APPENDIX 5

HASLEMERE TOWN COUNCIL

SANG Grassland Management — Revised Cutting Regime and Cost

Background

The SANG is managed in accordance with the SANG Management & Delivery Plan prepared as part of the 2018 Section 106 agreement.

Section 7 of the SANG Management & Delivery Plan requires one quarter of the area of the existing sward to be cut each year in January or February to a minimum height of 150mm, with arisings removed and disposed of around the site.

When Commercial Grounds Care originally attended site to assess the works and quote, they raised concerns about both the timing and practical delivery of the cut. The site's ground conditions and topography make a January/February cut impractical, and in recent years weather conditions at that time of year are likely to have made the work unachievable. In addition, it was less practical and more costly to cut one quarter of the area per year.

It has subsequently been noted the purpose of the cutting regime is to retain long grassland habitat, including for reptiles and other wildlife, and for floristic diversity.

Reptile Presence

A query was raised as to whether the Council can know definitively whether reptiles are present before committing to the additional expenditure.

Stonewater has confirmed that reptile translocation took place. However, no subsequent monitoring was undertaken or required. A phased summer cut at 150 mm is consistent with reptile-sensitive best practice.

Proposed Change to Timing

The current January/February timing is impractical due to winter ground conditions, weather and the site's topography. The company who undertook the original management plan confirmed verbally this did not make sense. A mid/late summer cut is more practical and appropriate for maintaining biodiversity.

The cut would still be limited to one quarter of the sward each year and maintained at a minimum height of 150mm, preserving the principle of phased long-grass management.

Financial Implications

The current annual grounds maintenance cost is **£10,356**.

The revised cost from CGC is **£11,712**, an annual increase of **£1,356**. This additional cost relates to the equipment and labour required to move the arisings from the cut area while retaining them on site. There is no reduction in the quoted cost if the arisings remain on site.

The Council received an endowment of **£287,000** for ongoing SANG maintenance. On a straight-line basis, excluding inflation, interest and other variable costs such as biennial tree inspections and maintenance:

The increased cost reduces the projected life of the endowment by approximately three years.

Recommendation

That the Council approves the revised grassland cutting regime for the SANG, replacing the current January/February cut with a mid/late summer rotational cut of one quarter of the sward each year, to a minimum height of 150 mm, with arisings removed and retained on site.