

COMMITTEE:	Cabinet
DATE:	9 January 2003
SUBJECT:	Options for Downland grounds maintenance on the Eastbourne Downland Estate.
REPORT OF:	Director of Tourism and Leisure
Ward(s):	Meads, Old Town and Ratton
Purpose:	To report to members on the options relating to the grounds maintenance contract on the Downland and recommend preferred option.
Contact:	Mike Smith, Downland, Trees and Woodland Manager – (Telephone 01323 415273)
Recommendations:	That Cabinet approve the in-house appointment of a new Downland Maintenance worker and authorise a change in grade band for a Downland Maintenance supervisor post.

1.0	<u>Background</u>	
1.1	All Grounds Maintenance works on the Downland are discussed and programmed, taking into account the management targets, indicated within the Eastbourne Downland Management Plan.	
1.2	The seasonal requirements are identified by the Downland Ranger in liaison with the Downland Maintenance worker, who then directs the day to day requirements for himself and the operative, taking into account ground conditions and weather.	

1.3	The annual summer programme covers flat and side arm mowing of the public recreational areas, roadside verges, grass car parks, rights of way, fire rides and other access routes. The frequency of this mowing is between 4 to 6 times per year depending on the seasonal conditions and growth of the grass. Any road signs, posts and restricted grass areas also have to be strimmed or mown by hand at the same frequency.	
1.4	Mowing of the species rich grassland, aftermath of grazing and topping of weeds is carried out once or twice per year and a hay crop is taken annually from the open downland areas, in rotation.	
1.5	In addition to the mowing, the erection and moving of temporary fencing for the Open Downland grazing scheme is also carried out regularly, both during summer and winter.	
1.6	At this time, the Council has extended the agreement with our existing grounds maintenance contractor, until 31 st March 2003.	
1.7	The agreement was to supply an operative with specified machinery and equipment, to carry out mowing and other related works on the Downland, for 35 weeks per year, as directed.	
1.8	To allow all year round cover it was agreed with the contractor that the operative would work 4 days per week, usually Tuesday to Friday, on the Downland, with the Councils own Downland Maintenance worker.	
1.9	Weekend work and any additional hours are not covered in the agreement and would require additional payments.	
1.10	The budget figure for the original agreement was £29,100 pa, but we have had to accept a figure of £34,277 for the extended period, to allow continued maintenance of the Downland Estate. The additional cost has been covered within our existing budgets, but has required a reduction in other works.	
1.11	Currently there are three possible options that would allow the Council to continue to maintain the Downland Estate in the proactive and sensitive manner that has now been established.	
2.0	<u>Options</u>	

2.1	Enter into written agreement with the existing contractor to continue the contract as currently exists.	
2.1.1	This might allow us to retain the existing tractor driver, but the annual cost of a new 5 year contract would increase substantially to allow the contractor to supply new machinery and equipment and would still only provide 4 day cover throughout the year, with no evening or weekend cover.	
2.1.2	An estimate received to carry out the same contract for a further 5 years from April 2003 was £36,300 pa, which is £7200 over the available budget for this function.	
2.1.3	There is also the occasional conflict between our contract requirements and the contractors other commitments, which can cause operational problems and delay works on occasions.	
2.2	Select specific elements of the grounds maintenance requirements and tender them out i.e. – Flat and side arm mowing of roadside verges and public rights of way on the Downland Estate.	
2.2.1	There are some mowing elements in the summer work routine that could be separated out and let as a separate contract.	
2.2.2	With this option it would be difficult to accurately identify and measure any areas to be included, as there are no physical boundaries on the Open Downland to indicate areas that would be within, or outside any contract.	
2.2.3	As an office exercise, the recreational grass areas and roadside verges were separated out and measured on our mapping system.	
2.2.4	The cost of mowing these areas 4 times per year, at current rates within existing grounds maintenance bills of quantities for mowing, would be in the region of £22,000.	
2.2.5	Additional supervision, liaison and clear specification details would be essential to ensure that any contractor was sensitive to the many designations and restrictions applicable to the area, as well as the need to leave parts of the contracted out areas unmown at certain times during the spring and summer.	

2.3.4	The benefits to the Council of a full time in house post, would not only allow full cover during the week on the downland, including holidays and sickness. In addition, it would allow for the inclusion of the post in the rota of weekend cover and also emergency call out currently covered by the Downland Ranger and Downland Maintenance worker.	
2.3.5	Winter works would also be fully covered from a Health and Safety aspect and the experience and knowledge of the existing maintenance worker can be passed on and directly benefit the Council.	
2.3.6	On the negative side, covering absences would fall to the Council. This is not an issue where contractors are engaged.	
2.3.7	Undertaking the extra responsibility of the day to day on site supervision and instruction of the new post holder and ensuring compliance to Health & Safety will mean that a job evaluation exercise should be carried out for existing staff. It is anticipated that any change in salary can be accommodated within existing budgets.	
3.0	<u>Consultations</u>	
3.1	The implications of this proposal have been discussed with Personnel, the Downland Ranger and the existing Downland Maintenance Worker. Unison have also been asked for their comments and the relevant sections within the Council have also been consulted in relation to any insurance and on cost implications.	
4.0	<u>Implications</u>	

4.1	<p>Human Resource:</p> <p>The appointment of an additional full time Maintenance Worker's post on the Downland will give the Downland, Trees and Woodland section the flexibility to prioritise and co-ordinate the greater variety of work programmes in line with the Downland Management Plan.</p>	
4.1.1	It will also greatly reduce the need for lone working and permanent additional overtime hours that have been necessary to manage workloads and weekend cover in this area to date.	
4.1.2	<p>There are potential risks involved in testing the market for direct recruitment of an additional worker. Research indicates that we would be likely to source a competent person within the anticipated spend.</p>	
4.1.3	Details of salaries proposed are shown in the confidential appendix.	
4.2	<p>Environmental:</p> <p>An additional maintenance worker will allow for easier long term planning and attention to detail in relation to the timing and quality of the Downland maintenance operations and environmental improvements. It will also give us the ability to control and redirect the Downland team as situations arise, to provide a service that is focused and sensitive to the environmental designations of the area.</p>	

4.3	<p>Financial:</p> <p>All expenditure relating to salary and on costs for the new post, changes in existing workers salary scale, machinery and fuel can all be accommodated within the existing Downland budgets.</p>	
4.4	<p><u>Youth/Anti-Poverty/Community Safety/Human Rights:</u></p> <p>None</p>	
5.0	<p><u>Conclusion</u></p>	
5.1	<p>The options open to the Council are limited, but with the current restricted budget availability and the weight now given to quality service provision to our stakeholders, the transfer of the post in house will allow increased control within the existing budget allocation.</p>	
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<p>Mike Smith : Downland, Trees & Woodland Manager.</p>		
<p>Background Papers:</p> <p>None.</p>		