
COUNTRY PARK – BALING MEADOW GRASS

Introduction

The Country Park is due for its annual cut of meadow grass following the Country Park Management Plan. This action promotes local habitat management and encourages new growth in the meadows. In 2022, following incidents of arson, the Country Park Working Group were requested to re-form specifically to look at the issues and consequences of baling and to report its recommendations. The Council noted 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.

This report invites the Committee to consider the most appropriate arrangements for 2023.

Summary

Historically the Country Park has been cut in July/August. The cut hay has then been baled and left in the Country Park to increase the biodiversity. However, as years have passed bales have built up in locations of the park as they are slow to degrade. Cases of arson have occurred, ignited from the haybales creating a high risk, damaging the Country Park and disturbing residents.

Considerations

Leaving the haybales in the park will create an opportunity for natural habitats to thrive. However, the potential reoccurrence of arson holds a high risk to the Country Park and the existing habitats, the park users and residents of surrounding areas. The existing bales have provided natural habitat opportunities. When considering the potential risk of arson and the cost to the emergency services these previous bales can be deemed enough to sufficiently support biodiversity for the Country Park. Biodiversity and habitats can be supported and created by other means within this park to promote conservation.

In previous years haybales have been left in Park to prevent high tractor traffic damaging the grounds when removing, reducing the risk and costs to remediate. In contrast to these years, the Park has seen a drier spring/summer this year with lower rainfall. This has resulted in the ground being much harder and reduces the risk of tractor traffic when removing bails significantly.

Given recent events the risk of arson cannot be dismissed if new dry bales are left in the Country Park. Therefore, the Committee is invited to consider to either bale and remove from the Country Park or suspend baling for 2023 and review again in 2024. The cost of baling for 2023 is quoted as £1,200.00 plus VAT.

Please note that there is likely to be a small charge to remove the haybales from the Country Park, the information was not available at the time of publication of the Agenda but will be advised to members at the Committee Meeting.

Recommendation

1. To instruct the Council's Ground Maintenance and Landscaping Contractor to cut the Meadow Grass and bale at a cost of £1,200 plus VAT on the understanding that the bales can be removed from the Country Park or
2. Suspend the Baling for 2023, leaving the Meadow Grass uncut and review for 2024.