
ALL-TERRAIN MOBILITY VEHICLE

Councillors will recall that a working group established to progress the provision of an all-terrain mobility scooter for hire in the town presented a detailed update to the Amenities Committee on 11 March 2024 upon which the Committee recommended to Council that the project be progressed to fruition (reg. minute A/24/23).

Subsequently, Council resolved to support the recommendation of the Amenities Committee for the delivery of an all-terrain disability scooter in Cranbrook and supported the purchase of a new vehicle (either a TGA Breeze S4 or Adventurer X8), suitable secure storage including an electrical connection to an integral charging point and other capital items which had been listed in the budget in the report at minute A/24/23 (ref. minute 24/38).

The working group progressed the project and at the time of reporting the Council is awaiting delivery and erection of the secure storage after which the necessary electrical work for charging will be completed. The all-terrain vehicle (TGA Breeze S4) has been ordered and is being held for delivery once the secure storage is in place. It is anticipated that the scheme will commence during August 2024 with a formal launch to follow planned to involve those organisations who have provided financial support.

Councillors will recall that the scheme budget placed no burden on precept and is fully funded from contributions by the three supporting bodies; Live West, Sport England LDP and the two County Councillors from their locality budget.

One of the capital items listed by the working group was a trailer which would be available for recovery of the all-terrain vehicle if necessary. The working group noted that a trailer owned by the Council would be a very useful addition to the facilities at the disposal of the Ranger and would have wide ranging use.

The provision of a trailer would necessitate the fitting of a tow bar to the Council's van. Because the van is leased the consent of the hire company would normally be required.

The decision to progress the fitting of a tow bar, particularly the timing, would depend to some extent on the Council's attitude to the retention or replacement of the van when the lease period ends in mid-summer 2025. The Council could decide to purchase the vehicle given its low use and mileage to date. Alternatively, the Council could return the vehicle and lease a new vehicle with the option of selecting an alternative model including a larger vehicle if that was felt to be the right course.

The fitting of a tow bar on the existing van would incur a cost but the All-Terrain Working Party has provision for this within the budget of the project. Hence a tow bar could be fitted to the van now at no cost to precept. The Council may feel that a tow bar be fitted now only if the thinking is to purchase the existing vehicle. Certainly if purchase is in doubt fitting would be subject to the hire company consent.

If Council is minded to replace the van, any expenditure on a tow bar now would need to be replicated in 12 months and that could impact on precept as it is not budgeted for in the available budget for the all-terrain mobility vehicle. The alternative would be to wait.

The working group has the funds to purchase a trailer and would seek to progress that as funds provided from financial supporters would expect the funds to be used within the current financial year. The working group could purchase a trailer suitable for carrying the all-terrain vehicle now and store it in the interim until a vehicle with a tow bar is available.

The purpose of this report, therefore, is to seek a steer from Council as to how it might wish to progress the future of the Council leased van when the lease expires in mid-2025. Once the working group is aware of Council's thinking, it will progress the issue of a tow bar and / or a trailer within its current budget.

The recommendation of the working group is for Council to decide to purchase the existing van when the lease expires. It is low mileage, low usage. Whilst a larger vehicle might be considered useful, the size and scale of the existing vehicle is suited to use within the Country Park. Returning the existing vehicle and replacing it with a new leased vehicle would be much more expensive as costs have risen considerably over the past two years.

In order to inform this consideration by Council, details have been requested regarding the financial implications of this decision. These will be provided ahead of the meeting.

Recommendations

a) To agree in principle to purchase the current leased Council van when the current lease expires.

b) To support the recommendation by the all-terrain vehicle working group to purchase and install a tow bar on the existing Council van so that it may be available to tow a trailer for the recovery of the all-terrain vehicle should the need arise.