

Report to the Council

Subject: Safer, Greener and Transport Portfolio Date: 26 September 2013

Portfolio Holder: Councillor G Waller

Recommending:

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

Safer Communities

In my last report I referred to the fact that the Domestic Homicide Review into the death of Gillian Andrade in Loughton was nearing its conclusion. Due to new information becoming available to the Panel, the completion of the Review Report has been delayed, but by the time of the Council meeting I very much hope that the Chairman of the Panel will have been able to submit it to the Home Office.

Epping Forest District Council Safer Communities Team works in close partnership with Essex Police to reduce crime in the Epping Forest District. In recent years the pattern has been for an increase to take place in the number of house burglaries over the winter period, with the numbers rising between October and April. I am pleased to say that Epping Forest and Brentwood districts are currently showing a reduction of around 20 per cent on the seasonal average in dwelling burglary.

The Community Safety Partnership is working on various initiatives to reduce burglary. One such initiative is to encourage residents, when moving home, to examine the security of their new property and take appropriate steps to 'target harden' it. With that in mind the Partnership has produced the 'HomeSafe' pack, including information on all types of security, a pen to postcode property, a security checklist and additional security and safety advice. The pack will be distributed by all the District's estate agents on completion of a property purchase in the district. Once these packs are available, I shall arrange for all members to receive one for information.

A Bill to replace the various measures currently available to tackle anti-social behaviour with a new set of powers, intended to provide a simpler and more streamlined framework has been proposed by government. It will introduce new mechanisms with the aim of giving victims and local communities a greater say in the treatment of anti-social behaviour and low-level crime, and it will strengthen the ability of landlords to terminate tenancies on grounds relating to anti-social behaviour. One of the issues identified by both the Commons and Bill Committee was the short sentences in respect of the owners of dogs who injure or kill. The Government is now consulting, via short [public survey](#), on whether to increase the maximum sentence for an aggravated offence under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. No dates have been set but, with the Government hoping to conclude the Bill's passage by the end of Spring 2014 and the House of Lords yet to scrutinise, it is likely to be timetabled fairly swiftly when the House resumes in early September.

Highways and Parking

I have previously made reference to the difficulties arising from the pressures of commuter parking in the main Epping town centre car parks. The Portfolio Holder Decision referred to in my last Report has been actioned, and Cottis Lane car park is now functioning solely as a short stay car park. This has freed up capacity for short stay users including shoppers, which is seen as an improvement by local retail businesses. However, as ever with changes to parking, there have been some consequential impacts, with local employees now finding it difficult to find a space to park throughout the day. Although I am being pressed to make further changes, I do not intend to do so until the impact of those already introduced have been fully assessed. However, I have instructed that permit holders should be permitted to continue parking in Cottis Lane. The car parking team are regularly visiting both the Bakers Lane and Cottis Lane car parks to establish user patterns at different times of the day and, if further changes are required and can be practically delivered, I will consider those in due course.

Following the delays on the part of Essex County Highways in effecting the Buckhurst Hill Parking Review, to which I referred at the last Council meeting, the Director of Environment & Street Scene has signed and returned the contract documentation, and the County's technical team are now commencing their preliminary work. I therefore believe that the public consultation exercise is imminent, and I hope that the timescale for the remaining stages can be kept as short as possible.

Countrycare

Benefiting from the fine weather, Countrycare has been exceptionally busy during the summer, with teams of volunteers carrying out a great deal of valuable work on the Local Nature Reserves.

During August four children's and family events took place, engaging with 120 children. On Weald Common LNR, a bug hunting exercise resulted in the discovery of lots of grasshoppers, including a pink one - a genetic mutation of the common meadow grasshopper. Pond Life at Nazeing Triangle LNR led to the discovery of a water stick insect, indicating that the state of the pond is very healthy.

On Friday 30 August, 25 people participated in a nocturnal Mad About Moths experience, identifying many species of moth and also detecting bats using bat detectors. Countrycare participated in a Play in the Forest event organised by Community Development, arranging activities on four occasions during August.

The team exhibited at the Epping Forest Burial Park Woodland Working Day, creating some interest and resulting in the possible recruitment of new tree wardens. Together with Ongar Town Council, Countrycare organised a fayre at Jubilee Nature Reserve (formerly Cripsey Brook LNR), not only to raise awareness of the district's nature and wildlife but also to celebrate the winning of two awards for the site: the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Fields in Trust Award and the Essex Wildlife Living Landscapes Award. All the stallholders, ranging from Essex Wildlife Trust and the RSPB to Essex Ferret Society and the Epping Hawk and Owl Sanctuary, were involved in nature conservation. There were demonstrations of hedgelaying and tree climbing by an arboriculturalist, and other attractions included the Forest Fiddlers playing folk music and an opportunity for visitors to try their hand at archery.