
SUMMARY REPORT

DISPOSAL OF BEECH WOOD DEPOT

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Stephen Harker, Resources Portfolio

Responsible Director - Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek permission to demolish Beech Wood Depot (see **Appendix 1** – hatched area), which is now surplus to requirements.

Summary

2. Beech Wood Depot, which is located at Beech Road, off Barmpton Lane and is a 70 square metre building that has been used since 1981 as a Council Depot for Horticultural Services. Since the implementation of Street Scene, the Depot has now become surplus to requirements for service delivery. Following consultation with local Ward Members, Friends of Beech Wood, local residents, Adult Social Services and Estates Section, it is evident there is no sustainable future use for this building and therefore it is proposed to demolish.
3. Following demolition, the area will be turned back to its natural environment tying in with the ongoing improvements within Beech Wood.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that the Council Depot at Beech Wood, which is now surplus to requirements, is demolished.

Reasons

5. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
 - (a) There is a continuing programme of improvements underway within Beech Wood working closely with the local Friends Group. The Council Depot, which is surplus to requirements, does detract from these improvements.
 - (b) Its demolition would allow further enhancements to the natural environment.

**Cliff Brown
Director of Community Services**

Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Ian Thompson : Extension 4446
CLD

S17 Crime and Disorder	There is some low level anti social behaviour and nuisance caused around the Depot, which has been reported through the Friends and local Ward Members. By removing the Depot, this will remove the opportunity for young people to hang around causing low level nuisance. The building, which is currently unused, is also vulnerable to vandalism, criminal damage and potential arson.
Health and Well Being	By continuing to improve Beech Wood, this provides the opportunity for residents to enjoy this environment, which may impact upon their health and well being.
Sustainability	A significant amount of work has taken place in Beech Wood to improve access to wildlife and the sustainability of the wood itself. The demolition of the Depot is another phase in this project.
Diversity	Demolition of the Depot will not have any impact on any individual.
Wards Affected	Haughton North Ward
Groups Affected	Demolition of the Depot will have no impact on any particular group.
Budget and Policy Framework	The cost of the demolition of the Depot will be contained within existing revenue budgets and there is no change to the existing policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Continued enhancement of Beech Wood fits into the Perfectly Placed agenda through the Greener and Safer themes.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. For the past two to three years, Countryside and more recently Groundwork West Durham and Darlington have been working with Friends of Beech Wood to improve the area by improving access to wildlife, enhancing the natural environment, creating more play opportunities and bulb and tree planting programme. Last year as part of the enhancements, a new cycleway was installed through the wood and low level lighting will be put along the cycleway in the near future.
7. The Council currently has a Depot at the entrance to Beech Wood from Beech Road, which used to be used pre Street Scene by the Horticultural Services Section. This Depot is now surplus to requirements and is currently unused.
8. There is some low level anti social behaviour and general nuisance being caused in the area near the Depot, with young people hanging around, in particular banging footballs against the security screens. The building, as it is empty and not used, is open to vandalism, criminal damage and potentially arson. It does currently detract from the overall appearance and entrance to the woodland.
9. The building was built in 1981 and is approximately 70 square metres in size. Historically it was used by the Horticultural Services Section as a Depot for storing equipment and used as a welfare facility. Consultation has taken place with a number of groups, discussed later in this report, with regard to its potential use but has been unsuccessful, therefore it is proposed to demolish the building and return the area to the natural environment, remodelling the entrance to the wood.

Outcome of Consultation

10. Consultation has taken place with the local Friends Group, who initially were considering using the building for an education/information facility for local Friends and visitors to the wood, working closely with the local schools. Unfortunately this option proved not to be viable.
11. Adult Social Services had been looking for a Depot/Operational Base for one of the Learning Disability Teams to utilise and Beech Wood was considered as a potential option. On further investigation by staff in Adult Social Services, the building was unfortunately deemed not to be suitable.
12. In consultation with the Estates Section, consideration was given to the potential of the building for a residential conversion but the tree canopy overhangs to the extent that there would be no direct light and a first floor could not be added. Consideration was also given to the possibility of leasing the building as a workshop but it was felt that demand would be limited and that any income that this would generate would be unlikely to meet the cost of maintaining the building.
13. Local Ward Members are involved with the Friends Group and have been fully involved in the consultation that has taken place and are aware of the proposal to demolish the building.

Planning Comment

14. Whilst a change of use to residential would be acceptable in principle as the depot is situated within development limits, the building is of no architectural merit and it is considered unlikely that planning permission would be granted for residential use due to the extensive tree cover and the damage that would be done to the existing mature trees by the associated works that would be required to bring it up to an acceptable standard.