

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 4 November 2014

Subject: Safer, Greener & Transport

Portfolio Holder: Cllr G Waller

Recommending: That the Report of the Safer, Greener & Transport Portfolio Holder be noted.

Community Safety

The CCTV installation at Loughton is now complete. Coverage extends along the High Road between Old Station Road and Trapps Hill, with the number of high definition cameras increasing from six to 30, providing excellent image clarity and detail both day and night. Thus, locations that are active in the night time economy are well covered.

These CCTV cameras are already linked to the local police and Essex Police Headquarters at Chelmsford, and will shortly provide extended coverage to the Community Safety Team based at the Civic Offices.

The current Domestic Homicide Review Report has now been completed and, when approved by members of the Community Safety Partnership, is due to be submitted to the Home Office for approval by its Quality Assurance Panel before being published.

Safeguarding

The Council is currently collating information for the annual safeguarding audits required by Essex Safeguarding Children Board and Essex Safeguarding Adults Board. As referred to in my previous Report to Council, the audits have been expanded in scope this year to include more in-depth analysis of training and leadership commitment.

A substantial number of members still need to undertake the in-house training provided, and the last course arranged in August had to be cancelled due to lack of numbers. Therefore, to ensure that the Council can fulfil its duties under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, two more sessions have been arranged for those members who have not yet undergone training and these will be held on the following dates:

Saturday 15 November 10.30 am - 12.00 noon (Refreshments provided at 10.00 am)
Tuesday 9 December 6.00 pm - 7.30 pm (Tea and coffee provided)

Members are very strongly urged to book on to one of these training sessions, as any weaknesses including inadequate training are identified in council audits which are now published; action can be taken if a council is found to be 'inadequate'. As I have previously stated, failure to ensure that councillors are trained in safeguarding has also been identified as a risk on the Council's risk register.

Energy switching

The Council is promoting the Essex Energy Switch scheme, which is an initiative providing householders with the opportunity to change suppliers by using a method which is less risky, less complex and far more likely to reduce their bills. (*Which?* has found that a substantial proportion of those who switch end up paying more.)

Under the scheme, suppliers bid for the right to supply those householders signing up, who are under no obligation to commit themselves until they are ready to do so. They are then guided through the process and advised about the pros and cons of the offer, before making a decision.

The Council participated as a partner in an energy switch auction earlier this year, and the intention is for it be actively involved in promoting a second auction to be held in December, this time accompanied by a more extensive publicity campaign. Essex County Council will be working in partnership with district and borough councils to help Essex residents secure a better deal on the cost of their gas and electricity bills by combining their purchasing power.

Countrycare

Countrycare has hosted several events since my last Report.

For children Countrycare hosted an evening of bug-hunting and pond-dipping for the Woodford Brownies on the pond at Woodford Green. This event was attended by 28 Brownies. A kids' event took place at Roughtalleys Wood, North Weald, helping children to understand the needs of hedgehogs which have been in severe decline partly because of habitat changes.

I was very pleased to take part in a guided walk around Sheering, taking in the Copse which Countrycare has just started to manage on behalf of Sheering Parish Council. Twenty people participated in the walk, learning about tree diseases, veteran trees and how to age a hedgerow.

In land management, a day was spent in partnership with the Essex Wildlife Trust, mowing and raking the SSSI fen on the Roding Valley Meadows, clearing reeds from an overgrown pond and pulling up self-seeded willow.

A member of Countrycare staff represented the Council at the East Anglian Tree Warden forum in early October. Members of the Tree Council and the Tree Officer from Network Rail presented a series of talks and outdoor workshops about ash die-back and trees in a planning context. Seven of EFDC's tree wardens also attended.

The Countryside Manager gave a presentation to 40 members of the Fyfield Probus Club about the work of Countrycare at one of their monthly meetings.

Meanwhile, a full programme of well attended weekly volunteer days has continued.

Conservation

Character appraisals

The character appraisals for Copped Hall and Waltham Abbey Conservation Areas are the current priorities. As in the case of the Loughton appraisals adopted earlier this year, Copped Hall has had a draft appraisal for a number of years which needs to be adopted, once it has been updated. There will be a targeted public consultation on the enlargement of the conservation area boundary, with account being taken of

feedback. A complete draft has been produced for the Waltham Abbey Conservation Area Character Appraisal, which will be used as the basis for public consultation involving local residents and interested stakeholders.

New designation

Work on the character appraisal for the new Buckhurst Hill Conservation Area (centred on St John's Church) is continuing. Research has been carried out on the historical development of the area, which will be used to inform the assessment of its special interest and character. The initial Townscape Survey has also been completed to assess the quality of the built environment. Full public consultation will begin once a complete draft appraisal has been produced and when the above consultations have been completed.

Development control

Consultations on planning applications affecting some aspects of the historic environment are an ongoing element of the team's workload, as is advice at a pre-application stage. Development control officers have reduced the number of formal consultations in favour of informal discussions for the more straightforward applications in order to ease the workload, which nevertheless remains quite time-consuming. Given the rigid deadlines on planning applications, these consultations have to take priority over character appraisals.

Assistant Conservation Officer

Bridget Pereira left the position as Technical Officer in September to take up a Conservation Officer role within the London Borough of Enfield. Interviews for her replacement were held in October, and the successful candidate has provisionally accepted the renamed position of Assistant Conservation Officer. In the temporary absence of a second officer, work on the character appraisals has slowed, but it is hoped that the Assistant Conservation Officer will be in post soon. This position is on a temporary contract until March 2016.

Car parking

Car parks strategy

The District-wide public consultation on the new Council car park strategy took place between May and July to seek the views of residents and visitors as well as business and other users of the car parks. The consultation was available on the Council website, and the survey was also circulated to town and parish councils, Town Centre Partnerships and partners in One Epping Forest. Alpha Parking Limited were engaged to carry out face to face interviews in the Council car parks over a two week period. Work on the strategy incorporates an assessment of new tariffs and the procurement of replacement smart pay and display machines.

Buckhurst Hill Parking Review

Ward members have reviewed all the responses to the public consultation carried out by Essex County Council, which involved placing adverts in local newspapers and notices in the vicinity of the proposed changes, as well as providing information on the Council website. ECC Highways are currently processing the necessary legal work before an Order is put in place.

Once this is completed, we shall commence work on the Loughton Broadway Parking Review.

North Essex Parking Partnership

At the most recent meeting of the NEPP Joint Committee, I submitted four parking schemes for implementation across the District. These are at Carisbrook Close, Epping; Hillyfields, Loughton; Castle Street, Ongar; and Park Avenue, Hastingwood.

The NEPP CCTV ParkSafe car is at present off the road while enhancements and improvements are made, but it will shortly be resuming its patrols of school locations where the stopping of vehicles to set down and pick up passengers causes unacceptable dangers.