

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

meeting date: 19 OCTOBER 2021
title: CASTLE GROUNDS WINTER WORK PLANS
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To provide an overview of the planned work in the Castle Grounds.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives - To help makes people's lives safer and healthier
- Corporate Priorities - To be a well-managed Council providing efficient services based on identified customer needs

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Each winter period when the frenetic activity of the summer season has abated, the winter work around the Borough is carried out, which enables much of the important clearing and reinstatement of areas of our estate to be carried out.

2.2 As many councillors will know, the grounds were laid out as a formal Victorian park, based around the focal point of the Castle Keep, although as decades have passed and ideas changed the style of planting and maintenance has been amended, supplemented by the addition of self-seeded vegetation. These changes have been either by design or through necessity due to budget reductions.

2.3 Today the Castle Grounds are a popular place for people to walk through and spend time. There are several scheduled events annually such as band concerts and the annual fireworks display, plus ad hoc ones such as a fun fair or circus. The latter events are weather dependent.

2.4 Although the days of large floral arrangements are in the past, due to budget constraints over the past twenty or more years (including the period of austerity since 2010), the essential nature of the grounds remains, and winter is the time when significant improvements can be made which will see it develop once the growing season returns in the Spring.

3 ISSUES

3.1 The issue of vandalism and anti-social behaviour remain a constant issue and over the past 2 winter periods, the opportunity has been taken to thin out or remove areas of the self-seeded shrubbery and trees, which are of poor quality and restrict sight lines throughout the grounds.

3.2 For example, in 2019 the banking above the labyrinth saw a lot of poor-quality bushes and shrubs removed, with a lot of positive comments on the improvements that has

made, despite initial criticism from some people. In 2020, a similar process was undertaken alongside the fence line on the banking above the Castle field. This opened views across the field and from the field towards the town. Several new trees were planted in this area, which will in time provide an avenue like that along the Eshton Terrace entrance. These were to compensate for the removal of that vegetation, but also the planned removal of more this winter.

3.3 During this winter period the following work will be carried out (a plan is attached):

- The area alongside the path below the bowling green on the field side will be cleared out leaving the primary trees and the variegated holly. The remainder of the shrubs will be removed and initially grass will replace them. The option of a wildflower meadow is being considered, together with flowering shrubs, to provide an area for pollinators to visit. Plus planting some additional specimen trees. Area A
- The banking below the wall to the left of the drive up to the museum will be cleared of the self-seeded trees and the dead ash tree. This will open the views from the Cenotaph across the town. Area B
- The rear planted area behind the Cenotaph which has been partially cleared of the poor shrubs and brambles will be completely cleared, allowing for flowering shrubs to be planted like the bed at the base of the wall in front of the Cenotaph. In addition, two benches will be installed along that retaining wall allowing visitors to sit and enjoy the views across the town towards Pendle Hill. Area C
- A small triangle of poor-quality self-seeded shrubs will be removed and replaced with a flowering shrub surrounded by grass on the path leading from the Woone Lane entrance. Area D
- The holly hedge running up from the Woone Lane entrance will be extended and replace the existing mixture of shrubbery which has self-seeded and grown. Area E.
- The sunken garden will be cut back significantly as it has become overgrown, allowing for new growth in the Spring. Area F.

3.4 In addition to this work, an external specialist will be carrying out a safety survey of the tree stock in the grounds which is something which is done periodically to mitigate against the risk of failure from some of the large trees which are located there.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – The budget for maintaining the Council Parks and open spaces must cover all aspects of their operation. The winter schedule allows us to tackle strategic work that cannot be done during the busier summer period.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – Any changes to the landscape which are taken are done in consultation with one or other of Historic England, our grounds maintenance staff or our countryside officers, or all combined.
- Political – None in the context of the report
- Reputation – The Castle grounds are rightly seen as an important historical and cultural asset of the area and many people have keen interest in them. The Council as owners have a responsibility to help ensure the site is maintained as well as possible, though mindful of the budget constraints that it must operate under.

- Equality & Diversity – The main entrances to the grounds are fully accessible, however the historical layout does make accessing certain areas, such as the Keep impossible without steps, unfortunately limiting where some people can reach.

5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

5.1 Note the report

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BACKGROUND PAPERS – None

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