

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 18 December 2012

Subject: Safer, Greener and Highways

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Gary Waller

Recommending:

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

Safer Communities

The first election for the Police & Crime Commissioner was held on 15 November, and the successful candidate was Nick Alston. Nick has been invited to attend a meeting of the Council's Safer, Cleaner, Greener Scrutiny Panel early in the New Year. By the time of the Council meeting I shall have met with him to discuss our CSP's priorities for the coming year.

Cabinet at its last meeting agreed to reallocate some existing capital budgets and provide additional capital funding in order to enhance the CCTV in Loughton High Road, extending it northwards and providing up to date cameras, as well as providing a future capital budget of £40,000 per annum to ensure we are able to expand, maintain and enhance our systems throughout the district.

Following some incidents of late night disorder in Epping over recent weekends, a meeting was held between the Council, Essex Police and local late night licensed premises in order to discuss what actions might be possible by all stakeholders, to prevent such disorder from occurring. I am pleased to say that the meeting was a positive one. Alongside this meeting, I have also authorised, through a Portfolio Holder decision, the installation of additional CCTV cameras in the area of the licensed premises, part of the funding of which is being provided by both of the club licensees. Furthermore, Essex Police and Epping Forest District Council are shortly to run Operation 'Allegro' which will focus mainly on the night time economy in Epping High Street. The operation includes increased Police patrols, the use of drugs dogs searching premises initially and queues as the evening progresses. The Council's Environmental Neighbourhood Officers will be carrying out taxi licensing checks and the Council's CCTV will be monitored live within the Civic Offices for the duration of the operation.

In my last report I made mention of a Domestic Homicide Review which, in my capacity as Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), I had established following the death of a woman in Loughton. The meeting of the Review Panel which had been scheduled for mid November had to be postponed, but it is due to meet again on 17 January 2013.

Domestic Abuse Awareness and Alcohol Awareness Week took place from 19 to 23 November. The Council promoted these important issues through the Council's website, as well as on Twitter and Facebook. Domestic violence continues to be a concern, and reducing it is one of the CSP's key objectives.

The CSP has been contacted by Chelmsford and Maldon CSPs to collaborate in producing a Crucial Crew handbook which can be used across the three districts.

We have also agreed to seek private sponsorship to offset the production costs from businesses and organisations in the three areas. This will dramatically reduce costs for each of the three areas and ensure, in this time of reduced funding, that these excellent handbooks, which follow up on all the safety lessons delivered at Crucial Crew, continue to be provided to all of the children attending.

I am pleased to inform Members that the Council's Safer Communities Team was successful in obtaining funding from Safer Essex in respect of a burglary prevention campaign on behalf of Epping Forest, Brentwood and Harlow Councils. The campaign includes funding increased Police patrols, a media campaign and leaflets, posters and booklets on how to protect property. These include property marking and defensive planting for gardens. The media campaign in respect of Epping Forest includes a half page advertisement in the Christmas issue of the Forester and a home page advert on the "Everything Epping Forest" Website. This will be in conjunction with articles on the Council website and distribution of the posters and leaflets to Information Offices across the District.

Finally on community safety matters, Members will be aware of the recent announcements of Government around reducing alcohol fuelled anti-social behaviour. The Home Office has issued a consultation document which has been placed in the Members' Room for information. The CSP intends to co-ordinate a response to the consultation and I would therefore ask any Member who wishes to respond to make their views known to either Jim Nolan or Caroline Wiggins in the Environment & Street Scene Directorate, so their comments can be included within the Partnership response.

Highways and Parking

At the last Cabinet meeting it was agreed to move forward with the Buckhurst Hill and Loughton Broadway parking reviews, but in a different way to those which have preceded them. Members will be only too aware of the sensitivities which arise from area wide parking reviews, and the difficulties in obtaining a resident and business consensus about what the solutions should be. In the past this has led to the review outcomes being revisited after initial implementation, often resulting in further resident discontent and involving considerable additional expense. Future reviews will therefore be more focussed in their approach, looking at smaller areas of parking stress where we can be more confident of achieving a solution which is technically deliverable, carrying the acceptance of the majority of those in that area and not displacing parking problems from one location to another.

Countrycare and Sustainability

The winter's hedgelaying project has continued with hedges being laid at Weald Common LNR and Epping Upland Millennium Garden. A total of 147 yards has been laid this month. Countrycare hosted a lunch to celebrate the raising of the green flag at the Roding Valley Meadows. 15 guests attended including several Roding Valley Volunteers, Chairman of the Council, Chairman of Essex Wildlife Trust, Councillors and other key people involved in the Roding Valley Meadows. Several people from the Planning Directorate joined Countrycare for a team building day on Chigwell Row Wood on the 27th, clearing sycamore.

Ash Dieback disease

Ash dieback disease has now been reported within Epping Forest District. There is a likely but as yet unconfirmed case involving five ash saplings at Grange Farm, Chigwell. This brings home the reality of the situation, which is that the disease is

already widespread in young trees across the country and that it will pose an increasing threat to the ash trees in our countryside and towns over the next decade. However the other large recent woodland planting in the district, by the Woodland Trust at Theydon Bois, is reported to be unaffected so far.

The disease is spread by small airborne spores in spring and summer, shed by tiny fungal fruiting bodies that grow on the ground upon ash leaf litter. There is no active spread at present therefore. Officers are actively monitoring a variety of sources of information so that they are as well informed as possible about the disease's progress, possible remedial measures and likely impact. At present, however, the national survey of woodland is incomplete so the full picture is unclear. The percentage of ash likely to be affected ultimately also remains unclear. DEFRA have set up a dedicated helpline for members of the public and concerned landowners/managers, and teams from the Forestry Commission and Woodland Trust have been inspecting woods across the country for signs of infected trees.

The pattern of infection is that young trees are the most vulnerable and also succumb most quickly. It appears that infection may have been latent and unrecognised in many recent plantings. Mature trees are more resistant, in that they are both less likely to be infected and also that they can tolerate the disease for longer and possibly resist it altogether. Experience on the continent appears mixed. Reports from Denmark suggest a survival rate of only 5%, but in Poland of 20%. It is not known which result is more likely in the UK. Current advice is to remove infected saplings and to clear and burn leaf litter where disease is suspected, but not to fell mature trees even if they are found to be infected. Landowners and managers therefore should be paying particular attention to newly planted ash trees (that is within the last five years) to check for the characteristic symptoms of dieback of the leaf and shoot and reporting suspected cases.

In relation to action by the Council our officers are advising concerned members of the public, who are contacting them by phone and in person, and referring possible cases to the national helpline. They are also advising our tree wardens about the disease and are encouraging local surveys to supplement those being undertaken by the Forestry Commission and Woodland Trust. One is currently underway, in Theydon Bois. It is unlikely that infection will be found on Council owned trees in the short term, because there have been no recent plantings of ash saplings. The Council's regular survey of its own stock will include a check for signs of the disease in future.

Finally, although ash is an important tree in the district it is not the major tree of the countryside, or the town. It is a minor component of our treescape compared, say, to oak in the wider countryside and beech in Epping Forest. The loss even of a high percentage, would be significant but not devastating and could potentially be mitigated by an active planting programme of other species on council land and by larger landowners and farmers.

Loughton Community Tree Strategy

The final text of the Community Tree Strategy for Loughton has now been agreed and will be published in December. This is the first to be designed primarily for access via the internet. Community Tree Strategies are a groundbreaking venture pioneered by Epping Forest District Council, whereby local communities have a real influence on how their trees are managed. They are also a way of informing the public as to the history of their local treescape and indeed how it has been formed through the actions of many previous generations, forming a living link to them. As with the previous strategies, that for Loughton will then form a basis to generate an

action plan. This will be drawn up in active collaboration with Loughton Town Council, the City of London Corporation, local tree wardens and residents' organisations.

Members will be able to access the strategy through the Council's website. It is intended that a limited hard copy edition should be published as part of the action plan, with the particular support of Loughton Town Council.

Conservation

Some of the findings of the Heritage Asset Review (published May 2012) relating to the York Hill and Baldwins Hill Conservation Areas have been carried forward. The Review recommended amendments to the boundaries of both these conservation areas: to include no.10 Pump Hill within the York Hill Conservation Area; and to exclude some of the properties at the south-western end of Wroths Path from the Baldwins Hill Conservation Area. Both these recommendations were viewed as appropriate changes which would enhance the special interest of the conservation areas. An additional recommendation to exclude nos.2-36 (even) Baldwins Hill (opposite Ash Green) has not been implemented as it is believed that these properties contribute to the special interest of the conservation area because of their historic interest. A letter was distributed to all the residents of both conservation areas (including no.10 Pump Hill), Loughton Town Council, Loughton Residents Association, Loughton and District Historical Society, and the Hills Amenity Society on 7th November 2012 detailing the proposed boundary amendments and inviting comments. This is not a formal further consultation and the deadline for receiving comments is 28th December 2012.

The Conservation Area Character Appraisals/Management Plans are ongoing for the three Loughton conservation areas (York Hill, Baldwins Hill and Staples Road) and for the Copped Hall Conservation Area. These documents are all in final draft form having previously had stakeholder comments incorporated into them where considered appropriate. Once the consultation period has ended for the York Hill and Baldwins Hill Conservation Areas amendments, the Loughton appraisals will be finalised and, once approved by Members and correctly publicised, published.

The Heritage Conservation chapter for the new Local Plan has been drafted. The findings of the Heritage Asset Review, a review of existing policy and the guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework, along with additional guidance from English Heritage, were all used to formulate the wording and policies contained in the chapter. This will now be reviewed and edited by other officers in the Directorate.