
Management of Venlaw Community Woodland, Peebles

Report by Service Director Commercial Services

PEEBLES COMMON GOOD SUB-COMMITTEE

2 December 2015

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates the Peebles Common Good Sub-Committee on the management agreement with Borders Forest Trust for the Venlaw Community Woodland and recommends that the management agreement is terminated due to the demise of the Venlaw Community Woodland Group.**
- 1.2 Since 2005 Borders Forest Trust has had a management agreement for Venlaw Community Woodland. The management of the woodland has been carried out by the Venlaw Community Woodland Management Group.
- 1.3 The Venlaw Community Woodland Management Group has lost members willing to be actively involved in the management and is no longer willing to carry out the woodland management.
- 1.4 Borders Forest Trust is not in a position to continue the management agreement and request it to be terminated.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 I recommend that the Peebles Common Good Sub Committee authorises the termination of the Venlaw Community Woodland Management Agreement with Borders Forest Trust effective from 15 February 2016.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2000 Mrs Grace Davidson gifted a woodland area of 7 acres at Venlaw to the Peebles Common Good Fund. The gift was on the condition that the area is kept as an amenity for the enjoyment of the inhabitants of Peebles and is never developed. (see attached plan with the woodland area shaded pink)
- 3.2 Borders Forest Trust (BFT) was approached by members of the Peebles community to help them develop a Community Woodland at Venlaw. In 2005 BFT entered into a 25 year Management Agreement which permits BFT to establish a Community Woodland in line with a management plan.
- 3.3 The Venlaw Community Woodland Group has managed the woodland with some technical assistance from BFT since 2005.
- 3.4 The Venlaw Community Woodland Group (VCWG) consist of approximately 25-30 members however only 5 volunteers are willing to be involved in the Management Committee and the VCWG is no longer quorate. All but one of the Management Committee are past retirement age and finding new younger members has proved difficult.
- 3.5 One of the routine tasks that the VCWG carried out was to arrange for an inspection report by a woodland consultant. This year's report recommended the felling of a mature beech tree in the middle of the Community Woodland because it was thought to be decaying and a potential danger. However, once felled the tree was considered to be in better condition. The VCWG therefore consider the routine inspections and reports to be excessive in the context of the whole wood, except along the boundary areas with other properties.
- 3.6 As well as offering technical assistance, Borders Forest Trust include the area under their insurance policy as a Community Woodland. VCWG has paid £100 each year to BFT for the insurance cover. If the BFT agreement is terminated, the Council's block policy would cover the public liability insurance without an increase in the recharge of insurance to the Common Good fund.
- 3.7 The general condition of the Community Woodland is currently good with no trees in a dangerous state or in a condition which may present a risk to the public.
- 3.8 The Management Agreement with BFT does not give a right of termination to BFT, however SBC/Peebles Common Good Fund has the right to terminate the agreement with six months written notice.
- 3.9 BFT and VCWG have sought other parties to take on the management of the woodland. Tweed Green had shown an interest in a small section of the woodland but they do not have an interest in managing the whole Community Woodland area.

- 3.10 The Community Woodland has some paths and benches for public use. These will continue to be available to the public and are not considered to require maintenance in the short term.

4 PROPOSAL

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Management Agreement with BFT is terminated on 15 February 2016 thus allowing the VCWG to officially disband. As the VCWG are not currently quorate there is no advantage in giving six months notice of termination to BFT.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

- (a) The VCWG as at 31 October 2015 have a cash surplus of £1,378. Much of this sum came from Peebles Community Council as the residue of the Jubilee Woodland Group. It is proposed that when the VCWG disband their cash surplus will be handed back to the Community Council (£1,142.60) and the balance to Peebles Common Good Fund.
- (b) If tree works are required in future years, the Peebles Common Good fund will be directly responsible for the procurement and cost of the required work. In the next two years no works are considered necessary however from 2017/18 a budget cost may have to be allocated for potential tree work.
- (c) Over the years the Common Good fund has awarded grants to the VCWG to manage the woodland and carry out various works.

5.2 Risks and Mitigations

If the management agreement is not terminated, Borders Forest Trust will need to find a group to manage the woodland.

5.3 Equalities

There are no adverse equality implications.

5.4 Acting Sustainably

There are no effects on the economic, social or environmental aspects contained in this report.

5.5 Carbon Management

There are no effects on carbon emissions as a result of the proposal in this report.

5.6 Rural Proofing

This report does not affect the Council's rural proofing policy.

5.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes to the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of the proposals in this report.

6 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Chief Financial Officer, Service Director Strategy and Policy, Service Director Regulatory Services, Chief Officer Audit and Risk, Chief Officer Human Resources and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

Approved by

Andrew Drummond-Hunt
Service Director Commercial Services

Signature

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Background Papers: None
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