

Minutes

Community Development Group

14th January 2020



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Mrs C Dervish	Yes	Mrs L Walters	Yes
Mrs D Garrod (Chairman)	Yes	Miss M Weeks	Yes
A Hensman (Vice-Chairman)	Yes	Mrs S Wilson	Yes
Mrs I Parker	Yes	B Wright	Yes
Mrs J Pell	Apologies		

6 MINUTES

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Community Development Group held on 30th October 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

8 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked, or statements made.

9 SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO COMMUNITY WOODLANDS – SECOND EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION

INFORMATION: Members received a presentation from Shaun Taylor, Landscape Services Team Supervisor, which provided an overview of Community Woodlands across the Braintree District; there were reportedly 15 woodlands in total. The main topics included the different types of community woodlands (e.g. urban regeneration, community resource, etc) and the ways in which different woodlands are used and maintained by volunteers groups like that of the Witham Tree Group. Examples of local woodlands, such as Cuckoo Wood in Great Notley, and James Cooke Wood in Witham, were also given.

Further to the presentation, Member were encouraged to give consideration to the current woodland resources across the District and the potential for future development opportunities that these sites had, as well as the planting of new woodlands.

The presentation slides can be viewed at:

Further to the presentation, Mr Ian Hunt, Head of Governance, reflected on some of the recent developments that had taken place within the organisation which could potentially overlap with the Work Programme of the Community Development Group (CDG), as set out in its Terms of Reference. The most significant of the recent developments was the Motion that was passed at the last meeting of Full Council on 16th December 2019, whereby Members agreed to substantially increase tree planting within the District, although it was noted the Motion did not specifically refer to the planting of woodlands or community woodlands.

Another development was the formation of the Climate Change Working Group, led by Councillor Mrs W Schmitt. It was reported that the Working Group had been tasked with the development of an action plan, the need for which had arisen in light of the Climate Emergency Motion that was passed by Members at the meeting of Full Council on 22nd July 2019. Both of the aforementioned developments could be linked directly with tree planting and the potential for new woodlands.

Given the specific nature of the 'Community Woodlands' topic, it was important that the Members of the CDG gave adequate consideration towards the features that define a community woodland, especially when compared with a conventional woodland, and the benefits that they can contribute to local communities (e.g. in terms of ecology, levels of community engagement, economics, etc). It was acknowledged that there would be a degree of overlap between the CDG and the work of Climate Change Working Group, but it was nonetheless stressed that there would be clear distinctions between the two areas of work for Members as well. It was added that officers would help to steer the work of the CDG and allocate the appropriate resources from within the organisation to help inform the outcome of the scrutiny review without the risk of the duplication of work.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hunt for his clarification. Members were then invited to raise any queries they had in relation to the presentation. The following responses were subsequently provided:

- On the subject of access by residential areas to community woodlands, it was agreed that connectivity between these two areas was important in order to encourage residents to make use of local woodlands amenities; for example, of the nine known woodlands in the Braintree Town area, the majority of these were either located close to or within residential settlements (e.g. Marks Farm, Cuckoo Wood, etc). However, other woodlands within the District, such as the James Cooke Wood in Witham, were often accessed by drivers due to its location further afield from the main town area. The attractiveness of woodlands and the quality of the access were also key factors in encouraging residents to visit such areas (e.g. woodlands located on green spaces, well-maintained footpaths, etc). Members were advised that the Landscape Services Team was a statutory consultee following the receipt of Planning Applications; if opportunities were identified within such applications by officers for the potential development of woodland areas, it was stressed that this would always be highlighted. Furthermore, suggestions would be made where possible for the improvement of footpaths and other forms of accessibility to woodlands in order to improve their usage, both within and close to residential areas, although it was added that such opportunities depended on the merit of the applications received.

- In response to a query raised as to the requirements for the maintenance of small woodlands, Members were advised that established woodland areas would normally have a regime of tree inspections every three to five years that followed the initial inspection. The frequency of such inspections was largely dependent on the insurance company's policy, of which might differ from other company policies. The most ideal approach towards the establishment and subsequent maintenance of woodlands was through the creation of volunteers groups, who could then develop a suitable management plan; through this, such groups could give adequate consideration towards the planting of suitable tree types, the risks associated with tree planting and the type of maintenance that the trees would require in the years to follow, especially given the long-term nature of tree maintenance.
- In respect of the development of new woodlands, Members were advised that native hardwood and other 'broad-leaved' tree types were the more favorable options for the planting of new trees, as these tended to be more robust and able to withstand periods of extreme weather conditions (i.e. drought). It was also important to ensure that any new trees planted were capable of competing with the existing tree stock in a given area.
- Members were advised that it was a requirement for developers to include areas of open space in new development sites. Areas of open space in new development sites were often used for the installation of drainage basins, which meant that trees could not always be planted; however, it was sometimes possible to plant a number of trees around the border of drainage sites (e.g. as with the Mulberries Redrow estate in Witham).
- On the subject of increasing the public's awareness of community woodland facilities, Members were informed that displays were usually assembled to help advertise the presence of woodlands to local residents; for example, groups such as the Friends of Bocking Blackwater were known to advertise woodland areas like that of the Ley Wood amenity in Braintree.
- Members were provided with an overview of the workload and level of resource that community woodlands imposed on both the Landscape Services Team and the Council as a whole. The organisation was responsible for the maintenance of approximately 9,000 trees across the District, and as such possessed a duty of care towards managing the risks associated with woodlands and those residents who lived within close vicinity to such areas. The Council retained a budget of approximately £25,000 to enable it to manage the potential risks as effectively as possible. It was reported that tree surveys were undertaken regularly, along with coppicing and other forms of rotational maintenance as and when needed (e.g. following cases of storm damage, onslaught of disease, etc). With regard to the purchasing of new areas of woodland, Members were encouraged to instead consider the woodland facilities that were already managed by the Council and how these areas might be more effectively resourced and maintained.
- It was noted that the costs associated with employing contractors to undertake the maintenance of wooded areas (e.g. watering of trees) could be excessive; the importance of local friend and volunteer groups (e.g. Witham Tree Group) and their efforts to maintain woodlands was therefore underlined.
- In response to a query about whether the Council could liaise with Writtle College, Chelmsford, on the topic of continuing woodland maintenance, Members were

informed that there had been a degree of historic discussion between the two organisations on this matter. Liaison between the two organisations could again be considered as a potential future option in respect of woodland maintenance.

The meeting commenced at 7.17pm and closed at 8.18pm.

Councillor Mrs D Garrod
(Chairman)