

WOODLANDS STRATEGY UPDATE

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the initiatives outlined in the approved Woodlands Strategy (Min.129/03).

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Woodlands Strategy document presented to Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 13 March 2003, gave details of a number of future initiatives / works that were planned to assist in the management and development of the Council's woodland areas, primarily Hockley Woods, Grove Woods, Kingley Woods, Betts Wood and the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park.
- 2.2 The Strategy also included a summary of what had been achieved in recent years, and in particular, details on the progress of works at the Country Park.

3 STRATEGY UPDATE

- 3.1 The five-year Forestry Authority Woodlands Grant Scheme has now been drawn up and subsequently agreed by the Forestry Authority. This will run from January 2004 until January 2009 and covers a variety of works in Hockley, Grove, Betts and Kingley Woods.
- 3.2 The details of the Woodland Grant Initiative with English Nature have also been drawn up, with confirmation and acceptance due back from English Nature very shortly. This will relate to specific works in Hockley Woods and will run from March 2004, initially for a 3 year period, but with the likelihood that it will then be extended for a further two years.
- 3.3 The Council's Woodlands Officer has also been successful in obtaining grant funding via the Essex Bio-Diversity Partnership from the local Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. This is a one-off grant of £6,000 and is linked to specific conservation works in Hockley Woods that are nearing completion.
- 3.4 The additional Woodlands Assistant post, specifically for maintaining the Country Park, has now been appointed, with the successful candidate having originally been part of the Unemployment Initiative that is based in Hockley Woods.
- 3.5 The appointment of an Arboricultural Officer to provide the extra technical experience required to assist the Woodlands Officer has so far proved more

difficult to fill. A shortlist is now being drawn up following a second advertisement.

- 3.6 The specific grant that might have been available through English Nature for the 5 year funding of an Environmental Liaison Officer is unfortunately no longer possible. However, from discussions with English Nature, they are very keen to see this sort of post in place in Rochford District and have encouraged an application for a similar 5 year funding to be made to them as a “Special Project Award.”
- 3.7 The Woodlands Officer has been working with the Farming Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), to whom the Council now subscribes, towards a grant application under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, as part of the England Rural Development Programme managed by DEFRA. This would be related to approximately 60 acres of land in the country park that is not wooded, planted with new trees, and not the lake. The grants that might be possible could be quite substantial and would be for a combination of access, capital and management works.
- 3.8 The development of the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park is continuing and since the Woodlands Strategy was written, the following works have taken place:
- Completion of the bridleways.
 - Completion and filling of the lake.
 - Further ground preparation and maintenance works.
 - The arboretum has now been planted with nearly 50 different species of native British trees and shrubs and naturalised non-native trees (although some have been damaged and will require replanting).
 - Liaison with Brogdale Horticultural Centre over obtaining the full species range for the planting of the orchard.
 - The achievement of the footpath diversion, which now means there is a continuous walkway along the whole length of the stream, running along the Park’s boundary.
- 3.9 The Council has also been successful in obtaining a further grant of £61,500 from Thames Gateway for the Country Park. This funding is specifically for all the signage, information boards, tree plaques, leaflets and education packs connected to the Country Park.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Operation Risks

In carrying out the various works and projects detailed in Section 3 of this report, it will be important that the quality of work and / or products received from suppliers, external contractors and our Woodlands staff is of an appropriate standard.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 All the above mentioned initiatives are either being met within existing revenue and capital budgets or are as a direct result of obtaining external grant funding.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

To note the progress being made on the initiatives detailed in the Woodlands Strategy and to receive a further report in 6 months time.

Roger Crofts

Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)

Background Papers:

None

For further information please contact Jeremy Bourne on:-

Tel:- 01702 318163

E-Mail:- Jeremy.bourne@rochford.gov.uk