinated between the Council's officers, the commissioned provider of woodland management services, local ward Councillors and the resident's steering group.
- 5.8. The PID document indicates a spending programme of £250,000 over 5 years however this is very much an estimate at this stage and clearer, more detailed costs will be identified within the quotations for the commissioned management plan and woodland management actions. Progress will be reported back to PID/CSG every year (as well as the resident's steering group) to ensure the capital spend profile is controlled, revised and kept up-to-date.
- 5.9. At present the key priority action is to get the woodland management actions underway during the course of the 2013/2014 winter, building on the back of the essential tree safety works that were carried in the woodland during 2012/2013's winter, in order to reduce any risks and protect the Council's position as landowner.
- 5.10. In addition to Beechen Cliff a number of sites are to be improved as part of the 2013/14 capital programme and these are set out in Appendix 1, Parks & Green Spaces – Programme of Works 2013/2014. Set out in the notes to the programme notes are comments explaining why we have chosen to include these items, rather than any others i.e. because we are dealing with urgent or unfunded issues, safeguarding health and safety of service users and staff, safeguarding assets, prioritising from our asset management plan or investing in improvements to minimise future cost liabilities and/or to improve sustainability.

6. RATIONALE

- 1.1. The available funding must be directed towards treating any risk arising from not managing the woodland at Beechen Cliff competently and other open spaces in Bath and North East Somerset to limit liability for the Council and to ensure the continuation of existing service levels.

7. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1. None.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1. Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods; Staff; Other B&NES Services; Section 151 Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer.
- 8.2. Once approved there will be consultation with Ward Members and service users/local residents as appropriate on a site by site basis as set out in Appendix 1.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1.A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

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Background papers	Report to Cabinet – Beechen Cliff Future Management Arrangements, 5 December 2012.
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	