

New Expenditure Proposals for the Medium Term Financial Strategy



South
Cambridgeshire
District Council

1. Service : Conservation	2. Submitted by : Nick Grimshaw
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<p>3. Brief Description of the proposal: Extension of hours for the Assistant Trees & Landscape Officer from 20 hours per week to 37 hours, to re-establish it as a full-time position. This is necessary as the previous post holder worked 37 hours via a part-time 20 hours permanent contract, enhanced by an additional 17 hours annual contract. Employment law meant the new post-holder could not be offered such a contract, resulting in a loss of available hours for the team and a diminution of the service. The re-establishment of the post as full-time will enable the team to better address increasing demands and enhance the quality of the existing trees and landscape service.</p>

4. Costs (£000s)				
Detail	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/8
Increase in salary budget by equivalent of 17 hours of the Assistant Trees & Landscape Officers post, per annum.		11	11	12
Total Costs:		11	11	12

<p>5. Reason for bid:</p> <table style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 20px;"></td> <td style="padding-left: 10px;">Inescapable</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 20px; text-align: center;">✓</td> <td style="padding-left: 10px;">Related to one or more of the three priorities</td> </tr> </table>		Inescapable	✓	Related to one or more of the three priorities
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<p>6. Policy Justification:</p> <p>Council priorities : The proposal will help achieve two of the three Council priorities by <i>enhancing customer service</i> and contributing to the <i>development of the new settlement</i> by facilitating enhanced tree protection and landscape development.</p> <p>In particular the extension of hours will :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide the ability to re-commence the “Tree Preservation Order Review” (particularly as it affects the major development areas) which was temporarily shelved due to a reduction in staff hours, resulting in an inability to enhance the records and a diminution of the quality of the statutory tree protection service. • increase the capacity of the team to focus on increasing tree protection and landscape development work resulting from the new settlements. The team need to have some more capacity to assess the impact of the new development on existing tree groups, particularly at Northstowe. This task is increasingly urgent and will absorb substantial amounts of the more experienced officers’ time, which can only be accommodated by delegating some day-to-day work to the Assistant Trees & Landscape Officer. <p>Community Strategy : The re-establishment of the 37 hour post will help the team respond to the environmental</p>
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demands of the Community Strategy by assisting with the :

- development of partnership projects with Parishes, to create a minimum of 5 'Village Greenspace' schemes by March 2006 . Addressing Community Strategy Action 22 (Access to the Countryside). Each project, (working with parish councils) absorbs considerable amount of the more senior officers' time and therefore needs support from the Assistant Trees & Landscape to enable this work to progress.
- development of strategic landscape and tree planting schemes. Addressing Community Strategy Action 22 – (Biodiversity enhancement).

7. Benefit for service users/public:

The re-establishment of the full-time post will extend the team's capability to deal with the increasing demands of applicants for statutory tree protection and landscape enhancement services. The Council receives an average of 526 applications for works to protected trees per year. The number increases annually, not least because the numbers of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) also increases annually. There are currently some 900 landscape schemes monitored per annum; resulting in 1500 site inspections. The new settlements will inevitably result in a considerable increase in : the assessment of works to trees; the need to advance TPO designation and the monitoring of landscape implementation. Consequently, more staff resources are required simply to be able to deal with the increasing work load resulting from development proposals. The coverage is potentially all properties in the district.

Approval of the funding will also enable the team to continue to respond to enhancement schemes with partner bodies (minimum 4 Parish Council Tree planting schemes per year, as well as individual projects with the Farming Wildlife Advisory Group and Cambridge Preservation Society etc.) to implement environmental improvement schemes. The coverage is district-wide.

8. Impact on Performance Indicators:

Performance Indicator		Estimated performance in 2004/2005	Estimated improved performance in 2005/2006
#	Description		
SP901	Hectares of accessible wildlife spaces per 1000 population.	15.04	16.00
SP905	Metres of hedge & hedgerow trees created with local authority support	4,000	4,500

9. Implications if not approved:

If the expenditure is refused, the Council will be increasingly unable to adequately address its statutory duties towards the protection of the district's natural heritage, particularly its tree preservation responsibilities or secure landscape enhancement.

This is because the trees and landscape component of the Conservation Service is already considerably stretched due to the lack of available staff resources. The situation is likely to become serious within the new year, as necessary work on the new settlements begins to develop. It will become increasingly urgent to have accurate and up to date records of the district's statutorily protected tree stock, as well as an understanding of the existing value of its landscape features, in order to respond to the development challenges presented, and deliver a minimum standard of service.

The extension of the Assist. Trees & landscape Officers hours will be a modest increase in staff resources, which will not fully address the staff resource requirements (as they will simply be returned to that existing prior to the end of 2003/04). However, it will enable the team to increase its current capacity to deal with its ever increasing statutory responsibilities.