

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

08 December 2014

**Report of the Director of Street Scene and Leisure and
Cabinet Member for Leisure, Youth and Arts**

Part 1- Public

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken
by the Cabinet Member)**

1 KENT WOODLAND EMPLOYMENT SCHEME

Summary

This report advises Members on the work of the Kent Woodland Employment Scheme and brings forward proposals for engagement with the charity.

1.1 Kent Woodland Employment Scheme

1.1.1 The Kent Woodland Employment Scheme is a new charity set up to provide training and employment for ex-Service personnel; young people and ex-offenders in Kent's ancient woodlands.

1.1.2 Its trainees obtain recognised qualifications in woodland management to ensure that at the end of their three year training period they can secure a worthwhile job. The trainees are people who have served their country in the armed forces but face difficulty in the transition to life outside, those who have recently left school but are unable to find work and those who have been involved in crime but wish to make a new start.

1.1.3 In the course of their training, the apprentices will help to restore Kent's ancient woodlands. It is their aim that ancient woodlands will once again become sustainable economic entities by producing wood to be sold for logs and timber and will also encourage sustainable tourism. Wood sold as logwood and timber from the woods will allow the Charity to train more apprentices.

1.1.4 The Charity work closely with landowners and environmental organisations all over Kent and are supported by the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Kent Wildlife Trust, Kent County Council, the Forestry Commission and a number of other charities.

1.2 Borough Council Woodland Management

- 1.2.1 The Council is responsible for the management and maintenance of a number of woodland sites across the Borough. These sites are managed under the guidance of the Council's Tree Safety Strategy with inspections, and resulting health and safety works, being undertaken on a regular basis. This is then supported by site specific conservation works as and when funding is identified.

1.3 Engagement with Kent Woodland Employment Scheme

- 1.3.1 The Borough Council recently approached the Charity to explore opportunities for partnership working and initial discussions have been very positive. It has been proposed that the Borough Council are able support the work of the Charity and their trainees by offering suitable woodland sites to come under its management.
- 1.3.2 A number of sites across the borough have been considered by the Council and the Charity for future management and sites visits have been undertaken to assess their suitability. These sites have included, Holly Hill on the North Downs, Taddington Valley, Walderslade, Woodland Walk, Tonbridge, Platt Woods, Platt Leybourne Woods and Basted Mill and The Napps in Borough Green.
- 1.3.3 Once a site has been deemed suitable a 10 year Management Plan will need to be drawn up for each site with the Charity then managing the site in accordance with this approved plan.
- 1.3.4 Following initial discussions it was proposed that Holly Hill be progressed as the first site under the scheme and a site Management Plan is currently being considered. It is also the intention that the Council continues to liaise with the Charity to incorporate further sites and the Charity are very receptive to this approach.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 The Charity enter into a formal Management Agreement with the Landowner for each individual site. Liaison is currently being undertaken with Legal Services and the Council's Health and Safety Officer to review the proposed Agreement to ensure appropriate documentation is in place.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 No costs are incurred in regard to the on-site works undertaken by the Charity though the Charity may look to sell timber from the sites to financially support current and future trainees.
- 1.5.2 The Borough Council will continue to undertake its health and safety monitoring of all woodland sites though management of the sites will be enhanced through the engagement of the Charity.
- 1.5.3 Costs incurred in relation to the production of site Management Plans will be met through existing revenue budgets.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 All works undertaken will be carried out in accordance with the approved site management plans and the formal Management Agreement. The Charity holds its own employers and public liability insurance for claims arising from its or its employees negligence.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.8 Policy Considerations

- 1.8.1 Asset Management, Biodiversity & Sustainability, Community, Young People.

1.9 Recommendations

- 1.9.1 It is **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that,

- 1) subject to a legal review of the formal Management Agreement, the Council works in partnership with the Kent Woodlands Employment Scheme initially in the management of Holly Hill woods;
- 2) the Council continues discussions with the Charity with the aim to broaden its engagement across other sites within the Council's ownership.

The Director of Street Scene and Leisure and Cabinet Member for Leisure, Youth and Arts confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

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Nil

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