

SOFT MARKET TEST

MP041 Grounds Maintenance Service

East Sussex Procurement Hub

on behalf of

Rother District Council

East Sussex
Procurement Hub



Grounds Maintenance Service

Market Engagement Questionnaire

Background

Rother District Council

The District of Rother is located on the East Sussex coast 65 miles to the Southeast of London; the district covers some 509 sq km with approximately 42,100 households and 93,100 residents (ONS Census published 2021).

Rother District Council and the East Sussex Procurement Hub wish to understand the current market costs to deliver grounds maintenance of public land, including but not limited to maintaining green open spaces, play areas (including inspections), parks and public gardens, emptying of litter bins (within green spaces) and cemeteries. This contract does not include tree management which is operated under a separate contract.

East Sussex Procurement Hub

The East Sussex Procurement Hub is a shared service hosted by Wealden District Council that administers procurement activity on behalf of Rother District Council (hereafter referred to as 'the Council').

Rother's foremost attractions:

Bexhill On Sea

An English seaside town in the traditional sense of the word, with pebbled beaches and a town with distinct architectural influences from the Edwardian, Victorian and Art Deco period, its focal point is the De La Warr Pavilion complimented by the Old Town and several picturesque open spaces.

Battle

1066 was a momentous year for Battle. Here you will find the world-renowned Battle Abbey, built by William the Conqueror. Battle is also a vibrant historic market town and the 13th century Norman church of St Mary's.

Camber Sands / Pett Level

One of the few uninterrupted stretches of sandy beach and rugged coastline on the south coast. A suitably dramatic combination of dunes, cliff-tops, beach and sea, one of the most popular locations in the area.

Bodiam

The area of Bodiam and Bodiam Castle is one of the UK's best preserved moated castles.

Rye

A welcoming combination of cobbled streets, maritime history and artistic heritage. Rye retains its picture postcard looks and charm to this day and has always attracted writers and artists from Henry James to HG Wells.

Winchelsea

Winchelsea forms part of the ancient Cinque Port confederation and still boasts the remnants of its illustrious past - including the original wine cellars of the Old Port and the Church of St Thomas the Martyr.

Rother's principal public green space sites and scope of service

The service includes maintenance of parks (excluding buildings other than those leased to the Contractor) open spaces, sports and recreation grounds, play areas, cemeteries, closed churchyards, watercourses, car parks, a small number of planters and other miscellaneous sites.

The current contract allows for routine work based on a performance specification and non-routine work via a schedule of rates.

We wish to consider a contract based on frequency rather than performance and would like an indication of suggested frequencies for playground inspections, litter, grass, hedges, weeding within the budget of £250K per annum, excluding the cost to provide the services to Bexhill and Rye Cemeteries the costs for which are to be provided separately. Frequencies are required so that they may be increased in the future when more budget becomes available.

Please note that there is no guarantee or automatic right to non-routine work.

The purchase and supply of equipment and materials should be allowed for in the costs in the table below (Question 1).

Small depots/storage facilities of varying sizes may be included in the contract but no office space available, and the Contractor will be expected to enter into a lease on the terms set out by the Council.

The paragraphs below provide an overview of the types of open space and landscape components within the current Contract and details of the principal sites within the current Contract.

There will always be an element of non-routine works that will be required based on a schedule of rates and according to budget.

Parks and Gardens

The principal parks and gardens are Egerton Park, Broad Oak Park, Manor Gardens, the seafront in Bexhill and the Gun Garden in Rye.

In addition to these, there are 4 smaller parks and gardens, Lanes Gardens, and Barrack Hall Park in Bexhill. A broad range of maintenance is required.

Egerton Park, Bexhill

Egerton Park is a formal, urban park close to the town centre and seafront, dating back to the late 1800s. Formerly marshland, the site was drained through the creation of two lakes around which paths, landscaping and recreational features and facilities were added.

Public facilities include a large children's play area, tennis courts, an adiZone (outdoor gym), a large lawn for events, a refreshment kiosk and a boating lake. The park is home to the Bexhill Tennis Club, Lakeside and Spartans Bowls Club. The Bexhill Museum and the Egerton Park Indoor Bowls Club are all located on the park's peripheries.

The Council has agreed to maintain the site to a high standard of maintenance and horticultural excellence. To achieve this, a dedicated site-based member of staff would be desirable.

Manor Gardens, Bexhill

Manor Gardens is a formal, ornamental green space situated in Bexhill's Old Town taking its name from the ruins of a manor house and estate built there in the 1100s. The estate and manor house were purchased by the Bexhill Town Council in 1963. In 1968 the house was demolished, and the Manor Gardens became a public park.

Manor Barn, a restored Grade II building, is set within the gardens. The building is leased to the Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society who maintains it and hires it out for various functions.

The gardens are used to host an annual performance by the Bexhill Amateur Theatrical Society, the Old Town Preservation Society's Christmas Fair and by wedding parties.

The gardens are predominantly planted with shrubs. In particular, rhododendrons, azaleas, roses and seasonal bedding is also used to provide colour. Features of note include a walled garden and pond.

Bexhill Seafront East Parade

Bexhill Seafront East Parade is a simple, traditional seafront landscape including grass lawns, permanent planting.

West Parade

West Parade including the landscaping project 'Next Wave' comprises of a series of 'garden rooms' made up of mixed planting (herbaceous and shrubs), grass, play equipment, hard surfacing, lighting and park furniture.

The De La Warr Lawns & Pavilion

The De La Warr Lawns & Pavilion comprises extensive lawns and some permanent planting and hedging.

Marina Gardens and War Memorial

These are the main areas of seasonal bedding.

Broad Oak Park

Broad Oak Park is located on the outskirts of Little Common in west Bexhill and adjoins Little Common Recreation Ground.

The land is used public open space. Totalling approximately 28.5ha, the park comprises some 15.2ha of public green space tree cover, and meadowland.

Gun Garden, Rye

The Gun Garden is situated on the edge of the historic town centre of Rye, next to the Ypres Tower, built as a fortification in 1249 and overlooking Romney Marsh and Rye Bay. It comprises hard landscape and grass.

The Salts

The Salts comprises 3 neighbouring sites; the Cricket Salts, Fair Salts and Town Salts, The Cricket Salts has a cricket field currently used by Rye Cricket Club which utilises ancillary buildings on site.

The skate ramp facility belongs to Rye Town Council and is not included in this contract.

The Fair Salts

The Fair Salts comprise a large grass open space, a bowls green with associated pavilion and a children's play area. It is used for events including fairs and the annual Rye bonfire.

The Town Salts

The Town Salts are laid down to grass for amenity use.

Kingsmead Battle

Kingsmead Open Space is an historic location within Battle said to be where King Harold rested his troops on the night before the famed Battle of Hastings in the year 1066.

The site comprises mature protected hedgerow, semi-natural grassland and trees.

Sports and Recreation Grounds

The principal recreation grounds are the Polegrove and Little Common in Bexhill and the Salts in Rye.

The contractor will be required to cut to an agreed length as amenity grass throughout the year and the sports clubs (football/cricket/bowls) may be maintaining their own playing area to their own standards and according to their sporting activities.

Play Areas

All play area repairs are carried out on a non-routine basis.

Play Areas, Bexhill

The maintenance and cleansing of children's playgrounds and 'kick about' areas.

Play areas include skateboard parks, basketball hoops, 5-a-side style football goals and play equipment usually contained within a fence. These play areas are sometimes stand-alone facilities but are more often part of a larger green space.

Play areas are located at various (c18) different open spaces in Bexhill.

Play Areas, Rye

The council manages 3 play areas in Rye; the Town Salts, Masons Field and King's Avenue, all of which are set in larger green spaces.

In addition to the above, the council manages 3 other play areas: Coronation Gardens, Battle; Darvel Down Netherfield, (both of which are set in larger amenity green spaces) and 1 play area in Bodiam.

Woodlands

The Council manages small areas of woodland in Bexhill, Netherfield, and Bodiam. Other than litter picking and bin emptying, no routine work is carried out in our woodlands. Arboriculture work is carried out under a separate contract and is excluded from the ground's maintenance contract.

Churchyards

There are 4 Closed churchyards being Rye, Ticehurst, and St. Peters and St. Marks in Bexhill. Minimal maintenance is required at these sites.

Cemetery maintenance

See Appendix A for more detailed specification.

Bexhill Cemetery

Bexhill Cemetery is situated at Turkey Road and has been open for burials since 1901. The cemetery has both Traditional and Lawn sections, and a further extended area of rough grass for future use. The service includes grave digging, of which there are on average 65-70 per year and the interment of cremated remains. The majority of graves are dug by light excavators, but some hand digging may be required on the older sections.

Rye Cemetery

Rye Cemetery is located at Rye Hill and has been open for burials since 1854. It contains both Traditional and Lawn sections. The service includes grave digging, of which there are on average 15-20 per year and the interment of cremated remains. Most graves are dug by light excavators, but some hand digging may be required on the older sections.

Other open spaces

There are several open spaces not classed as parks, gardens or recreation grounds or play areas.

These include Barrack Road, Galley Hill, Sidley House, Bexhill Police station, planting by the A259 and Collington Halt (all in Bexhill). Watch Oak Offices in Battle, School workshops in Udimore and the Maltings Workshops in Peasmarsh.

Their maintenance includes grass cutting, shrub maintenance and hedge cutting.

Car Parks Maintenance

This includes car park maintenance of the soft landscape at various car parks. This varies at each car park site and includes grass cutting and maintenance of shrub and rose beds.

There are:

- Five car parks in Bexhill (Sidley, Little Common, Cooden, Beeching Road and Wainwright Road).
- Two car parks in Battle (Mount Street and Market Street).
- Three car parks in Rye (Cinque Port Street, Gibbets Marsh and Lucknow Place).
- Two car parks in Camber (Johnsons Field and Western car park) and two other car parks i.e. Northiam & Hurst Green.

Supply of seasonal bedding plants and bulbs

The Council has a minimal amount of seasonal bedding and bulbs and if required will form non-routine activities.

Litter

The clearance of litter and path/road sweeping from all park areas in compliance with the Environmental Protection Act – Code of Practice.

Water courses.

There are various water courses across the district that will require attention during the contract e.g. litter clearance, outflow grill.

The Service

The current contract has been in place for some years and will expire in November 2024. The Council wishes to seek guidance on what level of service a contractor could provide for an annual budget of £250,000, excluding the two cemeteries.

We wish to understand what a contract service would deliver for £250,000, and then the costs of additional works so that this service could be built on as budgets allow.

It is recognised that the budget of £250,000, excluding the two cemeteries, is limited and would most likely not be able to fulfill all the current contractual operations.

Cemeteries should be costed separately to the £250,000. Certain landscapes are more sensitive to maintain than others such as cemeteries and Egerton Park (Green Flag Award). The council would like to understand what would be achievable and the estimated cost based on the following priorities:

Essential items

(To be included in £250,000 annual budget)

- Play area inspections -anticipated cost to deliver.
- Egerton Park
- Seafront gardens (including West, East and Marina)
- Grass cutting in all areas -anticipated cost.
- Hedge cutting -anticipated cost.
- Emptying of litter bins -anticipated costs -see site plans.
- Litter picking
- Herbicide treatments

(To be excluded from £250,000 as a separate annual budget)

- Cemeteries -Rye and Bexhill -anticipated costs to deliver
- Bexhill is a manned site plus locking and unlocking, bin emptying and litter picking.

Lower priority

- Seasonal bedding
- Shrub beds/perennial planting
- Woodlands
- Water courses/ditch maintenance
- Hard surface sweeping/blowing.

Objectives

- 1) The Council wishes to engage with the market and undertake a market engagement exercise to establish the current issues and opportunities facing the market in the delivery of these services.
- 2) The Council wishes to market test the possible procurement options and packaging to gain a better understanding of the following:
 - i. How service providers might approach delivery of the service

- ii. Contract length- short, medium, and long term and estimate of costs
 - iii. Views on the procurement route
 - iv. Specifications
 - v. Potential Risk and Risk allocation
- 3) The Council wants to use the results of this exercise to help it shape the future contract and to ensure it provides a procurement package that is attractive and helpful to potential bidders.
- 4) Depending upon the range and number of responses the Council may select a representative sample of interested parties for follow up meetings or discussions. Selection is at the discretion of the Council.
- 5) Please note that this communication has been issued by the Council purely for information seeking purposes and does not form part of the procurement process. Interested parties should note that a response to this does not guarantee an invitation to tender. Conversely, not participating in the market testing exercise will not exclude any party from any involvement in any subsequent procurement process. The Council is not liable for any costs, fees or expenses incurred by any provider participating in the market engagement exercise.

Please read the document and if you feel that your organisation is able to contribute to this Market Engagement exercise, please complete the questionnaire as contained in this document and return via email to esph@wealden.gov.uk with the Subject heading "MP041 RDC Grounds Maintenance Service SMT" by Wednesday 31st January 2024.

Please note that this is not a call for competition.

The following objectives are pertinent to this market engagement exercise:

- a. An understanding of what the Council is aiming to deliver; and
- b. The ability to innovate and add value; and
- c. An thorough understanding of the current marketplace; and
- d. The overall value added in helping to scope the project.

For the avoidance of doubt, this communication is for the purpose of conducting stakeholder and market engagement and will not formally begin any procurement process or constitute any commitment by the East Sussex Procurement Hub and Rother District Council in the undertaking of any such procurement exercise.

Stakeholder and Market Engagement

The Council and the East Sussex Procurement Hub are at an early stage in development of its proposals for the Grounds Maintenance Service and seeks input from the market as to what might be the most potentially advantageous way of packaging and scoping any future procurement opportunity.

This exercise will also provide an opportunity for the Council to obtain insight into how the market may approach the delivery of the services in question. It also gives useful early insight into the likely level of interest from that market.

Stakeholders and market providers will not be prejudiced by any response or failure to respond to this exercise or attendance at any future marketing events. Market providers must also note that a response to this communication does not guarantee an invitation to participate in any future tender opportunity that may be conducted. Any procurement for the supply and services by the Council will be carried out strictly in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

The East Sussex Procurement Hub in association with the Council has developed a questionnaire (see below) that they would like market providers to complete.

As stated previously the outcome of this market engagement exercise will seek to shape the future delivery of the formerly referred service provision.

Before commencing a procurement process, the Council wishes to undertake a market sounding exercise and would welcome the views of providers on the questions set out on the page below. We would like to receive feedback on the following and any other comments that you may have.

1. Which of the below items can you provide for £250,000 per annum budget, based on the priorities below?

Please state the frequency or the standard you would achieve for each item.

Please state the cost for each item.

For those items that cannot be covered in the £250,000 per annum budget, please provide a cost for them in the end column.

Task	Cost per annum as part of £250k budget	Frequency (if applicable)	Standard achieved (if not done on frequency basis)	For those items that cannot be covered in the £250,000 please provide a cost
Essential Items				
Play area inspections				
Emptying of litter bins				
Litter picking				
Egerton Park-				
Grass cutting in all areas				
Bexhill Seafront planting/hedges				
Lower Priority				
Hedge cutting				
Planted areas				
Car parks				
Water courses				
Herbicide treatment				

2. Cemeteries -Rye and Bexhill

The Council charges customers for various aspects including internments, exclusive rights for the purchase of a grave, memorial permits and use of Chapel. The intention is to ensure the cost of grave digging and maintaining cemeteries remains covered by revenue generation.

How much would it cost to deliver the following services within cemeteries according to the specification provided in Appendix A.

- Bexhill Cemetery -Fully manned site to complete grounds maintenance Monday to Friday only and opening and closing 365 days per annum.
- Rye Cemetery -as and when required.
- Grave digging -both sites
- Grounds maintenance -both sites

3. The Council needs to deliver a routine grounds maintenance service within a budget £250k per annum.

Please suggest how this could be achieved whilst delivering as many ground maintenance services as possible?

4. What length of contract would be desirable?

5. Please indicate staff numbers included in the £250k, split out separately to show managers and full-time equivalent operatives.

6. Please indicate staff numbers included for the cemeteries; split out separately to show managers and full-time equivalent operatives

7. The Council has limited storage facilities for equipment and welfare please see appendix B attached for your information.

Would you be able to provide your own?

8. What equipment will you anticipate using to provide the service?
9. The council has committed to being a carbon neutral district by 2030. Has your organisation made a Net Zero commitment and if so, what is your target date? What are your main leavers and barriers to achieving this?
10. Please outline what you believe the risks are if you were to take on this contract and how these risks could be mitigated for all parties.
11. How long would you require to mobilise a new contract to start 1st December 2024
12. Please state any contractual terms which would be a disincentive to the market, and why.
13. Are there any barriers to you tendering with regards to procurement methods (e.g. would you prefer to use a Framework)?
14. RDC currently uses DTE Grounds to manage their maintenance. What grounds maintenance software do you use to manage your contracts? Do you have a preferred system to use?

We would be grateful if responses to these questions could be submitted by Wednesday 31st January 2024. Responses should be sent by email to: esph@wealden.gov.uk with the Subject heading "MP041 RDC Grounds Maintenance Service SMT"

Please note:

Market providers will not be prejudiced by any response or failure to respond to this soft market testing/sounding exercise and a response to this communication does not guarantee any invitation to participate in any future public procurement process that the Commissioning Authority may conduct.

Any responses provided will not be treated as commercially confidential and may be used by the East Sussex Procurement Hub and the Council in the development of any service specifications and utilized for the purposes of undertaking any subsequent procurement exercises, but no organisation will be individually identified.