

Report to the Council

Subject: Safer, Greener, Highways Portfolio Date: 19 February 2013

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Gary Waller

Recommending:

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

Safer Communities

In my last report I referred to 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 Review Panel met again on 17 January when it considered progress in respect of the receipt of Individual Management Reports from the key agencies which may have had an involvement with either the victim or the perpetrator.

Safer Communities are now managing the Western Local Policing Area Partnership analyst. The analyst is co-located at the Civic Offices and Epping Police Station and is currently completing 4 strategic assessments for the Partnerships based in Epping Forest, Harlow, Brentwood and Thurrock. The team is also hosting the Housing Fraud Investigator, and this is working well with good daily interaction and exchange of information.

The Council's public space CCTV systems are continuing to provide crucial evidence for the police to investigate crimes, and have recently identified a rogue trader who defrauded an elderly victim out of a significant amount of money. As a result of this incident, and to raise awareness among the banks in the district, an initiative is being planned with Safer Communities, Police, Trading Standards and local banks, with the objective of preventing a recurrence.

Safer Communities are about to launch the 'Lock em Out' campaign which is based on a series of advice leaflets and booklets on burglary prevention, defensive planting, property marking and posters. The Epping Forest team led on this initiative, and it is likely to be rolled out across Essex this year, with the material having already been supplied to the Harlow and Brentwood areas. Funding was obtained through the Safer Essex Serious Acquisitive Crime Group.

Our Anti-social Behaviour Investigators remain busy dealing with serious complaints, and an ASBO on conviction application is currently being considered against a young person in the Loughton area

Highways and Parking

Cabinet has agreed to progress the Buckhurst Hill and Loughton Broadway parking reviews, focussing on smaller targeted areas which have congestion problems rather than large geographic areas. The Buckhurst Hill review will be implemented first, and arrangements for commencement are currently under way through Essex County Council. As soon as I have more information, I will share that with Members.

A new junction on the M11 (Junction 7a) has come a stage closer with an announcement that it is about to be assessed by the Department of Transport, having already been approved in principle by Essex County Council following a £500,000 feasibility study. While the junction is intended primarily to serve Harlow, it would be located within the Epping Forest District, so it will be important to develop a clear input into the consultations due to take place with key stakeholders in the coming months.

Countrycare

Since Christmas, Countrycare has been working on launching its environmental education programme. This has involved getting a leaflet about the available projects printed and sent off to 30 schools in and around the district. The content is available on the website as a PDF download.

Countrycare has also been busy planting trees, with six hundred saplings planted on Bobbingworth Nature Reserve (a former landfill site) to mark out the boundary between the parishes of Moreton and Bobbingworth. This boundary was once marked by Moreton Wood, which was unfortunately removed sometime between 1886 and 1912, but in time the new hedgerow will be beneficial for nesting birds and as a corridor of movement across the Reserve for other kinds of wildlife.

I was delighted to join a group of volunteers who planted a hundred trees at Weald Common Local Nature Reserve, paid for using money from the Jack Petchey Award. This project was chosen by the winner of the Award, Josh Russell, using funds which he had received as his prize, and 18 dedicated volunteers came along on a cold winter's day to join Josh and Countrycare in completing it. Snow had to be cleared from along the hedgerow before any of the planting could take place, but a hearty bonfire to burn the bramble and blackthorn which also needed to be cleared that day kept everyone warm.

Last year was a record one for Countrycare with the average number of volunteers attending having increased from 10 in 2007 to 14 in 2012. So far 2013 has seen a continuation of the rising trend with an average of 17 volunteers making themselves available for each task in January. The benefit resulting from this superb volunteer effort undoubtedly maximises the return received from our investment in Countrycare

Trees

I attended the one day quarterly meeting and seminar of Essex Tree and Landscape Officers at Theydon Bois Village Hall, an event intended in particular to discuss and publicise an important recent publication entitled 'Trees in the Landscape - A Guide for Decision Makers'. Addressing the meeting, I pointed out that in Epping Forest we are aiming to have a report presented to the Council in due course for it to consider adopting the 12 principles set out in the Guide.

Among the speakers was Jeremy Dagley, Conservation Manager at The Warren, on the Theydon Bois oak avenue, emphasising the care that the conservators are taking to ensure that their management reflects the community's views. Russell Horsey, now Deputy Director of the Institute of Chartered Foresters but previously a Tree Officer in Chris Neilan's team, discussed how the Guide can assist officers to ensure they have political and community support for their work. Finally, the recently published Community Tree Strategy for Loughton, which has been well received, constituted one of several case studies presented before the end of the day