
Report to:	Cabinet Member – Locality Services	Date of Issue:	12 April 2016
		Date of Decision:	20 April 2016
Subject:	Red Squirrel Conservation	Wards Affected:	All Wards
Report of:	Head Locality Services - Commissioned		
Is this a Key Decision?	No	Is it included in the Forward Plan?	No
Exempt/Confidential	No		

Purpose/Summary

Sefton Council is a partner in conserving the Red Squirrel in Sefton. The Red Squirrel initiative, under the lead of Lancashire Wildlife Trust, has been hugely successful in conserving these endangered animals, which are an iconic species in Sefton; attracting many visitors and much loved by Sefton's residents.

The Rural Payments Agency has recently changed its method of paying out grants for Grey Squirrel control.

Recommendation(s)

The Cabinet Member confirms Sefton Councils continued commitment to supporting the Lancashire Wildlife Trust in its work to conserve the Red Squirrel;

that a process be established to allow the annual grant for Grey Squirrel control to be claimed by the Council and forwarded to the Lancashire Wildlife Trust and;

as a part of this process, the Cabinet Member requests that the Lancashire Wildlife Trust provide Sefton Council with an annual report and work programme by April each year.

How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Objectives?

	<u>Corporate Objective</u>	<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community	√		
2	Jobs and Prosperity	√		
3	Environmental Sustainability	√		
4	Health and Well-Being	√		
5	Children and Young People	√		
6	Creating Safe Communities		√	
7	Creating Inclusive Communities	√		
8	Improving the Quality of Council	√		

	Services and Strengthening Local Democracy			
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Reasons for the Recommendation:

The Rural Payments Agency has recently changed its method of paying out grants for Grey Squirrel control. This may have an impact on Red Squirrel conservation in Sefton if the Council does not claim the grant and forward the grant to the Lancashire Wildlife Trust.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

There are no alternative options

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

There are no revenue costs associated with this report

(B) Capital Costs

There are no capital costs associated with this report

Implications:

The following implications of this proposal have been considered and where there are specific implications, these are set out below:

Financial	
The Council did not receive the grant directly and this has now changed	
Legal	
Human Resources	
Equality	
1. No Equality Implication	<input type="text" value="None"/>
2. Equality Implications identified and mitigated	<input type="text"/>
3. Equality Implication identified and risk remains	<input type="text"/>

Impact of the Proposals on Service Delivery:

There is no direct impact on service delivery

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

The Chief Finance Officer (FD 4124/16) has been consulted and has no comments to make.

The Head of Regulation and Compliance (LD 3407/16) has been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Committee/Council/meeting.

Contact Officer: Dave McAleavy, Coast and Countryside Service Manager

Tel: 0151 934 2967

Email: dave.mcaleavy@sefton.gov.uk

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

Introduction/Background

1. Red Squirrels are a National Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species, at risk in the UK, and as such they are protected by legislation. Sefton's coastal woodlands are one of the few locations in England where the Red Squirrel is surviving, but they are under constant threat from Grey Squirrel competition and the fatal Squirrel pox disease they carry.
2. Sefton Council has long been a partner in conserving the Red Squirrel and the Species Action Plan for this species set out a strategy in 2002, which has been built on ever since through the adoption of the national strategy of Red Squirrel Strongholds; along with partnership working within the Sefton Coast Partnership to support research and management of the species and their habitat through the Sefton Coast Woodlands Plan & Sefton Nature Conservation Strategy. The Partnership, under the lead of Lancashire Wildlife Trust, has been hugely successful in conserving these endangered animals, which are an iconic species in Sefton, attracting visitors and much loved by Sefton's residents.
3. The Forestry Commission has funding available through its England Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) to fund Grey Squirrel control and therefore contribute directly to Red Squirrel conservation. EWGS can only be applied for on land registered by the Rural Payments Agency.
4. The Sefton Coast Red Squirrel Stronghold, centred on Sefton's Coastal Woodlands, covers an area of 16,630ha. Of this 1,712ha is woodland cover. Within a wider 'buffer' zone, two private landowners currently have EWGS' running – Little Crosby Estate and Gatefield Clump - with two further schemes coming online in 2015 – Formby Hall Golf Course and Meols Hall. Due to the small nature of the woodlands within the Sefton Red Squirrel Stronghold the grants are around £2,000 per landholding.
5. Natural England and the Altcar Estate are not eligible to apply for EWGS, so Sefton Council and National Trust are the main landowners able to access this funding stream. Natural England and National Trust also contribute financially in other ways to the conservation of this species.
6. This funding is a stand-alone grant only available to control grey squirrels and cannot be used for any other purpose. Lancashire Wildlife Trust (LWT) had undertaken Grey control on behalf of Sefton Council and other landowners within the Sefton Coast Partnership and the wider stronghold through its own fundraising mechanisms for many years. A grant offer under EWGS was received from the Forestry Commission and accepted in 2014 by Sefton Council. This amounts to £59,840 over a 5 year period, see breakdown below:

Claim Year:	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
Grant (£)	16,755.10	10,771.20	10,771.20	10,771.20	10,771.20

7. This is based on Sefton's eligible woodland as recorded on the Rural Land Register (52.77ha). The contract is between Sefton Council and the Forestry Commission. The grant covers 60% of the costs of the work. To draw down the grant, Sefton would need to meet the other 40% of the costs which is currently met by LWT. Grey control in the Stronghold costs in excess of £60k annually.

8. The thrust of this report is to advise the Cabinet Member that the RPA has recently changed its payment arrangements with the grant now being paid directly to Sefton rather than LWT, in their capacity as Agent. Because of this the grant payment will need to be transferred from Sefton Council to the Lancashire Wildlife Trust. To not claim the grant or transfer the funding to the Lancashire Wildlife Trust will not impact on Sefton Council directly but will have a significant impact on the Wildlife Trust and Red Squirrel conservation in Sefton.
9. Grey Squirrel control is not just about trapping those animals coming into the Council's woodlands, it is about controlling them within the wider stronghold; this includes private land and residents' gardens. Sefton Council on its own is unable to undertake this wider work and benefits greatly from the network of volunteers and from the services of the experienced Red Squirrel Officers supported by LWT and its partners and partially funded by this grant.
10. The Cabinet Member is asked to confirm Sefton Councils continued commitment and the partnership approach to support the Lancashire Wildlife Trust in its work to conserve the Red Squirrel in Sefton and, that a mechanism to forward the annual grant for Grey Squirrel control to the Lancashire Wildlife Trust for this purpose, be established. As part of this process the Cabinet Member requests that the Lancashire Wildlife Trust provide Sefton Council with an annual report and work programme.