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## **Grass Removal Report**

### **Introduction**

The Country Park will be due for a meadow grass cut come the end of summer in accordance with the Country Park Management Plan. Cutting is essential for habitat management; it encourages new growth throughout the Country Park.

This report invites members to consider the best course of action to benefit the Country Park and community regarding the removal of meadow grass cutting.

### **Considerations**

The Council previously approved the decision of the working party to suspend baling of meadow grass for a period of one year (2022) to reflect the advice of the Fire Service Minutes A/22/52 and 22/156 refer.

Last year (2023) the grass was left cut in situ. If continuously left this will increase nutrients. By increasing nutrients grassland will become highly fertile, reducing the biodiversity within our Country Park. Longer term removing grass is financially beneficial as it reduces grass growth rate and may result in requiring less cutting.

The Council's ground maintenance and landscaping contract includes the cutting and baling of grassland but not the removal of bales. As such the Council has been quoted by its Contractors in excess of £1000 to remove bales to the boundary edge of the Country Park.

The Ranger has requested quotes for the removal of bales from local farmers and agricultural services. Some contractors have provided quotes for cutting, baling and removal. Opting for the full service with one contractor can result in a smoother prompt service from start to finish.

Using an external contractor would require the Council to claim a sum back from its Ground Maintenance and Landscaping Contractor.

An external contractor has carried out a site visit and offered to provide a quotation for the cutting, baling, removal and onward disposal of this season's grass. At the time of publication, the quotation had not been received but will be forwarded to Members upon receipt.

The Council's Ground Maintenance and Landscaping Contractor proposed designating an area in the Country Park for bale storage that can be rotated each season. The area would be scraped to store bales below ground level. Excess soil from the scrape can be made into a bund to surround the area and put on top of bales to help decompose. With the addition of a post and rail fence to define the area. This would be provided at an estimated cost of £6,000. The suggested area (see Appendix 1) has been selected and agreed for natural colonisation with the North Devon Biospheres Devon Woods Project and as such may need to be removed from the project if land is to be regularly disturbed.

Looking into potential storage sites for decomposition the Ranger identified unused land space in the Nature Reserve between the existing shrubs and hedgerow (See Appendix 2). This location is hidden out of sight. The Council's Contractor Site Manager has recommended this 'corridor space' would accommodate up to two cuts worth of bales. Currently, the adjacent hedgerows are cut on a 3-year cycle as per the Hedgebank Management Plan and would not impede access to the area. The Bales would provide additional habitat creation and promote the value of the Nature Reserve.

The cost of moving bales to the proposed storage location would be the same cost as moving bales to the boundary edge of the Country Park.

Please see Appendix 3 which provides an extract from the proposed site development plan to the south of the Nature Reserve hedgerow and forms the adjacent parcel. It will contain a basin and nature trail. Proposed access points do not lead from the development site to the suggested baling location and therefore the bales should not affect the development of the neighbouring site. The use of this area would provide a short-term solution for this current season and potentially a contingency for the next year. Further options with a longer-term solution are required.

### Options

- 1) Leave grass cut in situ for a further year.
- 2) To cut and store bales in a designated area of the Country Park to decompose naturally.
- 3) Instruct the Council's Ground Maintenance and Landscaping Contractor to cut and bale the meadow grass in preparation for the Town Council to hire a picker and haylage trailer to remove bales from site for onward disposal.
- 4) Instruct an external contractor to cut, bale and remove the grass, after which the Ranger would seek for the Council's contractor to recompense the value of cutting and baling.

### Recommendation

- 1) To accept a quotation from the external contractor to cut, bale and remove from site or
- 2) To instruct the Council's Ground Maintenance and Landscaping Contractor to cut and bale this season's meadow grass and move the bales to the area designated as the Nature Reserve to store and decompose naturally.

### Appendix

- 1) Council's Ground Maintenance Contractor's Proposed Baling Storage Site



- 2) Proposed Baling Site in Nature Reserve.



- 3) Extract from Neighbouring Development site which runs adjacent to proposed Baling Storage site in appendix 2 above.

