

Stronger Communities Committee

Date: Monday 16 September 2019

Title: Operational Report - Progress on improvements & repairs since last meeting

Contact Officer: Operations & Estates Officer - John Hickman

Background

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the progress of improvements and repairs since the last meeting.

Current situation

T583 St Marys church yard bat survey, the Operations and Estates Officer was in contact with Adam Harper of Elite Ecology who council had commissioned to carry out this survey on 4th July. The Operations and Estates Officer spoke to Adam Harper on that afternoon regarding where they could park etc. whilst carrying out the survey that evening.

Since that time the Operations and Estates Officer has had no response despite trying to contact them by phone, email and their website. Email bounce back as un-deliverable, it can only assume that Elite Ecology has now folded.

These works will now need to be re-commission with another company however bat surveys of this type can only be carried out between early May and late July. The Operations and Estates Officer will ask previous companies that quoted to re-quote and look for additional companies to quote - these quotes will be brought back to a future meeting.

In the meantime, the area below the crown of the tree will need to remain fenced off to prevent access in case of further branch failure.

Tree Planting

The Operations and Estates Officer will be planning this year's tree replanting/replacement in the near future along with the Mayors tree, any suggestions councillors may have where they would wish to see trees planted provided it is WTC land can be given to the Operations and Estates Officer for consideration.

Tree Survey

This year's tree survey is due to be carried out week commencing 9th September any year one works recommended by this report will be carried using the current arboriculture budget line.

Other Tree Works

There are remaining year two tree works to be undertaken this year and also several items of tree works that are required under the current tree policy following complaints from residents of properties affected by WTC trees. These will be added to the year one works and carried out as soon as possible following the receipt of the tree survey recommendations associated costs being taken from the current arboriculture budget line.

West Witney Bowls Trees

The STRI report for West Witney Bowls Green has made recommendation that:

“Further tree removal and thinning, plus the prescribed increased maintenance of the hedges which border the greens, will undoubtedly increase air movement and light penetration to improve overall turf health and promote longevity of the surfaces.”

The Operations and Estates Officer would wish to remove several trees in group G1427, possible crown reduction on T 1425 and also carry out some reduction works on a tree in the corner of the former Grounds Contract depot in order to increase air flow across the green and light to the green in shaded areas in order to promote overall turf health especially if council are intending to use STRI to carry out the STRI recommendation that

“It is now critical that a detailed schedule for maintenance and renovations is re-written and updated by the STRI, for each of the sports fields at West Witney and Leys, to ensure both the Council and Contractor have defined parameters within which to operate to improve the facilities. It is proposed that a Pesticide Policy be incorporated to form an essential part of this formal document to ensure the Council and Contractor work within the confines of current legislation to minimise the use of chemicals across the respective sites.”

This should help deal with the current issues regarding Witney Town Councils use of chemicals in that they would only be used in an emergency on the sporting facilities.

Spraying Chemicals General.

No advice has been received regarding the spraying of the Herbicide Glyphosate in order to control weeds since the complaints that it had severely affected the Bee population in the Town. Spraying was only carried out on the In Bloom judging route and also on the Witney Town Council Estate following. It has since been agreed by Cllr Bolger that WTC is limited to only spraying herbicides on its sports pitches wickets and greens in order to maintain them and control broadleaved weeds, moss etc. until this issue has been addressed.

Witney Town Council do not use pesticides we use herbicides to treat weeds around the councils estate however this has now been stopped apart from the Sports pitches. During the recent STRI visit the issues regarding the use of chemicals on WTC sports pitches/wickets/greens. STRI have recommended that a new specification is drawn up for WTC sports pitches/wickets/greens to include a Pesticide Policy.

However this will not cover other areas of the WTC Estate where such chemicals are required.

During a meeting on 29th August with Jennie Schilling Assistant Church Buildings Officer for the Oxford Diocese regarding St Mary's church boundary wall who was recommending WTC use a systemic weed killer in order to treat the remaining ivy/tree roots within the boundary wall after the main stems have been removed carefully in order not to damage the wall any further, prior to carrying out repairs to the wall. She also recommended the same systemic weed killer is used to treat the suckers and self-seeded plants growing in the tombstones and chests within St Mary's church yard.

During the summer council has been requested to deal with two wasp nests on its property, the only method WTC has to deal with wasp nests is to use insecticides these are extremely harmful to insects and mammals.

WTC were unable to deal with these wasp nests or look to outside contractors as they would deal with them in the same way by use of Insecticides.

The person who complained regarding one of the nests dealt with the issue themselves however the Operations and Estates Officer was informed afterwards that they used an Insecticide to deal with the Wasp nest.

Council need to form a clear policy as to what if any chemicals are allowed to be used on its property in dealing with pests where it control as far as possible any risk to other wildlife. Council has no control over the use of such chemicals if it bans the use by of them by the council itself but then allows members of the public to use them on its property instead.

A clear policy regarding pesticides/insecticides needs to be set in order that Officers can decide if the works should be carried out carry out or advise the correct actions under the policy.

Town Hall Replacement Bus Shelter.

The damaged Town Hall bus shelter has been removed by the works team in preparation for the installation of the replacement shelter week commencing 9th September 19.

Benches

The Works team have completed the installation of the second new bench agreed by council at Oxlease.

The Operations and Estates Officer has contacted Cottsway Housing regarding the bench agreed by council to be installed on Blake's Avenue close to the bus stop, other than a receipt for the request from the person dealing with it no further response has been received. The Operations and Estates Officer has requested updates on what is happening on 3 occasions since the original request but Cottsway Housing have still not responded.

Trinder memorial bench on the Leys agreed by council has now been installed by the works team and the invoice has been sent to the purchaser.

No more benches are currently held in stock until the Operations and Estates Officer orders further street furniture this financial year.

Floral Displays

The current summer bedding, planters and Baskets will be removed from week commencing 23rd September. The flower beds etc. will then be prepared in preparation for the spring bedding planting in early October.

The Schools in Bloom wheel barrows will be removed at the same time by the works team, the barrows will be emptied and prepared for re-use next year.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Financial implications

There will be financial implications relating to the various tree works as detailed above, these will be met from the Council's arboriculture budget.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider:

1. The tree works associated with West Witney Bowls Green.
2. The policy regarding the use of Pesticides throughout the WTC Estate.