

# ***Report to the Council***

**Subject: Safer, Greener & Transport Portfolio Date: 5 November 2013**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor G Waller**

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## **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Safer, Greener & Transport Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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## **Safer Communities**

Following the submission to the Home Office of the report of the Domestic Homicide Review examining the circumstances of the death of Gillian Andrade in Loughton, I regret to inform Members that the Epping Forest District Community Safety Partnership, which I chair, is in the process of commissioning another DHR following the death of a female in Waltham Abbey. Whilst these are multi-agency investigations, a considerable burden falls upon the Council's Safer Communities team in ensuring that the review is undertaken in accordance with Home Office guidance and in good time. I shall keep Members informed of progress.

At the last meeting I reported on the Home Safe initiative. I can now report that 30 estate agents throughout the District are participating in the scheme, with 1,750 packs distributed to those moving home.

Officers participated in the launch of the West Essex Integrated Offender Management Scheme when a presentation was made to interested parties on the work of our Community Safety Partnership.

Officers have re-examined the way in which we deal with repeat victimisation involving high risk and vulnerable victims of domestic abuse, and I am glad to report that the repeat victimisation rate has been cut from 40 to 20 per cent.

## **Highways and Parking**

In previous reports I have mentioned the changes made to parking arrangements in the Cottis Lane car park in Epping. I believe that the new arrangements are working satisfactorily in ensuring that adequate car parking spaces exist for short stay use by shoppers and other visitors, but I fully recognise that the pressure for long stay spaces remains, and the position is kept under regular review to assess the need for additional measures.

As part of the budget making process, consideration is now being given to a review of car parking tariffs. Members will be aware that tariffs have not increased for four years, but the potentially deteriorating position of the Council's finances, as set out in the Finance Portfolio Holder's Medium Term Financial Strategy, dictates that this is no longer a sustainable policy. I have therefore instructed officers to look at tariff structures with a view to modestly increasing income whilst assessing the way the tariffs work across the district, to consider amongst other things differential or demand led pricing regimes. Although time is very short for looking at a new approach to tariffs, with initial consideration being given by the Finance &

Performance Management Scrutiny Panel meeting on 12 November, I would welcome the views of members on the approach to be taken.

Despite the delays on which I have previously commented, I am glad to report that better progress has recently been made by Essex Highways on work relating to the Buckhurst Hill Parking Review. By the time of the Council meeting I shall have held a meeting with Buckhurst Hill members to review the progress made since the last meeting in April and to focus on the detailed proposals to be put forward for informal consultation with residents.

### **Trees and Landscape**

The team has made 28 tree preservation orders so far in 2014, generally resulting from potential development and ranging from individual trees to extensive tracts of land, such as that adjacent to the former Hill House Farm, between Chigwell High Road and the M11.

More than 180 applications for works to protected trees have also been dealt with in this calendar year, including complex applications resulting from alleged subsidence. Only one decision (concerning a tree at Lower Sheering) has been appealed so far this year, resulting in the appeal being dismissed. Notice of a potential claim for compensation has been received in respect of one case, where felling of an oak on grounds of alleged subsidence at Colebrook Lane, Loughton had been refused by the South Area Plans Sub-Committee for lack of sufficiently clear supporting evidence. This followed a deferral to allow time for necessary evidence to be submitted; it was, however, not forthcoming. Officers have disputed the basis for any such claim and indicated that if one were to be made, it would be vigorously defended.

The team continue to respond to a high volume of requests for advice and action from the public and from the development control team, and have made a significant input into decisions involving complex applications with extensive landscape impacts, such as the current housing proposal at Knollys Farm in Waltham Abbey. The adopted Landscape Character Assessment for the District and the Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Studies are now proving very helpful in advising prospective applicants for major development and in allowing the wider landscape implications of applications to be properly reflected in planning decisions. The team are also involved in drafting the Landscape and Green Infrastructure section of the draft Local Plan.

An action plan for the Community Tree Strategy for Loughton has been prepared, in partnership with Loughton Town Council, and final comments are awaited from the Corporation of London before seeking ratification and publication. The intention then would be to seek funding for further Strategies.

A report on the Trees and Design Action Group report 'Trees in the Townscape: A Guide for Decision Makers' is also in preparation. This will address the question of whether the Council should endorse the report's principles, as many other authorities have done across the country, but also what changes would be necessary to current practice in order to put its principles into effect.

Work has now started on the housing element of the St John's School redevelopment site in Epping. Extensive landscaping of the school site has assisted in creating an attractive environment for pupils, but some damage to street trees occurred because, for a short time, lorries used an unauthorised route to the site via Crows Road. Use of the CAVAT (Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees) valuation

tool, devised by Chris Neilan and now used by various local authorities around the country, has resulted in agreement that the developer will make an equivalent contribution to the value lost, to be devoted to next year's street tree planting budget for the area. While the amount in this case is modest (£1,845 plus the costs of ancillary work), the principle that just funding the cost of a replacement tree is insufficient has been established.

Members will be aware that developers are proposing to submit an application in due course for a major extension to Harlow on a site at Latton Priory within the Epping Forest District. Discussions have begun in relation to the visual impact and the impact on landscape character of the proposed development, and the intention is shortly to invite interested members to walk the site to see the context for themselves.

## **Countrycare**

Last year a hedgelaying project began to lay 150 metres of old straggly hawthorn hedge at the Roding Valley Meadows local nature reserve, next to the football pitches near Oakwood Hill estate in Loughton. Because of the age and the size of the hedge, chainsaws had to be used to complete this task. There is now only ten yards of hedge left to lay, which will be used to train up new Roding Valley Assistant Ranger Claire Rogers in the art of chainsaw hedgelaying. A lot of work has been done on the hedge, which now looks excellent and should continue to thrive for many years to come. While laying the hedge, staff and volunteers were fortunate to come across a *Convolvulus Hawk Moth*, which is a migrant from southern Africa and, like many other migrants, was attracted by this summer's good weather. This moth, with a wingspan of over 10 cm, is quite an uncommon sight in this country and so caused quite a lot of excitement.

On 8 October, Countrycare had a team of eight employees from GlaxoSmithKline join them for a day of heathland restoration. The same team had helped out at the Bobbingworth former landfill tip in 2009 and enjoyed themselves so much that GSK decided to offer their corporate volunteer day to Countrycare again this year. The team spent the day clearing Chigwell Heath of aspen, digging scrapes to encourage heather and gorse to spread, and clearing bramble.

## **Sustainability**

### *Food Waste Trial*

The trial of food waste bins within the Civic Offices and Conder building has been completed successfully, with just a few teething problems. Collection of waste by SITA was initially confused on some occasions due to the involvement of new SITA personnel, but this issue has been resolved and the collection by the cleaners from bins within the trial areas has not presented them with any practical problems.

Those involved in the trial noted that close proximity to a food waste bin meant that staff were more likely to use it. It was generally agreed that smaller bins would be preferable, but that there should be more of them. The possibility of issuing caddies in some areas, which could then be emptied into food waste bins, was also discussed.

The next stage is for the number of bins and the budget to be considered, and for an article to be produced for *District Lines* to inform staff of the forthcoming changes. Once bins have been fully rolled out at the Civic Offices and Conder sites, SITA will begin testing the waste to check that the con-food component is sufficiently uncontaminated to recycle.

## *HECA*

Last year the Government reinstated mandatory HECA reporting for local authorities, in line with the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. This report is due every two years, with the next one scheduled for 2015, but the Environmental Co-ordinator will continue to collect data from the relevant Housing areas in the New Year to keep up momentum and avoid a build-up of the workload in the approach to March 2015.

There is an opportunity for the Council to join other local authorities in delivering energy efficient measures to homes as part of the Essex Energy Partnership. However, until it has been established exactly how residents could expect to benefit from this partnership, EFDC will not yet join as it is considered that joining could expose the Council to reputational risk if those benefits are not clearly defined. Work to address this issue is being done at Thurrock Council, which has agreed to circulate its Cabinet report to other local authorities as a template.

## *The Green Deal*

The Green Deal has so far been very slow in progressing, with reports that, though many householders across the country are agreeing to have a Green Deal assessment carried out, they are not following through with the installation of energy saving measures, making use of the finance that the scheme offers. Householders are instead tending to select one or two measures, for which they choose to pay themselves, or borrowing money from elsewhere at a more competitive rate. Because of the uncertainty surrounding the scheme, the Council has not signed up as a Green Deal provider, but does still provide information to members of the public.