

REPORT OF Head of Communities and Place
To: Community and Resources Committee
Subject: Purchase of Tractor
Date: 23rd October 2023

Reference:

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To seek approval for the purchase of a tractor for use by the Burrows Service and Grounds Maintenance Teams.

1. INTRODUCTION

A compact tractor is needed by both the Ground Maintenance service and the Northam Burrows Ranger team to deliver biodiversity projects across the district. In addition to the compact tractor, implements will be required to perform the necessary tasks. These include a cut collect flail, for cutting and removing arisings from wildflower meadows and verges, a power harrow for preparing ground for sowing wildflower seed and a loader for moving arisings and other heavy loads. Staff using this equipment will also need to undertake vocational training to ensure they are qualified and safe to use it.

2. REPORT

The Environment Plan was launched by the government in 2018 as part of an ambitious 25-year project to improve the environment in a generation. This document identified the dire condition of nature in the British Isles and set out measures to ensure further degradation is stopped and the habitats are restored to benefit the rare wildlife that lives in this country.

In 2021 the North Devon Biosphere set out local objectives to achieve the aim of the Environment Plan in this area and Torridge District Council committed to delivering these objectives following a vote at Full Council. The objectives are to be delivered through the planning process as well as adopting better management practices for the Council's estate to promote biodiversity across the district.

The Council's Ranger team manages important habitats at Northam Burrows Country Park, which is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Kenwith Valley and Kynochs Local Nature Reserves. The Ground Maintenance service looks after green spaces across the district including verges, meadows, parkland and amenity grassland that has potential to be improved to support greater biodiversity and help the community connect with nature.

The proposed project involves the purchase of a compact tractor along with a cut collect flail, power harrow and loader which will initially be used to protect and enhance the dune and grassland habitats at Northam Burrows Country Park and Kenwith Valley Local Nature Reserve as well as the implementation of a biodiversity plan to enhance the verges and meadows managed by the Ground Maintenance service for wildlife.



The compact tractor will enable the Council to undertake these works inhouse and avoid the costs associated with employing contractors to undertake the work. Northam Burrows SSSI was considered to be in unfavourable condition in 2011 and capital works were undertaken in 2015 to control scrub encroachment, that was affecting rare wildflowers, as part of an Environmental Stewardship Scheme. Every year aftercare works are required to prevent future scrub encroachment and, while annual subsidies are currently provided for this, purchasing a compact tractor and implements will ensure continuity and allow management to continue after the scheme is completed. Kenwith Valley Local Nature Reserve has a number of valuable grassland sites that require annual management to ensure they are not affected by scrub encroachment. The verges and meadows managed by the Ground Maintenance service have potential to be managed for biodiversity but require some management works to improve their condition first. The tractor and implements will make it possible to carryout twice annual hay cuts and prepare the ground for sowing wildflower seed.

Unlike other mowing equipment that the Council currently own, a compact tractor will be powerful enough to operate a cut collect flail which will be crucial on all sites for helping to remove arisings once the cutting has taken place. It will also be powerful enough to operate a power harrow that will be necessary to prepare the ground for sowing wildflower seed. The arisings from these operations will require a loader to remove to the council compost or store onsite in a suitable position. The loader is expected prove useful for the authority in many different situations. These applications are likely to help make operations more financially and environmentally sustainable. For example, the tractor will enable the Ground Maintenance service to turn green waste and create a good quality compost that can be used as fertiliser. This will reduce the cost of removing the green waste, reduce the cost to purchase fertiliser and reduce the amount of waste that the council produces.

The tractor and implements would be purchased through a government framework to ensure best value can be achieved, this will help to manage risks associated with costs. The purchase and delivery will take place during the winter of 2023/24 and a training course will be arranged for the same time to ensure all Council staff that use the equipment can do so safely. This will help to manage health and safety risks which are a serious consideration for projects involving the use of equipment such as this.

Completing the delivery and purchase of this equipment on time will ensure that the Council can begin to manage green spaces for biodiversity immediately. There is a risk that the equipment will not be delivered before the start of the bird nesting season (Spring 2024), in which case many of the improvement works that have been proposed will be delayed until the next opportunity for them to take place in the Autumn of 2024. The Council made a commitment to delivering the objectives in the North Devon Biosphere's Nature Recovery Plan in 2021 and the implementation of a biodiversity plan has been delayed whilst the Ground Maintenance team 'bedded in' having been taken in house in 2022. Urgent action is required to prevent degradation to nature and enhance biodiversity so further delays are undesirable.

3. IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

None

Financial Implications

£55,000 capital cost funded from the Environmental stewardship grant.



Once the Council has the tractor and associated equipment there will be revenue savings as contractors will not need to be procured for certain tasks.

A PID has been completed and scored by the Panel . The PID scored 83%.

Human Resources Implications

None other than that suitable training on the use of the tractor will need to be provided.

Sustainability/Biodiversity Implications

The benefits are set out in the body of the report

Equality/Diversity

None directly applicable to this report

Risk Management

A full risk assessment for the use of the equipment will be prepared and training given to qualified users.

Compliance with Policies and Strategies

As set out in the body of the report

Data Protection (GDPR) Implications

None

Climate Change

Benefits set out in the body of the report

Ward Member and Lead Member Views

Councillor Hicks

Date of Consultation – 13/10/23

I recommend the purchase of the tractor to this committee.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The benefits of this project can be measured in terms of areas under management. Initially we hope to bring 3ha of verges and meadows under management and increase this year on year as more suitable sites are identified across the district. Baseline studies at each site will also provide an understanding of the species present before the project begins and improvements in biodiversity can be measured year on year. It will be more difficult to measure the benefits to community. However, the links between health, and well-being, and nature are well documented and there will be significant benefits for people as well as wildlife.



The Council could employ contractors with this equipment to undertake the work. However, the cost of employing contractors to undertake this work is expected to exceed the cost of purchasing the equipment within the first few years. Having brought the Ground Maintenance service inhouse there is opportunity to achieve long term cost savings that will outweigh the initial capital costs to purchase equipment.

Purchasing the tractor and implements will be done using a framework to ensure that value for money can be achieved. As well as the initial investment maintenance will be required to keep the equipment safe and in good working order. The vehicle fitters at Westcombe Depot will be able to undertake most of this work inhouse to reduce ongoing costs. Well maintained tractors and implements retain their value so when it is time to replace the equipment the Council can expect to recoup some of the initial expenditure by selling it on. The tractor will be stored with the other grounds maintenance equipment at the compound in Victoria Park.

The proposal is to purchase the tractor and implements using subsidies received through the Environmental Stewardship scheme on Northam Burrows. These subsidies have been allocated to help undertake aftercare following the capital works undertaken in 2015. Purchasing a tractor and implements to undertake this work will ensure that aftercare work can continue following the end of the scheme. The equipment can also be used to deliver the Council's objectives to improve biodiversity across its estate. It is expected that the full cost of the project will be covered by this grant funding and other resources will not be needed.

There would be no adverse revenue implications as this project would be grant funded.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members recommend to Full Council that the capital programme be increased by £55k and that the tractor be purchased for the reasons outline in the report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Consultations:	Officers Consulted	SMT, Estates Manager, Lead Ranger
Contact Officer:	Sean Kearney	
Background Papers:	Project Initiation Document (PID)	

