



## Community Services Scrutiny Committee

### Briefing Paper

Report of: Kay Higman, Cultural Services  
Manager

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Open

## Countryside Service and implications of taking on additional land

### 1. Summary

1.1 This report is to brief Members of the Scrutiny Committee on the resource implications for the Countryside Service on taking on additional land, including through Section 106 agreements.

### 2. Background

2.1 The Council's countryside service is responsible for the management of the Districts Local Nature Reserves (LNR's), Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI's) and other conservation and countryside areas. In addition the service has an education remit, working closely with local schools and community organisations or groups.

2.2 The Countryside Service has over the last 5 years taken on additional land through Section 106 agreements with additional resources for maintaining the land from Developers but without any increase in staff to be able to manage this.

2.3 Examples of land which the Countryside service has already taken on additionally include Puxton Marsh, Hurcott Pool, and Blake Marsh.

2.4 The Council currently manages ten LNR's, and SSSI's, in order to maintain and protect wildlife the work of the Ranger Service aims to restore biodiversity of natural habitats and to protect our local wildlife for future generations.

2.5 The Countryside Service has 4 full time posts whose responsibilities include the management of these sites, and additionally 1 externally funded Grazing Animal Officer.

2.6 The Countryside Service also provides an environmental education service to all aspects of the community of the Wyre Forest District.

### **3. Key Issues**

- 3.1 The Countryside Service will very soon be taking on the management of Britannia Gardens and Timber Lane in Stourport, and Stour Vale in Kidderminster. There are commuted sums available for these new acquisitions but the same number of rangers are responsible for managing and maintaining them.
- 3.2 This has caused issues for the rangers in terms of spreading resources thinly.
- 3.3 In consultation with the Cabinet Member for Leisure Services it is proposed to utilise section 106 monies to appoint a Member of staff to the Countryside Service who will be responsible for the production of the management plan for these sites and co-ordinating and implementing the required maintenance and management regime.
- 3.4 Commuted sums payable under Section 106 agreements are specified to be spent in identified open space areas to ensure that they meet the tests set to determine whether a local authority can require a payment as part of the determination of a planning application. If monies remain unspent at the end of a period following receipt (usually 5 to 10 years) a developer can demand that the monies are repaid with interest.
- 3.5 To ensure that the Section 106 monies do not have to be repaid it is vital that sufficient manpower resources are allocated to the specified open spaces to utilise those monies. A consequence of this may be that other open spaces within the District receive less manpower resources if no developments in that area generate S106 contributions.

### **4. Options**

- 4.1 To note the potential options available for development in this area:
  - Option 1 would be to continue to manage with the limited resources available and in the knowledge that the quality of the management of these sites would not be to the highest standard and Section 106 monies may have to be repaid to Developers.
  - Option 2 would be for Members to endorse the proposal to utilise Section 106 monies, as in point 3.3, to ensure that sufficient manpower resources are available when new land is acquired.

### **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 Consultation with Financial Services and Legal and Democratic Services regarding Option 2 would need to take place.

**6. Relevant Council Policies/Strategies**

6.1 There are no relevant Council policies or strategies.

**7. Implications**

7.1 Any financial implications for WFDC with regard to option 2 would need to be looked into before any decision could be made.

**8. Wards affected**

8.1 All wards are potentially affected

**9 Appendices**

9.1 None

**10. Background Papers**

10.1 None

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