

- 3.4 Discussions with the CIC have indicated that the woodland could better serve the community if it were in the ownership and management of the CIC which
- has a good understanding of local needs
 - has access to funding unavailable to the Council which would be used to further improve the site
 - would be in a better position to maintain the long term use of the site through its network of local volunteer groups such as the Friends of the Colne Valley Park

4. Discussion

- 4.1 The Colne Valley Park CIC is a social enterprise operating to maintain and enhance the landscape of the Colne Valley Regional Park.
- 4.2 The CIC is currently negotiating with Bucks County Council to take on the adjacent Northmoor Hill Wood. Heads of terms have been agreed and Bucks CC legal team are drawing up an agreement.
- 4.3 It would make sense if these two woodlands, which are continuous on the ground and first recorded on a 1590 map as 'Wyat Wood', are managed as one site by the CIC for the benefit of the landscape, wildlife and the local community (e.g. informal recreation, school visits, habitat enhancement.)
- 4.4 There are three options:
- 1) Do Nothing.
 - 2) Freehold transfer to the CIC
 - 3) Leasehold transfer (99 years)

The CIC has requested an endowment of £8,400* (the equivalent of £85/year) plus a one-off contribution of approx. £5-7k, which would allow fence repairs to be undertaken to improve the appearance, maintain the integrity of the boundary & existing access points and improve health and safety (e.g. remove exposed barbed wire, support leaning posts, remove trees and vegetation damaging the fence.)

Members may consider that a combined amount of £10 - £15k may be appropriate.

*The CIC has requested £16,800 from Bucks CC for 2 woodlands; therefore £8,400 is requested from SBDC for Wyatts Covert. The CIC is able to secure external funding (typically £8-10 for every £1 invested) but requires the endowment and fence contribution because external funders will not cover costs of repair, responsive management or ongoing costs such as insurance.

The endowment would cover items such as ongoing improvements to boundary treatment, paths, woodland management, enhanced biodiversity and help to introduce additional community features such as safer access for school visits.

- 4.5 As Wyatts Covert is open space land for the purposes of section 123 (2) of the Local Government Act 1972 it will be necessary to advertise the proposed disposal to the CIC in the local press for 2 consecutive weeks and to consider any objections received before deciding whether to proceed with the disposal.
- 4.6 Should South Bucks transfer responsibility of the site management to the CIC this will reduce the burden on the Council relating to
- Health & safety
 - Liability

- Responsive management (such as removal of fallen trees)
- Free up officer time

This is in addition to the environmental and community benefits that the Colne Valley Park will be able to bring to this site for the benefit of local residents.

- 4.7 A leasehold transfer would enable SBDC to maintain some control over the land while a freehold transfer would enable the CIC to develop a long term management strategy for the site and continue discussions with HS2 Limited (the CIC is requesting money from HS2 for ongoing management of woodlands in the Colne Valley affected by the line, and if these woods were in the CIC's freehold ownership it would help the CIC in its negotiations.)
- 4.8 There is an elected member of SBDC on the CIC Board who would provide oversight.
- 4.9 Members are asked to consider the proposed land transfer and advise whether work on the proposals should be continued.

5. Resource and Wider Policy Implications.

- 5.1 The work required to progress the matters above will require officer time.
- 5.2 Capital funding of circa £15k would be added to the capital programme for a one off contribution to enable the CIC to improve the site for enhanced public use.
- 5.3 There is a risk that if the SBDC owned part of the woods is not transferred to the CIC, the Northmoor Hill Woods transfer from BCC goes ahead separately and those woods are improved for the use of the community leaving the SBDC owned part of the woods in a comparatively substandard state, reflecting badly on the Council.
- 5.4 There is a risk that should the land remain in the Council's ownership there will be further fragmentation of the site due to the limited funds available for management, and due to the separate ownership of the two woodlands.

6. Recommendations.

- 6.1 The advice of the PAG is sought on whether the Portfolio Holder should be asked to recommend to Cabinet the following:
1. the transfer of the land to the CIC, as a freehold transfer or a Leasehold transfer for 99 years.
 2. the endowment to the CIC and the proposed amount.
 3. authority be delegated to the Head of Environment to advertise the proposed disposal in the local press in accordance with section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972.
 4. if no objections are received in response to the advertisement the Head of Environment in consultation with the Resources Portfolio Holder, be authorised to proceed with the disposal and agree any minor details.

5. If objections are received in response to the advertisement the matter be reported back to the PAG for further consideration

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Background Papers:	Previous correspondence on this matter.