

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Littleworth Common.
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Officer Management Team - Director of Services Prepared by - Head of Environment

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Members about the Higher Level Stewardship funding application for Littleworth Common.

## 2. Links to Council Policy Objectives

- 2.1 The management of Littleworth Common contributes to the Council's aim to make our environment measurably cleaner, healthier and managed in a way to preserve it for future generations.

## 3. Background

- 3.1. Littleworth Common is significant lowland heathland of 16 Hectares/ 39.6 acres and is shown edged in black on the plan at Appendix A.
- 3.2 The site is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Natural England (NE) guidance states that "The purpose of SSSIs is to safeguard, for present and future generations, the diversity and geographic range of habitats, species... including the full range of natural and semi-natural ecosystems." The legislation states that the owner or the occupier of the site is legally responsible for the site and has a statutory duty to get the SSSI into a favourable condition (it is currently 'unfavourable recovering').
- 3.3 The District Council does not own the site but manages it under an agreement with the owners.
- 3.4 The District Council has recently prepared a new management plan for the site, for the years 2011 - 2021.
- 3.5 The budget for maintaining the site has been reduced to £1,000 per annum for future years. This includes safety works to trees etc., and for bracken and birch removal with the aim to encourage regeneration of the heather.
- 3.6 The former 'Countryside Stewardship Scheme' funding ceased in September 2010. This scheme has been replaced with a 'Higher Level Stewardship' (HLS) scheme. Approval was given at the PAG on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2010 to apply for this HLS funding for the next 10 years.

## 4.0 Discussion

- 4.1 The Council submitted an application for the 'Higher Level Stewardship' (HLS) funding in 2011.
- 4.2 Natural England (NE) initially indicated that the application would be successful but following an internal review of their funding mechanisms NE has since

revised the criteria for applications to HLS. Now the owner of the site has to countersign any application to confirm that should the applicant (in this case SBDC as the manager of the site) default on its management responsibilities they would step in and manage the site to the agreement of NE.

- 4.3 In addition, the national funding for HLS schemes is due to cease at the end of 2013, so it was requested that the revised application should be submitted, with the owner's signatures, by mid September 2013.
- 4.4 Despite officer attempts to contact the owner, no response has been received. Therefore NE has rejected the Council's application for HLS funding and stated that no further funding will be available until the next funding stream is announced. This is likely to be in 2014/15.
- 4.5 Therefore the Council will continue to currently manage the site with its limited funding and a firm letter will be sent to NE explaining the surprising nature of this decision and copying the letter to Dominic Grieve seeking his assistance to help us obtain funding from NE for this site.

## 5. Resources, Risk and Other Implications

- 5.1 The Council has a revenue budget from 2011/12 of £1,000 per annum for works at Littleworth Common. Together with recharges of £3,420, the total spend will be £4,420.

## 6. Summary

- 6.1 The Policy Advisory Group is asked to note this report.

Portfolio Holder:	Councillor N Naylor
Officer Contact:	Simon Gray 01895 837321 email <a href="mailto:simon.gray@southbucks.gov.uk">simon.gray@southbucks.gov.uk</a>
Background papers	Previous reports on this matter.