

Report of Director of Environment and Housing**Report to Executive Board****Date: 8th February 2017****Subject: Memorial Woodland**

Are specific electoral wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, name(s) of ward(s): Bramley and Stanningley	
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, access to information procedure rule number:	
Appendix number:	

Summary of main issues

1. 'Life for a Life' Memorial Forests is a registered charity that offers bereaved members of the public an opportunity to commemorate the loss of a loved one primarily by planting trees at designated sites (often with commemorative plaques) throughout the United Kingdom. Many people also choose to inter ashes at the base of the tree which can be arranged as part of the scheme.
2. The provision of trees and other forms of memorialisation are subject to a minimum donation to the charity who in turn distributes funds to health related organisations.
3. New sites develop through three phases. The first phase covers the first 20 years characterised by memorial trees with plaque posts. After this time the plaque posts are removed and this second phase moves the site towards a memorial woodland. The final phase after 30 years is to transfer the site back to the landowner as a mature amenity woodland.
4. A suitable site owned by the council (just over 2 hectares) has been identified in Leeds which is currently unmanaged grassland adjacent to Leeds Bradford Road with views across to Kirkstall Abbey which the council has no plans or resources to develop. A lease agreement is proposed at 30 years after which management of the site will revert back to the council.
5. The charity will undertake and meet all costs associated with site development works in line with an agreed management plan. They will also carry out all aspects of management including boundary treatment, access arrangements, tree planting (and replacement if necessary), horticultural maintenance and client liaison. Beyond the

service provided by the charity, the approach recommended offers the opportunity to improve the Council's asset in the long term.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that Executive Board support entering into an agreement with 'Life for a Life' Memorial Forests with a view to establishing a 30 year lease on the land identified in paragraph 3.1 for the purpose described in this report.
2. Note that the Chief Officer Parks and Countryside is responsible for implementing this agreement which is anticipated to be in place during 2017.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report outlines a potential partnership agreement with a registered charity ('Life for a Life' Memorial Forests) to create a memorial woodland at a site just over 2 hectares adjacent to the Leeds Liverpool canal near Kirkstall Abbey.

2. Background information

- 2.1 The charity offers bereaved members of the public an opportunity to commemorate the loss of a loved one primarily by planting trees at around 40 designated sites across the United Kingdom. There are no sites currently identified in the Leeds area. It achieves this by working with landowners who in turn provide areas of land for this purpose at no charge, or a nominal fee. These sites are typically of little value other than woodland planting and if unmanaged can look unsightly or attract unauthorised use and therefore creating a woodland in this way provides a positive land management solution.
- 2.2 This land is then transformed into a publicly accessible woodland site, and can include memorial benches and picnic tables as appropriate. There is a further option of including a commemorative plaque to accompany each tree along with related books of remembrance. Many people also choose to inter ashes at the base of the tree which can be arranged as part of the scheme. The provision of trees and other forms of memorialisation are subject to a minimum donation to the charity. For example a woodland bench seat or picnic table requires a donation of not less than £595, plaques not less than £75, a memorial tree £595 and interring ashes £75. The charity in turn distributes around 80% of income to health related organisations with the remaining 20% used to manage the scheme and maintain sites.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 The charity is keen to continue to identify sites across the country where this approach can be adopted and have approached the council to identify potential areas of land. A suitable site owned by the council has been identified on Leeds Bradford Road in the Bramley and Stanningley ward, with views across to Kirkstall Abbey as illustrated below:



- 3.2 The area indicated is 2.179 hectares and is currently unmanaged grassland with limited public access. The council has no plans or resources to develop the site.

Either side of the proposed site are areas that have already had significant tree planting as well as some natural regeneration. An important feature clearly visible from the site is Kirkstall Abbey.

- 3.3 It is intended that the woodland will develop through three different phases. The first phase which covers the first 20 years will be characterised by memorial trees with plaque posts. After this time the plaque posts will be removed and this second phase will move the site towards a memorial woodland. This transition phase aims to reduce the attachment towards individual trees which will allow a progression to the third phase of forest management using best industry practices after a 30 year period. The final goal of this project is to create a forest which will thrive, allowing the development of a substantial tree canopy as well as creating a usable space for the general public. The period of the lease agreement is therefore proposed at 30 years after which management of the site will revert back to the council.
- 3.4 Currently the site is accessed by a 12 foot field gate off the Leeds Bradford Road and this will remain the main pedestrian and vehicular access for the site. The area designated for the memorial forest is not intended to develop any manufactured lines of access, rather to develop mown woodland walks as shown in the site design at Appendix 1. Disabled access plots will be available close to the car park area and the wheelchair friendly path will link the start of the footpath to the car park and the main entrance.
- 3.5 The charity will undertake and meet all costs associated with site development works in line with a management plan in agreement with the landowner. They will carry out all aspects of management on each site including boundary treatment, access arrangements, tree planting (and replacement if necessary), horticultural maintenance and client liaison.
- 3.6 It is important to note that plaques attached to posts installed with each tree remain in place for the first 20 years and thereafter begins a transition process whereby plaques are removed in order to transform the site into mature woodland without memorial evidence.
- 3.7 The vision for the planting area as shown in Appendix 1 shows that phase one will develop through 4 separate 'coups'. These coups will be planted one at time which will marginally diversify the age structure of the developing forest. Allowing mown natural woodland walks to be created through the developing forest will promote and enable access to the site. As part of enhancing site usability, signage and interpretation will be installed, with some signs giving details about the charity's aims and objectives plus the future of site development and another with points of interest and historical information about the area.

3. Corporate considerations

3.1 Consultation and engagement

- 3.1.1 Local ward members have been consulted and are in support of this proposal. The site at present is unmanaged grassland with limited public access. Subject to approval by Executive Board, an agreement with the charity will transform this area of land into a public amenity with opportunity for various forms of memorialisation. The charity will undertake public promotion and engagement as part of the development of the site and implementation of the management plan.

3.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 3.2.1 An equality and diversity, cohesion and integration screening is attached as an appendix to this report. There are no identified impacts on differing equality characteristics. The site is currently unmanaged grassland not promoted for public access and therefore this would provide an additional amenity to the public. The provision of trees and other forms of memorialisation are subject to a minimum donation to the charity. They in turn distribute around 80% of income to health related organisations with the remaining 20% used to manage the scheme and maintain sites.

3.3 Council policies and best council plan

- 3.3.1 The proposals in this report will support the Vision for Leeds 2011 to 2030: Best city... to live. Leeds will be a great place to live with good housing, and clean, green spaces, where everyone can enjoy a good quality of life. The charitable donations as a result of entering into this agreement will also support the Best city ... for health and wellbeing.
- 3.3.2 It supports the Best Council Plan outcomes to enjoy greater access to green spaces as well as Best Council Plan priorities by improving air quality and by enhancing the quality of our public realm and green spaces.

3.4 Resources and value for money

- 3.4.1 Land will be provided on a lease basis on a peppercorn rent. The charity will undertake and meet all costs associated with site development works in line with an agreed management plan. They will carry out all aspects of management on each site including boundary treatment, access arrangements, tree planting (and replacement if necessary), horticultural maintenance and client liaison.

3.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

- 3.5.1 The period of the lease agreement with the charity is proposed at 30 years after which management of the site will revert back to the council. The charity will undertake and meet all costs associated with site development works in line with an agreed management plan. They will also be responsible for their legal costs and will ensure appropriate public liability insurance is in place. A legal agreement is being drawn up with full heads of terms and other relevant matters in association with legal services.
- 3.5.2 There are no identified issues with access to information. The decision is subject to call in.

3.6 Risk management

- 3.6.1 The land is currently unmanaged grassland with limited amenity value and is not promoted as an accessible site for members of the public. Entering into an agreement with the charity therefore presents an opportunity to bring this land into use and as they will undertake all development and management works on the site (in line with an agreed management plan) the risks to the council are minimal.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 There are mutual benefits to be gained by the council and the charity in entering into an agreement to utilise the land identified for a memorial woodland. Leeds residents will gain the option of choosing a memorial woodland as a form of remembrance, and in due course the city will gain an established woodland accessible to all those who wish to visit. There is the potential for local health related organisations to benefit from funds redistributed as part of the scheme.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 It is recommended that Executive Board support entering into an agreement with 'Life for a Life' Memorial Forests with a view to establishing a 30 year lease on the land identified in paragraph 3.1 for the purpose described in this report.
- 5.2 Note that the Chief Officer Parks and Countryside is responsible for implementing this agreement which is anticipated to be in place during 2017.

6. Background documents¹

- 6.1 None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.

Appendix 1: Proposed Site Design

