
Subject:	PURCHASE OF A REMOTE-CONTROLLED BANKS MOWER
Date:	10 July 2024
Decision to be taken by:	Mike Davis, Strategic Director (Finance and Housing)
Report of:	Darran Solley, Parks and Open Spaces Manager
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Charlotte Zosseder, Portfolio Holder for Community and Corporate Property
Decision Type:	Executive non-Key Decision
Classification:	Unrestricted

Authority Delegation C64 to the Section 151 Officer of Section 6 (Scheme of Officer Delegations) of Part 3 (Responsibility for Functions) of the Constitution: 'To authorise new projects up to £50,000 that can be funded within the overall resources of the approved Medium-Term Financial Plan'.

Purpose of the report: To seek release of funds allocated in the Medium-Term Financial Plan for purchase of a remote-controlled banks mower.
To seek approval to purchase a remote-controlled banks mower.

Recommendation:

1. To agree to release funds from the Medium-Term Financial Plan for the purchase of a remote-controlled banks mower.
 2. To authorise the purchase of a remote-controlled Kersten Hycut banks mower.
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1. Summary

1.1 The Parks and Open Spaces in-house grounds maintenance team is responsible for numerous grass banks, some of which are in high profile locations such as York Street in Dover and the Mill Wall in Sandwich. Several of these banks have a gradient greater than manufacturers' guidelines for conventional mowers and therefore cannot be maintained safely using the Council's existing equipment. Purchase of a modern, specialist remote controlled mower will allow the team to safely achieve a high standard of maintenance. The preferred option, the Kersten Hycut, would cost £44,475, which is within the capital budget of £45,000.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 More than five years ago the Council purchased a remote-controlled mower, but due to limitations in both the technology available and budget restraints at that time, it does not meet service needs. The existing machine is only specified to cut 30-degree slopes while, for example, the banks at York Street are up to 50 degrees. Finally, the existing machine can only be operated where there are run-offs adjacent to the bank and is therefore not suitable for use at places such as York Street and other built-up urban areas.

- 2.2 Due to concerns about the safety of using the Council's sit-on mowers to cut slopes, the Corporate Health and Safety team reviewed banks cutting operations jointly with the Parks and Open Spaces team. As a test, a specialist external contractor was appointed to mow one of the banks in Dover. The cost for one visit to this single area was approximately £3,000, therefore it is not a financially viable option to use this approach regularly across the district.
- 2.3 Demonstrations were then organised of a variety of remote-controlled machines in some of the most challenging DDC managed sites. These were assessed by Parks and Open Spaces, alongside Corporate Health and Safety, and the results are shown in Appendix 1. The recommended option is not the cheapest on offer, but its performance was significantly better than the cheapest model, and it performed well even on steep banks in wet conditions.
- 2.4 In order to continue improving the in-house grounds' maintenance service, the Council must be prepared to invest in new reliable equipment and machinery, when justified. Purchase of a modern, specialist remote controlled mower will allow the team to safely achieve a high standard of maintenance at high profile sloped sites throughout the district. If such a machine is not purchased it will be necessary to continually appoint contractors to care for these areas.

3. Identification of Options

- 3.1 Option 1 – Release the funding and allow the Parks department to purchase the preferred Kersten Hycut banks mower following the scoring process.
- 3.2 Option 2 – Allow the release of funding and purchase the cheapest mower trialled.
- 3.3 Option 3 – To decline to authorise the funding or purchase of a banks mower.

4. Evaluation of Options

- 4.1 Option 1 – Preferred option and will enable the Council to maintain difficult sites in a safe manner.
- 4.2 Option 2 – Will enable the Council to maintain most banks but not all in a safe manner.
- 4.3 Option 3 – This would result in greater expense for the Council as specialist contractors would have to be appointed continually.

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1 There is a budget allowance of £45,000 in the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for purchase of a banks mower, so the preferred option can be purchased within that allowance. Maintenance costs will be accommodated within the existing Parks and Open Spaces budget.

6. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

- 6.1 The preferred mower is a hybrid mower, using electric motors which are then charged by the petrol engine. It is the only mower trialled that could be operated using battery only. This was only for a relatively short period but would allow moving, unloading/loading the mower by battery in sensitive areas and quietly.

7. Corporate Implications

- 7.1 Comment from the Director of Finance (linked to the MTFP): Accountancy has been consulted on the report and has no further comments to add. (ZW)

- 7.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Strategic Director (Corporate & Regulatory) has been consulted during the preparation of the report and has no further comment to make.
- 7.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: This report seeking approval to release the funding and allow the Parks department to procure the preferred banks mower following the scoring process does not specifically highlight any equality implications. In discharging their duties members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Scoring assessment sheet

Contact Officers:

Darran Solley, Parks and Open Spaces Manager
Darran.solley@dover.gov.uk

Banks Mower Comparison Sheet				
	Agria 9600-112 Remote-controlled High Grass Rotary Mulcher	ROBOCUT2 S300	Kersten Hycut	Stella URS 100
Price	39,000.00	29,850.00	36,975.00	34,725.00
Additional costs			£1500 (Hycut Maintenance App)	£4283 (Different blade set up as per demo machine)
Total Cost	£39,000	£29,850	£36,975 and an annual subscription of £1500 for the App.	£39,008
Contents of tank	2 x 10 litre; removable tanks	2 x 10 litre; removable tanks	Removable 25litre marine style fuel tank (up to 10 hours run time.)	18 litres incl. fuel filter
Engine	Briggs & Stratton Series 8270 2-cylinder-4-stroke-petrol engine 17,9 kW (24,3 PS)	Vanguard 810cc, 28hp (21kw)	23HP Briggs Vanguard petrol engine	HONDA 2 cyl.OHV 4 stroke, model iGXV 800 EFI
Speeds	0-10 km/h	0-7 kph	0-6km/h speed	
Mower drive	Belt drive with electromagnetic clutch	Direct shaft drive with electric clutch	2 x 3kw brushless and sealed motors with air cooled planetary gear traction drives	electromagnetic clutch and C-V-belt with tension pulley
Dimensions	145 x 150 x 72-85,5 cm	150 x 151 x 91.5 cm		170 x 142 x 92 (L x W x H)
Slope - max cutting angle	55	55	55	55
Area performance	ca. 5000 m ² /h			
cutting height adjustable	ca. 5 - 19 cm	3 - 18 cm	55mm - 180mm cutting height	20-120mm
Cutting width	112 cm	110 cm	1150mm cutting width	100cm

Ground pressure	0,18 kg/cm ²			
Weight	about 638,00 kg	535kg	630kg weight	640kg
Elektromechanical fail safe-brake	yes			
LED safety light	yes			
Tilt sensor	yes			
Assessment	Comments			
Build Quality	4	3	4	4
Ease of Use	4	3	4	3
Noise	3	3	4	3
Stability	4	3	4	3
Servicing and Aftercare	3	3	4	4
Quality of cut	3	3	3	4
Total	21	18	23	21
1 - Poor				
2 - Basic				
3 - Satisfactory				
4 - Good				

Conclusion	This mower was very impressive and performed well on the steepest of banks. It was stable and even when the operator drove it intentionally erratic, it maintained stability on the bank. It is the second most expensive mower trialled.	This mower performed adequately but struggled to maintain grip on the steeper banks. It had some impressive features such as inbuilt battery charging for the remote unit and a digital display screen to inform operator of and issues.	This machine performed very well on the steepest of banks. It was the only hybrid mower which was highly commended by the team and improved the control & responsiveness of the machine. It was also the only machine that had an App for the Council to review outputs, performance and errors with the machine (which in turn provided the manufacturer with more information to assist with after service). This is the preferred machine.	This machine performed well but the demonstrator restricted its use to a lesser degree bank than other manufacturers. The caused concerns about its overall capability of the steepest of banks. It had the best cut and finish of all machines, but the machine demonstrated did have upgraded blades that made it the most expensive machine trialled and more than the preferred machine.
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