

Agenda item 3

For information - An update on Millennium Green

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Summary

This report has been prompted by the recent storm damage to the ancient Sycamore tree on the Green; and a focused discussion about the role and future of the Millennium Green Trust (MGT).



Background

As previously reported at the Council Matters meetings on 7 June 2017 and 6 September 2017, FTC was working with the MGT to submit a formal request to Mendip District Council (the owner and the landlord to the MGT) asking that the freehold (or long lease) of the Green be transferred to the Town Council.

However, the damage to this tree overnight on 17 January has focused discussions about the role of the MGT and its future. With limited resources, no funds and reduced numbers of Trustees and regular volunteers, the trustees have decided to dissolve the Trust.

Accordingly, the MGT is in discussions with the Charity Commission, Natural England and Mendip District Council to find out what

steps need to be taken to formally dissolve the MGT and what happens if this happens (as now looks very likely).

Working on the basis that the MGT will be dissolved in the near future, MDC Cllr Des Harris has agreed to propose to MDC that it agrees to either transfer the freehold to FTC or revises the 999-year tenancy agreement such that FTC becomes the tenant of the Green, with immediate effect or to provide firm assurances either way.

Assuming this happens, we would be in a position to deal with the fallen tree (and of course to manage the entire Green going forward).

Please note that although the prospect of FTC taking on responsibility for the Green has been variously discussed at previous meetings, any formal transfer from MDC will yet require

approval by FTC at a future Council meeting (as opposed to a Council Matters meeting).

The best course of action for the ancient sycamore tree

In conjunction with the MGT, we have already spoken with tree surgeons about the tree; and we have a detailed and expert report from a local arboriculturalist, Jonathan Astill. Based on this advice, we would instruct a tree surgeon to complete the following works:

1. Clear the fallen branch from the footpath; removing and chipping the brush but retaining as much of the fallen limb as possible
2. Reduce the crown to make it reasonably and sensibly safe given its position next to the main footpath across the Green
3. Leave as much as possible of the fallen branches in situ to provide important deadwood habitat and an excellent place for informal play

A compelling argument for completing tree works now is the possibility of retaining some of the tree. Although allowing the tree to break down and/or fall under its own time is more natural and perhaps more romantic, there is a possibility that the tree could uproot itself completely. By reducing the tree now (to a point of safety) we'll be able to retain as much of the trunk and branch system as possible, giving us a focal point for an interpretation board (budget permitting) telling everyone more about the tree, including charting its recent history.

Recommendations

1. Note the report
2. Recommend to Council that FTC acquires the freehold or a long term tenancy of the Millennium Green
3. Acknowledge the contribution of the Millennium Green Trust over the last 18 years