

Culture, Leisure & Recreation Committee

Date:	3 December 2013
Title:	Ham Wood
Purpose of the Report:	To consider a proposal for leasing the wood
Contact Officer:	Helen Stewart, Town Clerk

Background

The Woodland Trust has been carrying out a review of its woodland estate as part of a strategic assessment to ensure that sites deliver as many of its charitable objectives as they can. The review includes Ham Wood (Appendix 1 and 2) which lies within the Thame parish boundary and for which the Town Council apparently made a donation of £2,000 towards the original purchase of the site in 1998.

As part of the review process, the Trust has identified the need for some really iconic sites and has acquired a small number of substantial 'landscape scale' sites across the country. It has also identified the opportunity to engage with local community groups and individuals in managing some of its other community-orientated sites, such as Ham Wood.

As a result, the Trust has leased a number of woods to community groups and individuals across the country. In each case public access has been maintained, where there is a history of public access, and the leases ensure that the sites will continue to be managed as native woodlands. Outright freehold sale of woods is not currently under consideration.

Proposal

The Council has been contacted by the Trust about this proposed change to the management of the wood and to enquire whether the Council might know of any local environmental or community groups who could be interested in leasing the wood as a potentially rewarding community project, or whether the Council might be interested itself.

Typically lease terms are publicly advertised for a period of between 25 and 999 years, and require the lessee to maintain the site as native broadleaf woodland. No development or buildings etc will be permitted in the wood without the consent of the Trust.

Resource Appraisal

The current Management Plan (Appendix 3) typically cost £183 a year to manage the paths and entrances. This year at a cost of £440, and every three years, the open ground area is cut to prevent it from turning to scrub. This is next due in 2016.

Although the revenue costs are relatively minimal it is still an additional cost when budgets are being squeezed. There is always the potential for some expenditure arising from essential safety work.

The Council has an annual revenue budget of £2000 for the management and maintenance of its 400+trees with any year end balances being accumulated in Ear Marked Reserves.

Risk Appraisal

It is presumed that the Woodland Trust would continue to manage the wood if the Council did not take on the responsibility and if a local group could not be encouraged to take on the lease. There is always the risk of unforeseen costs arising from work required for safety reasons.

Legal Powers: Local Government Act 1972

Neighbourhood Plan Objective: ESDQ1- Protect existing open spaces.

Recommendation

- i) To consider leasing Ham Wood with an increase in the tree revenue budget of £350 to cover the additional costs.***