

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 20 December 2018

Subject: Contracts and Technical Services

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nigel Avey

Recommending:

That the report of the Contracts and Technical Services Portfolio Holder be noted.

Grounds Maintenance

The Grounds Service were pleased to receive a note of thanks from Loughton Town Council for its contribution in helping them to achieve the award for the Best Kept Playing Fields 2018 Class 1 for the Roding Valley Recreation Ground. This award has been won by the Town Council for the second year running and is a real credit to the hard work and commitment of the staff at both Councils in managing and maintaining the site to such a high standard. We look forward to our continued partnership with the Town Council and achieving a hat-trick win in 2019.

As we approach the winter period, the grounds team are starting to gear up for its winter works programme. Part of this work involves tree planting and the grounds team have just taken delivery of the new tree stock. Over 100 new trees of varying types are to be planted in our streets and open spaces across district. It is worth noting that 23 of these trees have been purchased from the kind donations of residents, which is most appreciated.

The Grounds Service is relied upon each year to provide the saluting dais and floral displays for the Remembrance Day parades in both Epping and Loughton. The grounds team work hard to ensure the planted troughs and tubs provide a wonderful display and that the wooden staging is correctly installed and maintained in first class order.

Flooding and Drainage.

As one would expect, the dry summer and only intermittently wet Autumn have produced little in the way of flooding to property. The Team have however ensured that going in to winter the drainage assets that the Council is responsible for are ready for any potential winter storms. Alongside this the Team also engaged a Certified Reservoirs Panel Engineer to undertake formal inspections of the Council's four main Flood Storage Areas situated in Thornwood and North weald. His subsequent report highlights that these are being managed in line with industry good practice and are in good order. Continued regular inspection and ongoing maintenance, the latter in conjunction with the CountyCare Team who manage the sites' biodiversity elements, will ensure their dual functionality continues to provide a positive contribution to the environment.

The downside of the drier weather is the distinct reduction in water flows through a high proportion of the districts watercourses and small streams. This has led to a spike in complaints concerning pollution in the rural areas from individual properties sewage treatment plants and septic tanks, as there is little flow to disguise the poor quality treated effluent being produced from a small number of malfunctioning plants and tanks. Officers

have needed to educate owners on the importance of regular inspection and maintenance of their plants and have in some circumstances had to resort to issuing Community Protection Notices to bring about improvements and stop the damage to the water environment.

Essex County Council's Flood and Water Management Team has recently identified Lower Sheering as an area for further investigation in respect of the flood risk posed by Surface Water. Members may recall that a Surface Water Management Plan (SWaMP) was produced by ECC's consultants for Loughton, Buckhurst Hill and Theydon Bios, and the Team will now work with ECC's newly appointed consultants to look at the issues facing the Lower Sheering area. ECC have also invited Hertfordshire County Council to participate in the work given the area of Sawbridgeworth that falls within the catchment for the River Stort. As with the Loughton Plan, the Sheering plan is intended to be completed in around 9 months' time, will be shared with EFDC members before publication.

Planning Applications involving drainage and flooding being referred to the Drainage Team for consultation in a rolling 12-month period have recently exceeded 1000 for the first time. The quality of drainage designs within applications remains incredibly varied which obviously impacts on the amount of time Officers need to spend dealing with applicants and their consultants. But the effort required does result in proposals ultimately being constructed on site that address the impact that new development has on the districts drainage assets, be that Thames Water's sewers or open ditches and watercourses.

Additionally, the increasing embedment of one of the teams Engineers within the Local Plan Implementation Team will ensure that as the master planning on the strategic local plan residential and employment sites progresses, the inclusion of high quality and sustainable medium and large-scale drainage schemes will be a top priority in the process rather than an afterthought.

Private Water Supply

The Engineering, Drainage and Water Team had its first successful prosecution under the Private Water Supply Regulations. The owner of a Nazeing nursery was fined £583 plus £500 costs and a £58 victim surcharge after pleading guilty at Chelmsford Magistrates Court to not having complied with a Notice served on him by Epping Forest District Council. The Notice specified improvement works to be carried out to the private water supply serving the nursery. Inspection of the supply confirmed it to be high risk and samples of the water showed that it contained E. coli and Enterococci which posed a potential danger to human health. These bacteria are commonly associated with human or animal bodily waste and the concentrations found were the highest the council has encountered. Residents of the site would be using this water to wash, cook and clean with.

After serving the Notice the Council had agreed to extend the time for completion of the works until 5th May 2018 however on the 4th May, the Council was informed that the work had still not been started. The improvement work continued until the 9th October 2018 when an inspection confirmed it was substantially complete subject to final sampling and analysis of the supply by the Council.

Council Officers will continue to inspect all private water supplies that are judged to be a risk, and take the necessary enforcement action to safeguard human health. These bacteria can cause significant illness and in some cases even death, especially at such high concentrations. It is the Council's statutory duty to risk assess and restore water quality to these supplies.

Fleet Operations Service

The Service has just launched an online mot booking system. This will enable motorists to book mot appointments through the internet and this will hopefully improve customer experience as well as increase customer base. As part of improving customer experience a touch screen has been installed in the Fleet reception area in Oakwood Hill Depot which will have a link to the Council website as well as the one-line booking system.

A vehicle apprentice has been appointed under the Council's Apprentice Scheme. This will create additional capacity in the team and could potentially increase income stream.

The service has placed orders for two electric charged Nissan vans. Depending on the operational performance of these two vehicles it would be possible to consider wider roll out of electrically chargeable fleet vehicles.

Parking

Christmas arrangements:

In keeping with previous years all Council car parks are free on Saturday and Sunday through the month of December.

Vere Road Loughton car park was closed on 30th November for the annual Christmas market to assist with the event.

Queens Road Upper Car Park was closed on Friday 7th December for the annual Christmas market.

Cottis Lane car park was free from 12 noon on Friday 7th December for the annual Christmas market.

Loughton Broadway Parking Review:

A public consultation on the final designs for the scheme, as agreed with Ward Members, has just closed and the comments/objections are being collated. Once a report on the outcome of the consultation becomes available I shall inform the Loughton Broadway Parking Review Members.

Epping Town Parking Review:

Following a review of the responses from the public consultation by Ward Members officers have finalise the proposed changes and made the legal Traffic Regulation Orders. This scheme will now be implemented early part of January.

Letters will be circulated to local businesses in Epping advising them about the impending changes and making them aware about business permits. Christmas Markets

Countrycare

Since the last report Countrycare has worked on eight different sites with its volunteers.

At Chigwell Heath we spent two days eradicating the aspen and birch saplings from amongst the heather and gorse. This will help the heath to develop rather than evolving into secondary woodland. The scrapes that were made in 2015 are sprouting heather so the heath is expanding, as planned.

At Roughtalleys Wood, North Weald we have made improvements to the rustic path and carried out some safety work on the boardwalk.

In Linder's Field, Buckhurst Hill we replaced the kissing gate box and eradicated an alien species that was beginning to encroach onto the meadow.

At Sheering Copse we felled some Scots pine and bramble bashed which has created a new glade in the woodland.

Church Lane, North Weald has had its willow coppiced around the pond.

Coppicing was undergone at Old Shire Lane, Waltham Abbey and the permissive rustic path with log edges has been created.

At Epping Upland Millennium Garden, we made a bug hotel.

An average of 12 volunteers came to each task.

On other sites without volunteers we have been doing routine maintenance of footpaths and strimming and pulling unwanted species. The winter work plan is underway with coppicing and tree planting planned for the new year. One such plan is the creation of a Community Orchard at Epping Upland Millennium Garden. The trees are being donated anonymously and will be planted with community assistance in February.

Leisure Management

November saw the opening of the new Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre by the Chairman on Saturday the 17th. The week leading up to the opening was particularly fraught with lots of last minutes issues to deal with. The first week of operation was massively successful - staff from all the centres across the district were brought in to conduct tours for local residents. The leisure contractor had forecast a first month increase in membership of 220 but by close of business today (28th November) there have been 663 new members signed up, over three times the forecast in just two weeks.

Centre users have been incredibly complimentary about the new facility especially via social media. As anticipated there have been some relatively minor operational issues as staff and users get used to doing things differently. The centre management have been collating suggestions from users to provide a 'you asked, we did' style feedback mechanism which has been well received. Contractually the centre is now in its six-month bedding in period which will continue until 17th May 2019.

Epping, Ongar and Loughton centres are performing well, seeing year on year increases in usage. There have been some ongoing complex complaints at Loughton which are being addressed by Officers and the contractor, however the refurbished gym and changing village continue to attract new members. Epping is suffering from some dilapidation issues due to the age of the building – the roof has a number of leaks which the recent wet weather has brought to light and the sports hall floor is in very poor condition. Ongar too has some issues with its aging pool tank and boilers which the contractor is trying to address especially as the weather gets colder.

Waste Management

As part of the Recycling Rewards project residents voted for prizes to be awarded to nominated charities. Cheques were presented in November to the following charities:

Epping Forest Community Transport

Chigwell Riding trust

Epping Forest Food Bank

Safer Places

Work has begun in partnership with Essex County Council on a county wide initiative to promote reuse and recycling.

There will be a change in the current sub-contractor to Biffa, LMB Textiles, who collect and process textiles from the recycling centres as well as door step. Once Biffa have appointed a new sub-contractor I will ask officers to inform Members through the Council Bulletin. The change will not affect current services which will continue to operate as normal.

Waste Management Team is continuing to work with various town and parish councils on volunteer litter picks and are helping Epping Town Council in reducing waste collection costs in Epping Market.