

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

07 February 2024

Report of the Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services

Part 1- Public

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

1 TADDINGTON VALLEY – WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

SUMMARY

This report brings forward comments received as part of the public consultation exercise on the draft Taddington Valley woodland management plan. The Committee is invited to consider the responses and any proposed amendments to enable the Plan to be submitted to the Forestry Commission for approval.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Taddington Valley is a Council owned public open space in the north of the borough bordering Medway Council district. The site is primarily established woodland with a network of paths throughout that link the adjoining residential areas. With 17 public entrances the site is well used for casual recreation and to link local communities. The site is bordered on all sides by residential properties.

1.1.2 The Council needs to seek the views of key stakeholders and members of the public before the Plan can be approved by the Forestry Commission (FC) and formally adopted.

1.1.3 It was RESOLVED, under Decision Number D230095MEM, on 31 October 2023 that the draft Woodland management plan would go out to public consultation. Presented below are the findings from the public consultation and any proposed amendments.

1.2 Introduction

1.2.1 Currently the Council undertakes relatively basic management and maintenance of the woodland to ensure it complies with the Council's Duty of Care and is a safe environment for users of the site. At the current time focus is not given to development and enhancement of the site. The Council already has another adopted FC woodland management plan, for Holly Hill Wood near Birling, which has worked well in making improvements and drawing in external funding.

- 1.2.2 It is now the aim to manage the Taddington Valley woodland site to enhance its biodiversity and landscape value whilst maintaining public access and improving local appreciation of it. A key factor in the overall plan will be bringing previously managed coppiced trees and pollarded trees back into a 15-year rotation cycle, alongside managing mature and immature trees, hedges and grassland to achieve a healthy and well-balanced woodland that is in keeping with its status as Ancient Woodland.
- 1.2.3 To achieve the above, a site Management Plan was drafted for public consultation. The document follows an industry standard Forestry Commission layout for a woodland management plan.

1.3 Draft Management plan

- 1.3.1 The draft Plan is intended to provide guidance and direction for all aspects of the management of the woodland and be used to inform future maintenance and development of the site. A core part of this document will be nature recovery by regeneration of the woodland using coppicing and pollarding of trees where appropriate. The Plan also covers many other aspects of the site's management including community engagement.

1.4 Consultation

- 1.4.1 The draft Management Plan was circulated/made available for comment between 10 November and 22 December 2023 and can be found at **[Annex 1]**. An email was circulated to key stakeholders, as listed at **[Annex 2]**, advising that copies of the Plan were available on the Council's website and hard copies were available to view at Walderslade Village Library and at the Council Offices, Kings Hill.
- 1.4.2 In addition, posters were displayed around the site advising visitors on the consultation process where and how to give feedback. 500 flyers were distributed to residents in the immediate local area and social media posts were also made.
- 1.4.3 We understand from the librarian at Walderslade Village Library that many people took the opportunity to view the Plan on display there. The Social media site received 4500 visits with 51 users then visiting the consultation webpage. The website page had 200 visits. In response to the consultation 20 residents provided written feedback with nearly 60 individual comments returned. From those responding, we had an average rating of 3.95 out of 5 for ease of understanding. All comments received have been carefully considered, most of these were supportive of the Plan and where appropriate amendments to the Plan have been proposed. A summary of the comments received and Officer responses can be found at **[Annex 3]** for Members consideration. Members will note that the comments received cover a whole variety of topics from woodland management, paths, accessibility, trees on boundaries, climate change, anti-social behaviour and funding.

1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 The matters set out in this report are considered routine or uncontroversial. The trees in most of this woodland are protected by a group Tree Preservation Order. Due to the level of coppicing proposed it will be essential to seek a Felling Licence from the Forestry Commission (which overrides the Tree Preservation Order) and in order to obtain this an adopted Woodland Management Plan is required to be developed in liaison with the local community and submitted and then approved by the Commission.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 Once approved, works will be actioned through revenue funding and a provision of £12,000 is included in the proposed 2024/25 revenue budget. External funding will also be sought where possible to fund projects within the Plan (they may be a requirement to find match funding for some grants).

1.7 Risk Assessment

1.7.1 The Council's Health and Safety Officer has been consulted on the draft Plan.

1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

1.8.1 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.

1.8.2 The proposals aim to extend and provide additional/improved facilities with free public access for all. An access audit of the site is proposed.

1.9 Policy Considerations

1.9.1 Biodiversity & Sustainability; Climate Change; Equalities/Diversity; Health and Safety; Healthy Lifestyles; Young People

1.9.2 The Plan has been developed to take into account the Council's local policy/guidance, and incorporates a number of the Borough Council's Priorities including:

- Reducing anti-social behaviour, and fear of crime;
- Climate change;
- Achieving a clean, smart, well maintained and sustainable borough; and
- Healthy Living opportunities and community wellbeing.

1.9.3 The Plan will promote healthy living opportunities through better access paths, and by running some events. Anti-social behaviour and fear of crime will be addressed by working with partners and providing a well-maintained site.

1.9.4 It will also address a number of climate change themes such as managing the Council's estate, raising awareness of nature and biodiversity, working with partners like the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership, and building a more resilient landscape and protecting natural assets.

1.10 Recommendations

1.10.1 The Committee is requested to consider the comments received through the public consultation and the proposed amendments to the draft Taddington Valley Woodland Management Plan. The committee is also requested to consider recommendation of the draft plan for submission to the Forestry Commission for formal adoption.

The Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Chris Fox
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Flyer used during the public consultation
Record of Executive non key decision notice number
D230095MEM

Robert Styles
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