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Parks and Countryside

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Dear Councillor Gabriel

South Leeds Green Infrastructure Corridor

Thank you for your letter of 13th June in which you refer to Parks & Countryside's South Leeds Green Infrastructure Project and the report that Glenn presented to Inner south Area Committee on 15th May.

Your letter indicates that Glenn's presentation and subsequent discussion highlighted a number of points that the Committee wish me to respond to. Before I respond to each in turn, I would like to summarise my understanding of the context which led to this.

I am aware that the aim of the report and Glenn's presentation was to inform you of the work that Parks & Countryside are undertaking to improve and enhance this important Green Infrastructure corridor, one of nine such corridors identified in The Council's Core Strategy Publication Draft (February 2012). The focus of their work is to improve the quality, biodiversity and connectivity of the land, within this corridor, that is under their direct control. This includes a variety of sites (woodland, wetland, grassland etc), plus Public Rights of Way and access desire lines, extending from the Leeds/Wakefield boundary at East Ardsley, through several wards in both the Outer South and Inner South Areas, towards the River Aire and the City Centre.

The Service are employing a 'landscape-scale' approach to improve local biodiversity, access and encouragement of improved health and wellbeing. I understand that Glenn explained that whilst focusing on the woodland and natural spaces that they controlled, the project offered opportunities to raise the profile of the important multiple benefits that well connected and well managed green spaces provide and to encourage all stakeholders to contribute, particularly through the development process.

Glenn conceded that parts of the Inner South Area were less well served with green spaces than others and presented many challenges, particularly in the hard landscape



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the built environment. This led to a discussion on the role of planting appropriate urban trees in the right locations and providing best conditions for their growth and development.

In response to the points that you raise, I would like to say that, first of all I agree whole heartedly that it is important to plant the right tree in the right location. In addition to ensuring that appropriate species are planted in the spaces available above ground, it is equally important that we continue to develop our understanding of how we can best maximise space for root development below ground. This will lead to improved tree survival after planting and allow our trees to reach their full potential, providing our urban areas with increased environmental benefits.

You will be aware that Parks & Countryside have responsibility for the management and maintenance of the majority of Council owned trees. However, the planning function – management of Tree Preservation Orders etc, plus responsibility for approving/rejecting tree schemes as part of development proposals - rests with our colleagues in City Development. Much of the latter is undertaken by City Development's Landscape Team, who employ Tree Officers, Landscape Architects and a Nature Conservation Officer to focus on this task. P&C's Natural Environment team have strong links with the Landscape Team and liaise with them closely. However, whilst there is an overlap of interest and consultation takes place in both directions, the day to day work of the two teams is essentially different. Therefore, there is no requirement for Glenn's team to input into every planning decision.

Understanding of the benefits that trees, particularly big, mature trees, bring to our built environment is increasing all the time. I would agree that opportunities need to be identified to significantly increase tree canopy cover in the areas that you identify. Indeed, the Draft Core Strategy articulates this well in Policies G1 and G2.

You requested more information on woodland management and how firewood production is making a contribution. All woodland under the control of Parks & Countryside (some 1300 hectares) is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council through the United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Standard as being fully sustainable. All of our woodlands are maintained as public amenities and the focus is upon improving biodiversity and opportunities for public recreation. The management of this type of woodland can be extremely expensive and has traditionally been undertaken using a combination of revenue funding and grant aid.

We are creating long-term management plans for each of our woodlands. This process includes specifying work that maximises the benefits that we derive from woodlands. Such work often includes felling a sustainable number of trees in order to provide sufficient space for the remaining trees to develop strongly. Recently, quotations had been invited from a number of local forest management businesses for standing timber that had been marked for felling. Using the rationale that the removal of marked trees is undertaken precisely in line with our management specification and in the requirements of the United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Standard, the highest quote was accepted. This work was successfully completed in February this year and other 'standing sales' are being planned. Whilst the income received is actually quite modest, it means that we do not need to use our revenue funding for this type of work and it can be used to fund other forms of woodland management, such as woodland creation. In essence, these standing sales mean that we

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are receiving modest payments to improve the condition of our own woodlands, thus adding a new 'more for less' dimension to the work that we can achieve.

Your final point refers to career opportunities for young people in horticulture. Parks & Countryside are implementing a new apprenticeship scheme this year. This initial phase will provide a 2 year apprenticeship for 13 young people – 11 horticultural apprenticeships, 1 Business Support/Visitor Services Apprentice and 1 Bereavement services admin apprentice

In addition to this, I believe that our ambition to increase the scale of management undertaken within our woodlands through the standing sales process, will not only improve the quality of our woodlands, but will also provide work for local contractors and raise the profile of this industry and its associated employment opportunities.

I trust that you will find my response comprehensive. However, should you wish to know more, please don't hesitate to contact Sean Flesher (Chief Parks & Countryside) or Glenn direct.

Yours sincerely,

Sean Flesher
Chief Officer
Parks and Countryside