REPORT CONTROL SHEET

This control sheet **MUST** be completed so that Committee Services can check that you have followed the compulsory consultation procedure before the report gets on the agenda. **The boxes where relevant must be completed before the report can be accepted onto the agenda. Please do NOT complete the 'response received' box unless you have actually received a proper response from the person concerned. The boxes for HR and Unions need only be completed for reports with staffing implications.**

Meeting:	Executive Committee		
Date:	13th September 2011		
Title of report:	Increasing biodiversity through grassland management		
Contact:	Matt Berry (Parks & Open Spaces)		
Tel:	x3993		
Consultee	**Name**	**Date Sent**	**Response Received**
Councillors			
IBC			
SCC			
Chairman of Committee (not applicable for Executive Reports)			
Portfolio Holder	Bryony Rudkin	26/07/11	26/07/11
Director/CMT	Jonathan Owen	26/07/11	26/07/11
Legal Services	Claire Barrett	15/7/11	
Head of Service	Billy Brennan	15/7/11	15/7/11
Finance	Ian Blofield	15/7/11	27/07/11
Finance Portfolio Holder		26/07/11	26/07/11
Head of Environmental Services	Matthew Ling	26/07/11	02/08/11
External Consultees			
For reports with staffing implications			
HR Operations Manager			
Appropriate unions			
For reports with ICT implications			
Head of Corporate Services			
ICT			

Closed Agenda? * Please ensure that public interest test is performed and exempt paragraph completed	**NO**
Is this a key decision and on the Forward Plan?	**YES**

X

COMMITTEE: **Executive** **REF NO:**

DATE: **13th September 2011**

SUBJECT: **Grass Management Project**

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: **COUNCILLOR Bryony Rudkin**

DIRECTOR: **Jonathan Owen**

Short description of report content and the decision requested:

This report discusses the proposal to change the grass management of a number of Ipswich Borough Council owned areas of land from short mown amenity grass to long grass and / or tree planted areas which will increase biodiversity and deliver savings as required in the current Medium Term Financial Plan.

Executive committee is requested to consider the contents of the report and to agree the proposed programme of consultation and implement where agreed.

List of Appendices included in this report:

a) Appendix 1 – Masterplan

b) Appendix 2 – Grass Management Spreadsheet

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This report was prepared after consultation with:

Internal consultees

Jonathan Owen (Director)

Billy Brennan (Head of Culture & Leisure)

Eddie Peters (Operations Manager Parks & Open Spaces)

Councillor Bryony Rudkin (Portfolio Holder)

Denis Cooper (Team Leader - Drainage & Flooding)

Matthew Ling (Head of Environmental Services)

Major Projects

Early Warning Group

External consultees

N/A

The following policies form a context to this report:

(all relevant policies must also be referred to in the body of the report)

Transforming Ipswich

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

(papers relied on to write the report but which are not published and do not contain exempt information)

1.	**N/A**

OTHER HELPFUL PAPERS

(papers which the report author considers might be helpful – this might include published material)

1.	**Trees or Turf? Best value in managing urban green space (Woodland Trust, May 2011). http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/campaigning/our-views-and-policy/woods-for-people/Documents/trees-or-turf-report.pdf**
2.	**IBC Tree Management Policy http://www.ipswich.gov.uk/site/scripts/download_info.php?fileID=2204&categoryID=505**

1. Introduction

1.1 This report covers the issue of increasing biodiversity in Ipswich through strategic management of Ipswich Borough Council (IBC) land that is currently managed as short mown grass by the Parks and Open Spaces service. The Council is considering this issue because of its commitments to biodiversity and due to a corporate requirement to maximise efficiency in all of its services.

2. Background

2.1 The parks and open spaces improvement plan has a savings target of £1.1m over the three year period 2010/11 to 2012/13). The savings programme includes management restructure, review of parks patrol, improved procurement and housekeeping savings. The service is broadly on track to make these savings. One of the areas included in the savings programme is to introduce changes to grass maintenance which is the subject of this report and if implemented will deliver £19,500 savings per year. Figures produced in a report by the Woodland Trust in May 2011 compare favourably with the findings of our own feasibility study that was instigated in November 2010 - concluding that is costs less to maintain long grass, woodland and a mosaic of the two than short mown amenity grass.

2.2 The feasibility study was carried out between November 2010 and January 2011 to identify:

- Whether there was available and suitable land for the project to be a success.
- A strategic overview for linking sites to existing wildlife & green corridors designated in the Local Plan / Local Development Framework, or other high value areas for biodiversity.
- A number of management options for the sites to balance increased biodiversity with increased efficiency for the Parks & Open Spaces service.

2.3 The outcomes of the study were as follows:

- 42 parcels of land were identified from 27 individual locations (Appendix 1).
- 35Ha of land would be converted from short mown grass to a mosaic of long grass meadows, scrub and native woodland.
- Biodiversity across all 42 areas would increase by approximately 30-40%
- A significant proportion of the sites would strengthen existing wildlife and green corridors plus increase and complement existing wildlife areas.

- The project would provide opportunities to support the Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and associated priority habitats and species. For example, planting Elm trees for White-letter Hairstreak butterflies or creation of long grass for habitat and transport links between sites for reptiles & amphibians.

3. Relevant Policies

3.1 Transforming Ipswich underlying principle:

Clean and Green Ipswich

5. Protect and enhance biodiversity, by managing, developing and interpreting our valuable natural habitats and sensitive wildlife sites.

4. Options Considered / Under Consideration

4.1 In order to assess the full viability and public support for the project and the principle for future phases the option to be considered is to undertake a programme of public consultation. This would use a series of different measures– Letters to nearby households, site notices, Area Forum presentations, Park Friends Group presentations and a publicity campaign organised through the Communications & Design section of the Council. It is proposed that the consultation period would be during autumn and winter 2011 and subject to local support the project would be rolled out.

5. Consultations

5.1 Internal consultation has been carried out in the Parks & Open Spaces department, at Head of Service, Director and Portfolio Holder level.

6. Risk Management

Risk Description	Consequence of risk	Risk Controls	Probability of risk occurring taking account of controls (scale A-F) A – very likely F – almost impossible	Impact of risk, if it occurred taking account of actions (scale 1 – catastrophic; 4 – negligible)	Actions to mitigate risk
1. Public rejection of long grass areas	Negative publicity for IBC	Contingency plan for reversion of areas back to short grass.	C	3	Public consultation to include strong educational message

					about wildlife benefits of long grass.
2. Fires in long grass areas	Negative publicity for IBC and potential for damage to property or harm to people.	Fire breaks incorporated where practicable	D	3	Public consultation to include strong educational message about public and wildlife safety relating to fires.
3. Increase in litter and dog fouling in long grass areas	Negative publicity for IBC and increased health risks for the public.	A combination of Grounds Maintenance, park patrol and wildlife ranger staff would monitor and deal with such mess as it occurs on a regular basis. One off cases of excessive litter or dog mess would include extra support from other relevant IBC departments, e.g. Cleansing.	D	3	Litter bins and dog bins are already provided in parks & open spaces. Regular site visits would also be carried out by staff via an agreed and monitored inspection regime for areas within this report.

7. Environmental Impact Assessment

7.1 The following elements from the EIA checklist are relevant to the project:

7.2 **Community** – One aspect of potential adverse reactions to the proposed changes in grass management could be that access is reduced or removed to the public in affected areas. A key consideration throughout the design and any future implementation to mitigate for this is the inclusion of short mown paths and way markers to provide

reasonable access and offer new opportunities for the public to enjoy wildlife and health benefits of guided routes.

7.3 **Climate change & pollution -** The change in grass management included in the project equates to less maintenance using machinery being required. Therefore the project will have a positive environmental impact due to a reduction in fuel consumption and emission of greenhouse gases contributing to our CO_2 reduction targets.

7.4 **Pollution** – As part of the proposals a significant number of new trees will be planted across the town. Trees improve air quality by absorbing pollutant gasses such as nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) Sulphur dioxide (SO_2) and ozone (O_3). Trees capture particulate matter such as dust, traffic emissions, pollen and smoke on the leaf and bark surfaces by both electrostatic attraction and direct interception on the rough surfaces. Like all green plants, trees take in carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the atmosphere and water and minerals from the soil and through photosynthesis manufacture all the substances for growth. In the process they release oxygen (O_2) into the air, and remove carbon dioxide and incorporate the carbon into their structures (Woodland Trust, May 2011).

7.5 **Flooding** – The proposed new trees and grassland will provide some level of flood alleviation. As the proportion of surfaces on which rain falls and are impervious surfaces can exceed 70 per cent in urban centres and high density residential areas, a high proportion of any falling rainwater runs off directly into drainage systems and rivers, rapidly increasing their levels and the potential for flooding (Woodland Trust, May 2011). Trees and grassland therefore contribute to mitigating for this.

7.5 **Ecology –** An assessment of biodiversity has been made on the affected land, resulting in a low biodiversity value (attributed as 5 for all sites of short mown grass). The proposed change of grass management and tree planting will increase the biodiversity value of all sites, by 30-40% to provide a indicator value of between 8-9 (see appendix 2).

7.6 **Measurement and monitoring –** Arrangements are already in place by the Wildlife Ranger team to conduct habitat and species audits of all the Parks & Open Spaces in Ipswich. The sites within this project come under that and so changes in biodiversity will be measured and monitored. The results will be reported using a GIS master plan, showing habitat size and quality and presence of protected and notable species.

8. Equalities and Diversity Implications

8.1 An equality impact screening assessment has been carried out and no adverse impact was identified.

9. Financial Considerations

9.1 The financial table below shows the effect of the proposed changes to the grass management regime.

9.2 The effect of more areas of long grass would result in less time being taken in managing the areas. This saving in staff costs would enable a vacant post to be disestablished (J7703).

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
	£	£	£
Tree Planting costs	23,620	0	0
Total Expenditure	23,620	0	0
Disestablish Vacant Post J7703	19,500Cr	19,500Cr	19,500Cr
External grants	23,620Cr	0	0
Total saving	43,120Cr	19,500Cr	19,500Cr
Net Cost/Saving (-)	-19,500	-19,500	-19,500
Band D Equivalent	-0.47	-0.47	-0.47

9.3 The tree planting cost associated with the project is £23,620. The funding for this will be found from external grants, for which officer time will be made available to make the applications (in partnership with local community groups and charities). There are opportunities to acquire free tree packs from organisations such as the Woodland Trust. These have to be applied for by community groups. Further opportunities exist for corporate sponsorship. Tree planting schemes for sites will be staggered to enable adequate time for consultation and for acquisition of any finances needed.

10. Legal Considerations

10.1 There are no legal consideration to consider.

11. Performance Monitoring

11.1 The project sets a performance target for between 30-40% increase in biodiversity on affected areas of land. This will be monitored by annual wildlife audits, carried out by the Wildlife Rangers.

12. Conclusions

12.1 The proposals in the report provide a practicable method for fulfilling the identified outcomes from the feasibility study – 35Ha of new semi-natural habitat, annual savings of £19,500, increase in biodiversity and strengthened green corridors and infrastructure.

12.2 The public consultation will convey the benefits of changing grassland management for the reasons set out in this report, and allow stakeholders and the general public feeling to be assessed and subject to local support will be rolled out to appropriate sites.

13. Recommendations

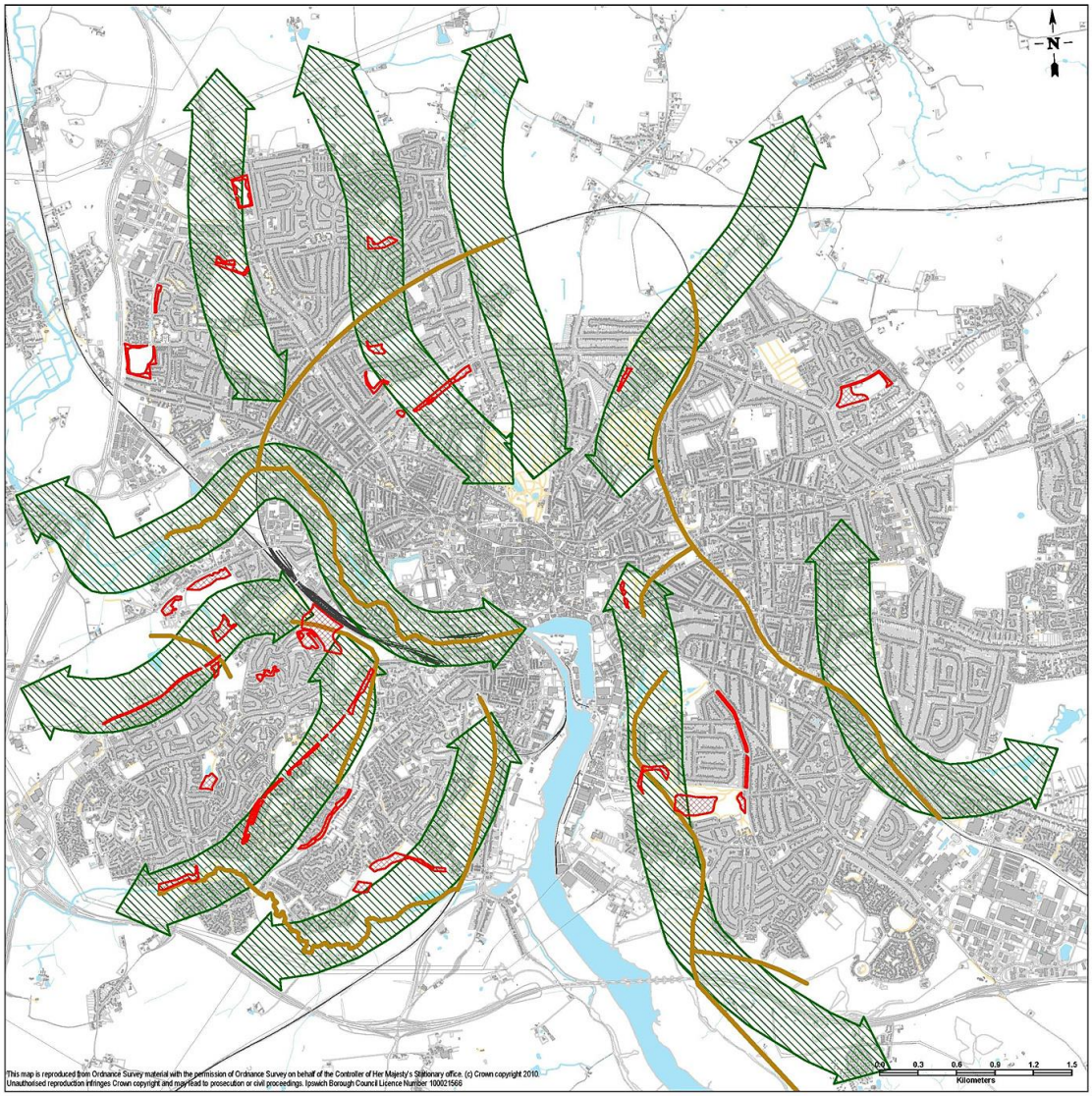
13.1 That Executive approves the principle of changing grassland management to increase biodiversity as set out in this paper and subject to the results of consultation, implements the changes for the areas proposed.

Reason: To help the Parks & Open Spaces department improve service efficiency and an increase in biodiversity and access to nature for the community of Ipswich.

13.2 That Executive approves the public consultation phase of the project.

Reason: To enable the project team to measure the level of public support for the proposed management of the identified sites.

Appendix 1 Master plan



Improving Biodiversity

Draft Master Plan

IPSWICH
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Legend

- Proposed sites
- Green Corridor (Adopted Local Plan)
- Wildlife Corridor (Adopted Local Plan)

Appendix 2 Grass management spreadsheet

"Appendix 2 Grass management spreads