



Subject:	Tree Cutting at Orangefield Playing Fields Undertaken by NIE Networks
Date:	7th December 2023
Reporting Officer:	David Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager, Neighbourhood Services

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	<u>Tree cutting at Orangefield Park undertaken by NIE Networks</u> In May 2023 a contractor working on behalf of NIE networks commenced tree works at Orangefield Park in order to provide mandatory clearances from the overhead lines that run along the western boundary of the Park and through a woodland adjacent to Orby Drive. These works were ceased once council officers became aware that the work carried out differed significantly from those agreed with the Council.
1.2	This report provides members with information as to what occurred in May and next steps including a replanting scheme to be funded by NIE. It also updates on learnings from the incident and changes to working practices that will prevent a recurrence.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>

2.1	Members are asked to note this report and the next steps in section 3.8.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	The overhead powerlines are owned and managed by NIE Networks who are obliged to ensure the safety of its electrical networks where there is encroachment of trees. On 13th April 2023 permissions were sought from a contractor working on behalf of NIE Networks to gain access to Orangefield Park in order to undertake tree cutting to provide mandatory clearances from the overhead powerlines.
3.2	Tree cutting works started 18th May 2023 under a licence agreement provided by the council's Estates Team. On 19th May the Council's Woodland Officer spoke to the contractors undertaking the works and raised concerns regarding the extent of the pruning works and discussed this with the contractor on site. On the 22nd May following a further inspection by the Council's Woodland Officer, it was evident that the tree cutting works deviated significantly from those agreed with Council and as detailed in as part of the access agreement.
3.3	Council sought clarification from NIE Networks as to why the works exceeded the agreed Schedule of Works and after review and investigation received a detailed response from NIE Networks 2023-06b_0823_01 (appendix 2).
3.4	This response references the work carried out on the 18 <sup>th</sup> & 19 <sup>th</sup> May as technically competent but acknowledges that significant deviation took place from the agreed work instruction with the effectiveness of the communication between the working party and their NIE counterpart on the 19 <sup>th</sup> May being an issue. The letter details a number of amendments to NIE working procedures. These have been considered by officers who are content they provide sufficient rigour to prevent an incident like this from occurring again. Full details of the proposed amendments are included in Appendix 2.
3.5	<p>The letter from NIE also includes a proposal to restore this area of the site as an Urban Woodland. This project shall be funded and managed by NIE Networks, at no cost to BCC. The works shall be undertaken in partnership with Conservation Volunteers (tCV) and (with the proviso that BCC approve such) following the advice and guidance provided in tCV's document <i>Proposed Tree Planting Under Power Lines at Orangefield Park</i> (Appendix 3). Specifically, this project shall include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the planting on the site of replacement tree saplings of various native species</li> <li>• the agreed management of regrowth of cut trees (i.e. Black Alder)</li> <li>• under tCV direction, any necessary maintenance (weed control etc) until new planting becomes firmly established (i.e. a commitment to such over a minimum two growing seasons).</li> </ul>
3.6	The proposal has been considered by Officers from the Council's Woodland team and Biodiversity officer and they have no concerns with the proposal.
3.7	<p><b><u>Next Steps</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NIE to return to the site to complete the necessary works to ensure mandatory clearance requirements under overhead powerlines.</li> <li>• Works to restore the site to commence following the completion of the above.</li> <li>• The access agreement to complete the outstanding tree cutting and restoration works will be issued under Delegated Authority by the Council's Estates team. These will reflect the learnings from this incident.</li> </ul>

<p>3.8</p> <p>3.9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Officers in CNS to liaise with Corporate comms in advance of any work commencing.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>HR &amp; Financial Implications</u></b> None. All works proposed are at no additional cost to the Council.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b> Equality implications are addressed through the consultation.</p>
<p><b>4.0</b></p>	<p><b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b></p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – NIE Networks 2023-06b_0823_01</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Proposed amendments to NIE Networks procedures to ensure rigour in the revision of any work instructions.</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Proposed Tree Planting Under Power Lines at Orangefield Park</p>