

Meeting of the Full Council

Monday 5 September 2022

Agenda item 14.0

TO CONSIDER THE RE-ALLOCATION OF FUNDS WITHIN EARMARKED RESERVES FOR WORKS TO ADDRESS ASH DIEBACK

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Ash die back made its presence felt in 2020 and a number of ash trees have unfortunately been affected within the town since then.
- 1.2 Ash Dieback is a condition caused by a fungus introduced into Britain fairly recently. The fungus has spread quite rapidly and is highly lethal to native ash. Total losses of native ash are expected to be between 70-95% of all ash trees within the country. Younger trees are highly susceptible but large mature trees, especially those that stand alone seem to be able to co-exist with the disease for some time. Ash trees are very common in our part of the world forming a key component of our woodlands.
- 1.3 Uckfield Town Council has been commissioning surveys on its tree stock throughout the town over the past two years - working with the Forestry Commission, Arboricultural Association and other experts to identify infected trees, assess the current health of the tree and consider the possible works required. This has been a phased process, which has enabled us to look at specific areas at a time.
- 1.4 Attention has been given to identifying trees that present a threat to property and a possible risk to the public and to find ways to mitigate the risk they pose. Focus initially was placed on the trees of highest risk in public areas and open spaces/sports pitches and those immediately adjacent to residents' properties. We now move to phase 2, to address a number of trees displaying evidence of Ash Dieback within the Town Council's woodlands.
- 1.5 The programme of works for the winter of 2022/23, will focus on Nightingale Wood and Boothland Wood and this report sets out the proposed plan and associated costs.
- 1.6 Further information can be found here on Ash Dieback.
<https://www.trees.org.uk/Help-Advice/Public/Ash-Dieback-%E2%80%93-Practice-Guidance>

2.0 Works to be undertaken

- 2.1 A total of 12 trees require attention in Nightingale Wood near to the woodland boundary and adjacent residential roads. The trees identified are illustrated in appendix A.
- 2.2 A large number of trees unfortunately also need to be addressed in Boothland Wood. The Town Clerk will confirm the number within the meeting as this quotation is just being finalised.

- 2.3 Although this will be a costly exercise, we also need to take on board the importance of removing or making these trees safe, to ensure the safety of nearby residential properties and users of the woodlands.
- 2.4 Access to Nightingale Wood will prove difficult, and it is anticipated that good communication will need to be provided to residents living in the adjacent properties, as well as users/walkers within the woods, and the owner of the car park at the back of The Jackdaws.
- 2.5 It is proposed that any works undertaken have consideration for the safety of nearby residential properties and woodland users, and are undertaken at some speed to reduce the inconvenience to local residents.

3.0 Anticipated cost of works

- 3.1 A contractor has been approached who assisted the Town Council with the works within the cemetery, and demonstrated they had the necessary equipment and expertise to handle more complex locations. They also undertake work for Brighton & Hove City Council so very familiar with council procedures.
- 3.2 Access to trees in Nightingale Wood, will require temporary closure of a small section of the adjacent residential roads in Fernley Park for one day at a time. The works will therefore be carried out over three days, to reduce the disruption to residents and manage carefully the area affected.
- 3.3 The quotation for the works at Nightingale Wood is: £7,769.00 plus VAT.
- 3.4 To reach the trees in Boothland Wood which require attention, access has been granted by Welbeck Strategic Land, so the contractors can gain access from Ridgewood Farm.
- 3.5 The quotation for the works at Boothland Wood is: £12,964.64 plus VAT.
- 3.6 This totals £20,733.64 and it is important to incorporate further funding for contingency should the work take longer, or other issues occur onsite.
- 3.7 The budget for tree works in 2022-23 was increased with the understanding that more activity would need to take place over the next two to three years to mitigate risk and remove or carry out works to the trees identified to have disease within the surveys. The revenue budget set can address individual trees and any damaged through bad weather, but would not cover the extent of the works required to address Ash Dieback in our ancient woodlands.
- 3.8 The current budget for tree works is £12,000. £2,640 has already been spent on necessary tree works, and we have a further individual ash tree planned for work costing in the region of £900. This would leave in the region of £8,460 remaining for this winter.
- 3.9 Officers therefore propose that a proportion of earmarked reserves be re-allocated specifically for the purpose of tree works relating to ash dieback. Officers wish to re-allocate a sum of £25,000 for the winter of 2022/23 specifically and suggest that £25,000 be re-allocated from earmarked reserves. Either of the following reserves have not been utilised for a number of years and are up for

consideration:

Joint Committee Masterplan Work - £50,000 or
Consultants – Town Centre - £120,300

- 3.10 It is recommended that the sum be removed from one of the above funding streams, but the Town Clerk had concerns that the wider Uckfield Town Centre Joint Regeneration Committee (UTCRC) would need to support any changes to the “Joint Committee Masterplan Work” earmarked reserve.

To remind members, the following resolution was taken in May 2014 and all three authorities (East Sussex County Council, Wealden District Council and Uckfield Town Council) contributed £50,000 towards the project.

FC.14.05.14 After further discussion it was **RESOLVED:-**

- (i) To approve the creation of The Uckfield Town Centre Regeneration (UTCRC) Joint Committee and adopt the Constitution at Appendix A of the report;
- (ii) To appoint two Council representatives to the UTCRC Joint Committee with two substitutes;
- (iii) To confirm support for Wealden District Council to act as the Administering Authority;
- (iv) To allocate up to £50,000 from the 2014/15 budget to be used to meet the procurement and support costs for the Uckfield Town Centre Regeneration project, subject to regular financial reports from the UTCRC Joint Committee.

The UTCRC Committee last met in July 2018 and it would therefore be difficult to formally agree the re-allocation of the £50,000 without further conversations.

- 3.11 The Town Clerk will therefore check prior to the Full Council meeting, the origins of the allocation of the £120,000 to earmarked reserves, to see if the necessary £25k needed for ash dieback tree works can be re-allocated from this funding. If neither can be utilised at this stage, it is suggested that the works be funded initially from general reserves, before a suitable funding stream is assigned from earmarked reserves.
- 3.12 It is important for works to go ahead as planned in Nightingale Wood due to their close proximity to residential properties, to reduce risk, and ensure that these trees are addressed before any bad weather is experienced over the winter months.
- 4.0 Proposed schedule for the works at Nightingale Wood**
- 4.1 Gaining access to the trees identified within appendix A, will prove more difficult. Therefore a three day plan has been proposed, with works potentially taking place sooner rather than later when weather may affect the ability for works to go ahead. It is proposed that works take place towards the end of September and communications should be circulated this week to provide residents and landowners with at least two weeks notice. We are also aware that there will be noise and moving vehicles as a result of the works and neighbouring residents need notification of this.

- 4.2 The Ranger will mark all identified trees for work in Year 1 with spraypaint to confirm to the contractors in both Nightingale Wood and Boothland Wood.
- 4.3 Communications will involve:
- notices on all entrances to the woodland;
 - letters to the residents affected;
 - press release/social media campaign to ensure walkers/users of the woodland are aware.
 - contact with the management company/car park at the back of the Jackdaws.
- 4.4 Day 1 – Focus on the far right hand side
Access Nightingale Wood by 6, Ponds View (cul de sac)
This would therefore restrict access for 6 Ponds View and the adjacent property to their driveways for this one day as a result of the contractors' vehicles.
- Day 2 – Work their way along middle stretch
Access to property driveways from 68 Baxendale Way to 62 Baxendale Way will be affected. Potential access issues may also occur to the flats 83-85 Baxendale Way towards the end of the day but there is a wide pull in area outside the building, which may be suitable for contractor vehicles to park.
- Day 3 – Access through The Jackdaws Car Park
To focus on the two trees identified behind the car park, access will be gained through the back of the car park and directly into the woodland. Parking for this work should be less problematic.
- 4.5 A banksman will be onsite within the wood, to check for safety and ensure no walkers are in close proximity to the works.
- 4.6 The methodology statement and proposed plan for the works is being finalised as we speak, but it is proposed that logs will be moved to Victoria along with chippings.
- 4.7 As a thank you to residents for their co-operation during the works, there may be an opportunity for those residents with fire places or woodburners to have some of the wood for free to support them through the winter months.
- 4.8 As members will therefore see from this report, the Estates & Facilities Manager and Ranger have undertaken a great deal of work to consider the options and best course of action for this work, and to keep disruption to a minimum whilst also ensuring the safety of residents.

5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 Members are asked to consider:
- (i) giving approval for work to be undertaken to safely remove Ash trees affected by Ash Dieback within Nightingale Wood and Boothland Wood as the first year of a programme of works, and;
 - (ii) with the advice of the Town Clerk, agree a suitable funding stream through which to manage the programme of tree works in Winter 2022/23 to the sum of £25,000.

Appendices: Appendix A: Map of trees affected by works in Nightingale Wood

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Ash Tree Works in Nightingale Woods