

Subject: Rapporteur Review of the Removal of Vegetation from Railway Embankments

Report to: Environment Committee

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

Date: 23 June 2011

This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out a proposal to appoint a rapporteur to review guidelines for the removal of vegetation from railway embankments.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **That the Committee recommends to the Business Management and Administration Committee the appointment of Darren Johnson AM as a rapporteur to review guidelines for the removal of vegetation from railway embankments, with the term of reference as set out in paragraph 4.2.**

3. Background

- 3.1 Lineside vegetation acts as wildlife corridors, provides vital urban greening, and provides screening for residents living close to the lines. There are over 740 kilometres of surface railway lines in London. A significant proportion of which constitutes habitat of wildlife interest and important areas of urban biodiversity. A number of lineside tracts have been identified as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance in London including the stretch of line between New Cross Gate and Forest Hill in Lewisham, a site of Metropolitan Importance, Brackembury Cutting (Hillingdon), Sydenham Hill Station (Southwark), Stanmore embankment (Harrow), High Barnet embankment (Barnet), East Sutton railway land (Sutton) and various stretches in Islington (collectively identified as of Borough Importance). Some tracts of lineside have local authority protection as green corridors within their planning documents.
- 3.2 The linesides are subject to management by the various railway companies, most particularly Network Rail, Transport for London and London Underground, to ensure that they are operationally safe. There is extensive guidance as to how linesides are to be managed. However a recent briefing paper from the London Wildlife Trust¹ and letters to individual Assembly Members highlights that lineside management can sometimes be controversial due to the scale of the cutting back, the timing, a perceived lack of consultation and impacts of works on local residents.

¹ Railway lineside management, London Wildlife Trust, July 2010

4. Issues for Consideration

- 4.1 The rapporteur proposes to collect examples of where the management of lineside vegetation has caused resident upset and to review existing guidance provided by Network Rail, Transport for London, London Underground and the Train Operating Companies. To this end the rapporteur will collect examples from Assembly Members, write to relevant residents groups, and the boroughs.
- 4.2 The proposed term of reference for this review is:
- To review the processes by which railway embankments are managed.
- 4.3 Written guidance will be sought from relevant stakeholders and meetings will be held with Transport for London and Network Rail to discuss how the guidance is acted upon and how residents' concerns are responded to. A short report will be produced collating the information received with recommendations to the train operators as appropriate.
- 4.4 If the Committee agrees to this proposal then this paper will need to be agreed at the 20 July 2011 meeting of the Business Management and Administration Committee. Letters to stakeholders will go out following approval and meetings will take place in August. A draft report will be produced for Member consideration by October.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in the report.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

List of appendices to this report:

None

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
List of Background Papers: None
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