

**BRIDGNORTH TOWN COUNCIL
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
1 JUNE 2021**

BI/2021

25th May 2021

REPORT TO TOWN COUNCILLORS

AGENDA ITEM 7 – OUTDOOR AND PROPERTIES MANAGER REPORT

AIM

1. To provide a general overview of estate management matters and consider budgetary recommendations to increase the grounds training budget and set aside funds for the future provision of a replacement tractor.

BACKGROUND

2. This report is a general overview of the ongoing outdoors and property maintenance issues.

DISCUSSION/ COMMENT

Some new, but mainly ongoing projects and tasks are listed below.

3. **Replacement Water Bowser.** We have now taken delivery of our new water bowser and preparing a bill of sale of £650 for the old one.
4. **Stoneway Steps.** Quotes are still being obtained by Shropshire Council to repair the retaining wall on the Stoneway Steps now that the vegetation has been cleared. Once those quotes are in it can be decided where the responsibility for payment might be. It is anticipated that the end of June might still be a likely date for the repairs to take place. **Ongoing.**
5. **Clock Tower.** The scaffold remains in place whilst work found during the site inspection is carried out. All works identified, includes the removal and complete refurbishment of the weathervane, repairs to the copper covered roof cupola, a replacement bell clapper cable, stripping and painting of all cupola timbers, repairs to glazing and general decoration of all furniture. These works should have been completed by 15th May, but due to inclement weather may not now be complete until the end of the month. This is likely to incur an additional cost for scaffold, to be determined at the end of the job.

6. **Damage to Lamppost on Cann Hall Drive.** A report from a member of public regarding the damaged lamppost was received through our office on Monday 17th May and is currently being investigated. Police and Town Council insurers have been informed.
7. **Fox Corner Public Toilets.** There have been several issues with the waste pipes over the last few months at Fox Corner. Recent clearance work and inspections of the sewer pipes suggests that the long-term solution is to reconfigure the internal drains. The toilet block is currently closed until a repair can be implemented. There are some cost implications in digging up the floor and reconfiguring the drains, most but not all of which are associated with man hours. The toilet block is likely to be closed for several weeks. **Ongoing with the maintenance team preparing to move onto this task on completion of the Clocktower repairs.**
8. **Public Toilets Tender.** A tender document for the cleaning and maintenance of the public toilets has been issued. The tender documentation has been published on the Town Council website and on the UK Government Contractor Finder website. Closing date for receipt of tenders is 25th May 2021. The consideration of tenders will take place in the confidential session of the Town Council meeting on 1st June 2021.
9. **Christmas Lighting Contract Tender.** The existing contract covers this year's festive lights but will need to be renewed for 2022 and beyond. We intend to invite tenders around about August this year to allow potential contractors to visit Bridgnorth and see the lights in place.
10. **Vehicle Leases.** We currently have 3 vehicles a Ford Ranger and 2 Ford Transit flatbeds on lease hire from Day's Rental at Shrewsbury which are due to expire either this year or early next. The Ranger in October this year and the Transits in May 2022. We will look to negotiate a favourable deal with the current contractor as well as elsewhere and report back Council in due course.
11. **Lodge Lane (the Grove) Woodland Trail and Play Equipment.** Work began on the project on 6th April. Regrettably, the contractor began the works before the agreed schedule date, and we found it necessary to reconfigure the layout following comments from neighbours who we met on site. We have, installed some items of play equipment already. The project is likely to be delivered in stages rather than as a one-off. **Ongoing and there is unlikely to be any movement before September for 2 reasons; contractor availability and the unpalatable need to close the park during school holidays.**
12. **Cemetery Extension.** Now that the new area of cemetery that was levelled almost 2-years ago and has had time to settle and the test digs were successful we will soon begin the hard landscaping of the area. We have also added a third row of hedging whips to those planted 2-years ago to separate the sloping ground from the main interment area.

13. **Cemetery Lodge Garden Fence.** The DLF has just finished erecting a 6ft garden fence at the rear of the Cemetery Lodge in line with the terms and conditions of the new tenancy agreement.
14. **Tree Theft and Damage.** Of the original 35 trees planted as part of the Grove Woodland Project 3 have been stolen and one damaged beyond repair. This has been reported to the police who are carrying out local enquiries and looking at ways to improve security in the area. **Police conducted house to house inquiries in the local area without any positive result and have now closed their file. However, since then there has been another tree stolen and a further 2 damaged as well as the odd hedgerow whip damaged.**
15. **Lodge Lane Gate.** The field access gate adjacent to the play area that was damaged beyond repair earlier in the year has now been replaced with a refurbished gate salvaged following the replacement of the Well Meadow access gate last year.
16. **Damage to Severn Park Access Barrier.** The main access security barrier into Severn Park was damaged beyond repair by a vehicle trying to exit the park after being locked in by a Council contracted security guard. This happened despite have a note being placed under the windscreen wiper by the guard explaining details of how to contact our out of hours duty person. The suspected vehicle was abandoned on the stone car park and was photographed the following morning by the security guard who opened the park. The details have been passed to the police and our insurance has been informed and both groups are actively investigating. A bespoke replacement barrier is currently being manufactured and is almost complete and as soon as we are able, we will resume the locking of the main entrance. In the meantime, we are only able to lock the grassed area below the stone car park.
17. **Town Hall Repairs.** The 2-man maintenance team have been carrying out lime plaster repairs to the underside of the covered market area during periods of inclement weather when they were unable to work on the Clocktower. They have also removed a few items of street furniture for repairs and refurbishment to their workshop during these same periods of bad weather.
18. **Grass Cutting.** This rather unseasonal mixture of heavy rain and sunshine has brought about exceptional growing conditions and caught us a little off guard while still playing catch-up after the period of reduced manning during the recent COVID restrictions. Some areas are still to be cut and it will be a few weeks before we are back to normal. Similarly, the weed spraying and strimming of all areas has also been affected.
19. **Dog Bins.** We are in the process of replacing 5 metal dog bins on Severn Park that have rusted beyond repair and have become too dangerous to use. Most bins on the park are well over 10-years-old and have been affected by flood water over the

years and so we are now trialling plastic replacements. There is little difference in cost, but it is hoped that plastic may last longer.

20. Weed Spraying. The first round of weed spraying of the town steps has been carried out and the remainder of the spraying program will follow as soon as we get some dry weather.

21. Hanging Baskets. The DLF have repainted and erected all the hanging basket poles in readiness for taking delivery of our floral displays from the 1st of June. This will keep the whole work force busy for the rest of the week with distribution and planting around the town. Immediately following this the early morning watering regime begins to avoid too much disruption to traffic. This will of course incur some additional overtime costs.

22. Covid-19 Precautions. The 10-day cycle of anti-viral spraying using a solution of Bacoban anti-viral spray continues on all play areas and hard surfaces in public spaces continues.

23. DLF Operational Qualifications and Certificates. For background information our previous ground maintenance training provider for many years went into retirement 2 years ago and now all the DLF's certificates expire this year. The previous providers governing body insisted on 3-year requalifying courses that worked out very expensive in the longer-term. This is also the case with several other grounds maintenance training providers. Research has identified that both LANTRA and City and Guilds offer courses in grounds maintenance that do not require refresher training every 3 years so long as the operator remains current and proficient on the machine they operate. This of course would need to be carefully managed by the DLF supervisor. As you might expect these long-term courses are more expensive but can offer considerable savings in the longer term. Harper Adams College offer all the courses that we require and would keep all our training requirements under one roof. The table of costs and the notes below show the number of courses required and the total cost would be £4,870.

Course Required	No of Candidates	Cost of Course	Dates	Renewal Date
Tractor Loader & Mowers	3	£1,100	6 and 7 July	N/A?
Ride on Mower & Pedestrian	6	£1,500	18 and 21 June	N/A?
Strimmer, Blower & Hedge Cutter	7	£1,900	16 and 17 June	N/A?
Pesticides PA 1-6	1	£370	5 July	N/A?

Amortisation:

The Council would seek to have some return on its investment of some of the more expensive courses such as; excavator operator, tractor operator and chainsaw and as such any member of the DLF that leaves the employment of Bridgnorth Town Council within 2 years of the training course (unless on retirement or medical reasons) will be required to reimburse the Council a proportion of the training costs:

- 1- Within 6 months – 100%
- 2- From 6-12 months – 75%
- 3- From 12-24 months – 50%

All the above courses are either LANTRA or City and Guilds qualifications with a recognised governing body in grounds maintenance with potentially a lifetime qualification that only advises refresher courses where equipment is not frequently used and is not a compulsory requirement.

24. Highways Accreditation Training. Besides the training courses mentioned above, which is by no means covers the numerous and quite diverse range of qualifications required by many of our staff. We must also attend and pass the NHSS 12d T1 Highways Training Course run by Shropshire Council Highways through KIER. This is a 5-year qualification which coincidentally also expires this year. We have already approached the training provider at KIER but as their training year runs from July to June and they have not yet worked out course dates and costings, we are still awaiting confirmation. The total cost 5-years ago for 10 staff was £1,074 and so we ought to expect somewhere circa £1,500.

25. Replacement Tractor. We currently have two aging tractors, a 24-year-old Kubota which had a considerable amount of money spent on it two years ago and is now fast approaching the end of its commercial working life. It is no longer road worthy or particularly reliable and there is a reluctance among the operators to use it and is now limited to cemetery use only. The other tractor a 16-year-old Case JX60 is expected to last at least another 5 years. However, it does carry almost the burden of work and is used daily throughout the grass cutting season and pulls fully laden trailers throughout the winter tree working season and is also used to tow the woodchipper. Having said all that, age has caught up with the Case and it no longer has sufficient torque to pull timber up the embankments during work on the riverbanks and this work is mostly contracted out at considerable cost. The Case is also the preferred tractor for removing spoil and materials when preparing graves having a greater load capacity than the Kubota. It is in this area of work that a second tractor is required as interments are our top priority. So, when grave digging is required; grass cutting, and tree work are put on hold.

26. Council is therefore asked to consider the purchase of a replacement tractor for the Kubota. It would help reduce wear and tear on the Case and may even extend its useful life and would increase DLF productivity by not having to continually pull the Case from other duties.

27. The ideal tractors for all the ground's maintenance tasks would be either the Kubota ST37 or the New Holland Boomer 40. They are both compact and versatile tractors capable of dealing with the most demanding of tasks including the hauling of timber during the winter months. It is compatible with all our implements and more importantly would be compatible with modern implements that require a 3-spool valve configuration which the Case does not have. Future grounds maintenance projects such as the creation and the management of new meadow areas require specialist equipment for cut and collect, equipment that is incompatible with the Case. This means that we would have to hire a tractor as well as a specific piece of machinery.

28. Earlier in the year we invited a Kubota rep to the Cemetery to test drive the Kubota ST37. All our tractor drivers found it easy to operate and the controls were simple and straight forward to understand. It is more environmentally friendly as the modern engine has a better power to weight ratio than either of the current tractors making it more economical to run. **We have yet to arrange a test drive of the New Holland however, it comes highly recommended and is 3hp more powerful than the Kubota ST37.**

29. We have sought quotes by way of a price comparison and have so far only received one from Kubota at £25,500. Other dealerships are unlikely to differ greatly from that figure. We would also hope to get a return price from the old Kubota circa £3,000 to £5,000 in either part exchange or second-hand sale. A likely replacement will not be sourced until 2022, lead in times are many months.

SUMMARY.

30. There is much work being undertaken across the wide sphere of property and ground maintenance tasks.

31. The Council is asked to consider the use of Harper Adams College for all grounds maintenance training courses at a cost of £4,870 plus VAT and to agree that £1,500 be put aside to cover the NHSS 12d T1 Highways Training Course with KIER – A combined total of £6,380. The Council is also asked to consider the need for a replacement tractor by the year 2022 subject to further field trials and additional quotations.

FINANCIALS

32. The report identifies certification training and health and safety training costs of £6,380. The total available in the 2 budgets that cater for the costs (Cost Centre 250, nominal ledgers 4030 and 4080) totals only £5k. An increase in nominal ledger 4030 to £5k is needed to cover the essential training costs. It should be noted that a number of the courses will be for life and that future years' training costs should reduce (subject to turnover of staff).

33. The report identifies a large potential expenditure next year (tractor). In the previous financial year, the Council transferred to earmarked reserves £3k to begin building up funds for a replacement tractor.
34. It would be prudent again this year to allocate a further significant sum of around £10k to the earmarked reserve to contribute to the costs likely to be incurred in FY 2022/23. This would result in £13k being earmarked for an anticipated expenditure of circa £25k and a need for a further £12k to be budgeted for in FY 2022/23.
35. At the end of the previous financial year the general reserve was somewhat higher than the budget had anticipated, and it could reasonably absorb the additional expenditure and maintain estimated levels of the general reserve.

RECOMMENDATIONS

36. It is recommended that the Town Council RESOLVES:

- a. To increase the 2021/22 budget for Grounds Maintenance Training budget (cost centre 250, nominal ledger 4030) from £3k to £5k.

AND

- b. To transfer from the general reserve £10k to earmarked reserves to contribute to the future purchase of a replacement tractor.

Barry Ince
Outdoors & Properties Manager