

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday 20th January 2020

Title: Extinction Rebellion Tree

Contact Officer: Operations and Estates Officer – John Hickman

BACKGROUND

Councillor Bolger contacted the Operations & Estates Officer on Friday 29th November informing him that the Extinction Rebellion intended to plant a tree on Church Green as part of the protest march through the Town over that weekend. As a compromise she suggested that if the Extinction Rebellion were to carry out a symbolic planting on Church Green could WTC plant the tree within its estate at a later date. The tree was left in the Corn Exchange Foyer after the march so it could be taken into the Council's tree stock and planted accordingly as part of the annual tree planting scheme.

ACTION TAKEN

The Operations and Estates Officer agreed to plant the tree along with the annual replacement tree planting he was due to carry out and he was under the impression that this would just be planted as any of WTC other trees as per normal practice.

On Monday 2nd December Councillor Bolger emailed the Operations and Estates Officer to say the tree was in the Corn Exchange behind the reception desk. Also, in the email it now requested that he let Extinction Rebellion know when and where the tree would be planted so they could have a gathering. The Operations and Estates Officer replied to Councillor Bolger after collecting the tree and finding it was a pot grown Oak and would require careful consideration as to where it should be planted.

Councillor Bolger requested a further update on 19th December to which the Operations and Estates Officer informed her that Council needed to make some policy decisions. This was especially important now if the Extinction Rebellion wanted to be involved in the planting etc as council might be seen to be supporting the Extinction Rebellion group if the group were to be involved or attend the planting as a group. Officers felt uncomfortable taking this decision particularly as WTC has not at any stage this year pledged its support to any such group.

The Operations and Estates Officer plans to plant the tree on Burwell QE2 Field close to the main Road between the existing fence and footpath as per approx. location on Burwell Plan,

subject to the Council's agreement and policy decisions as set out in the recommendations below.

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. As mentioned above the Council has not pledged support to any such activist group and in accepting this tree Members should give consideration to the public perception of endorsement and any reputational risk this may have.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If Council accepts this tree into its tree stock there will be a cost of maintaining it – and possibly the replacement cost if it were to die.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Is the Council happy to accept the tree from XR and allow it to be planted on WTC land - endorsing XR's cause;
2. Is Council willing for XR to be involved in the planting of this tree – should a plaque be provided to acknowledge the donation and reasons for planting – if so at who's expense;
3. If council will replace the tree should the tree be lost for any reason;
4. Are Council happy to maintain and look after this tree in line with all its other tree stock.