

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GROUP AGENDA

**Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020 at 7.15pm**

In accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, this meeting will be held via Zoom and by the Council's YouTube channel – Braintree District Council Committees.

Members of the public will be able to view and listen to this meeting via YouTube.  
To access the meeting please use the link below:

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**Members of the Community Development Group are requested to attend this meeting to transact the business set out in the Agenda.**

Councillor Mrs C Dervish  
Councillor Mrs D Garrod (Chairman)  
Councillor A Hensman (Vice Chairman)  
Councillor Mrs I Parker  
Councillor Mrs J Pell

Councillor Mrs L Walters  
Councillor Miss M Weeks  
Councillor Mrs S Wilson  
Councillor B Wright

Members unable to attend the meeting are requested to forward their apologies for absence to the Governance and Members Team on 01376 552525 or email [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk) by 3pm on the day of the meeting.

A WRIGHT  
Chief Executive

## INFORMATION FOR MEMBER – DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS’ INTERESTS

### Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI), Other Pecuniary Interests (OPI) or Non-Pecuniary Interests (NPI).

Any Member with a DPI, OPI or NPI must declare the nature of their interest in accordance with the Code of Conduct. Members must not participate in any discussion of the matter in which they have declared a DPI or OPI or participate in any vote, or further vote, taken on the matter at the meeting. In addition, the Member must withdraw from the Chamber where the meeting considering the business is being held unless the Member has received a dispensation from the Monitoring Officer.

### Public Question Time – Registration and Speaking:

In response to the Coronavirus the Council has implemented procedures for Public Question Time for its virtual meetings which are hosted via Zoom.

The Agenda allows for a period of up to 30 minutes for Public Question Time.

Participation will be via the submission of a written question or statement which will be read out by an Officer or the Registered Speaker during the meeting. All written questions or statements should be concise and should be able to be read **within 3 minutes** allotted for each question/statement.

Members of the public wishing to participate are requested to register by contacting the Governance and Members Team on 01376 552525 or email [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk) by midday on the working day before the day of the Committee meeting. For example, if the Committee meeting is due to be held on a Tuesday, the registration deadline is midday on Monday, (where there is a bank holiday Monday you will need to register by midday on the previous Friday).

The Council reserves the right to decline any requests to register for Public Question Time if they are received after the registration deadline.

Upon registration members of the public may indicate whether they wish to read their question/statement or to request an Officer to read their question/statement on their behalf during the virtual meeting. Members of the public who wish to read their question/statement will be provided with a link to attend the meeting to participate at the appropriate part of the Agenda.

All registered speakers are required to submit their written questions/statements to the Council by no later than 9am on the day of the meeting by emailing them to [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk). In the event that a registered speaker is unable to connect to the virtual meeting their question/statement will be read by an Officer.

Questions/statements received by the Council will be published on the Council’s website. The Council reserves the right to remove any defamatory comment in the submitted questions/statements.

The Chairman of the Committee has discretion to extend the time allocated for public question time and to amend the order in which questions/statements are presented to the Committee.

**Documents:** Agendas, Reports, Minutes and Public Question Time questions and statements can be accessed via [www.braintree.gov.uk](http://www.braintree.gov.uk)

**Data Processing:** During the meeting the Council will be collecting performance data of participants' connectivity to the meeting. This will be used for reviewing the functionality of Ms Teams/Zoom and YouTube as the Council's platform for virtual meetings and for monitoring compliance with the legal framework for Council meetings. Anonymised performance data may be shared with third parties.

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We welcome comments to make our services as efficient and effective as possible. If you have any suggestions regarding the meeting you have attended, you can send these to [governance@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:governance@braintree.gov.uk)

- 1 Apologies for Absence**
  
- 2 Member Declarations**
  1. To declare the existence and nature of any interests relating to items on the agenda having regard to the Code of Conduct for Members and having taken appropriate advice (where necessary) before the meeting.
  2. To declare the existence and nature of any instruction given by or on behalf of a political group to any Councillor who is a member of that group as to how that Councillor shall speak or vote on any matter before the Committee or the application or threat to apply any sanction by the group in respect of that Councillor should he/she speak or vote on any particular matter.
  
- 3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Community Development Group held on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2020 (copy previously circulated).
  
- 4 Public Question Time**

(See paragraph above)
  
- 5 Scrutiny Review into Vaccinations in the Braintree District – Draft Summary Report** **5 - 9**
  
- 6 Scrutiny Review into Community Woodlands - Draft Report** **10 - 21**
  
- 7 Urgent Business - Public Session**

To consider any matter which, in the opinion of the Chairman, should be considered in public by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency.

<b>Scrutiny Review into Vaccinations in the Braintree District – Draft Report</b>		<b>Agenda No: 5</b>
<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Health and Communities</b>	
<b>Corporate Outcome:</b>	<b>Residents live well in healthy and resilient communities where residents feel supported</b>	
<b>Report presented by:</b>	<b>Councillor Mrs Diana Garrod, Chairman of the Community Development Group</b>	
<b>Report prepared by:</b>	<b>Jessica Mann, Governance and Members Officer</b>	
<b>Background Papers:</b>	<b>Public Report</b>	
<a href="#"><u>Agenda and Minutes of the evidence gathering session of the Community Development Group on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020</u></a>	<b>Key Decision: No</b>	
<b>Executive Summary:</b>		
<p>The Community Development Group’s first topic for Scrutiny Review for 2019/20 was a review into ‘Vaccinations in the Braintree District.’ As part of the first stage of the Scrutiny Review, officers were required to establish which authority was responsible for vaccination and immunisation in the Braintree District, whether there were any notable issues in relation to vaccine uptake and how this compared with vaccination uptake across the wider Mid-Essex area.</p> <p>On 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019, the Community Development Group considered information and data relating to vaccination uptake across the Braintree District provided by a number of external sources which included NHS England and Essex County Council. The key aim for Members was to ascertain whether there was an issue with vaccination uptake at District level, and whether this compared favourably or not with the wider Mid-Essex area, Essex as a whole and nationally.</p> <p>Although it was acknowledged that there were some discrepancies with the data provided, Members agreed that there did not seem to be any notable issues with vaccination uptake in the District. Based on the conclusions drawn from the evidence available, it was considered by the Group that there would be little benefit in pursuing the Scrutiny Review any further.</p> <p>This report provides a summary of the Scrutiny Review into Vaccinations and provides the Council with a summary of the actions that the Group took in order to reach the conclusions drawn from the Review.</p>		

**Recommended Decision:**

1. Members are asked to review the draft report for the Scrutiny Review into Vaccinations in the Braintree District.
2. Authorise the Chairman to finalise the draft report, prior to its submission to Full Council, and to give authority to Governance Officers to make any necessary administrative changes to the report.

**Purpose of Decision:**

To finalise the draft report for the Scrutiny Review into Vaccinations in the Braintree District, prior to its submission to Full Council.

**Any Corporate implications in relation to the following should be explained in detail.**

<b>Financial:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Legal:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Safeguarding:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Equalities/Diversity:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Customer Impact:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Environment and Climate Change:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Consultation/Community Engagement:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Risks:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Officer Contact:</b>	Jessica Mann, Governance and Members Officer
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## **Scrutiny Review into Vaccinations 2019**

The Community Development Group's first topic for Scrutiny Review for the period 2019/2020 was 'Vaccinations in the Braintree District.'

The Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Review were as follows:-

- Who is responsible for managing/overseeing the Vaccination Programme in the Braintree District?
- What Vaccinations/diseases are covered by the "normal" programme – age/other triggers to get Vaccinations?
- What are Braintree District's rates of vaccination in comparison to Essex / National averages?
  - Would any rates give rise to public health concerns
  - Are there any trends (good or bad) we should be aware of
  - Are there any hotspot concerns within the District (e.g. geographics/demographic groups)
- What "optional" vaccinations are available for people and how?
  - Best practice/emerging practice
  - Travel

The first stage of the Scrutiny Review was to establish who was responsible for vaccination and immunisation in the Braintree District, whether there were any notable issues in relation to vaccine uptake and how this compared with uptake across the wider Mid-Essex area.

Enquiries were made with the Director of Wellbeing, Public Health and Communities at Essex County Council, Dr Mike Gogarty, in order to identify which authority had direct responsibility for vaccinations in the Braintree District. Dr Gogarty confirmed that vaccination and immunisation in the Braintree District was the responsibility of NHS England (East of England branch) and an invitation was sent to the local lead consultant for Screening and Immunisation. Unfortunately, this invitation could not be accepted due to capacity issues within that particular service; however, a briefing paper which addressed the questions asked by the Group in relation to vaccination uptake in the Braintree District was provided to enable the Group to explore this within the terms of the Review.

The briefing paper included details about The Essex Vaccination Oversight Committee (EVOC) which oversees effective commissioning and delivery of immunisation services, ensures vaccinations are of a high quality, responsive, progressive and safe for the population of Essex. The briefing paper explained that the EVOC meets quarterly or more frequently if required, and its function is to provide strategic direction to ensure that there is full implementation of national vaccination policies within the required timeframe and long term sustainability. The briefing paper also clarified the following:-

- Immunisations offered up to the age of 5 are generally given at GP practices and the scheduling of these vaccinations is managed by the Child Health Information Service (CHIS) who schedule childhood immunisations and report uptake data.
- The Community and School Aged Immunisation Service (provided by Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, EPUT) are commissioned to assist in the follow up children that are not up to date with their childhood immunisations.
- Immunisations offered in adolescence are delivered in schools by the Community and School Aged Immunisation Service. Catch-up sessions are often offered in schools for children that have been absent, and vaccination can also take place in the community clinics offered by this service. This helps support reducing inequalities by providing additional access for home-educated children, Gypsy and Traveller communities and some faith groups. The community clinics also provide support for patients with needle-phobia. These clinics cover support for patients from birth to up to 19 years of age.
- Vaccinations offered to older adults are generally delivered in GP practices, with the exception of the seasonal flu vaccine which is also offered through community pharmacy, and some maternity units for pregnant women only.

Further to the briefing paper provided, the Group concluded that vaccination uptake for immunisations within Mid Essex is generally amongst the highest in the County, and Essex frequently demonstrates uptake levels slightly above that of the national average. The data shows that uptake for the Braintree GP practices is broadly similar to that of the Mid Essex CCG. The recommended uptake rates for childhood vaccinations is 95%, which would provide 'herd immunity' (i.e. those that are contraindicated for vaccination would be protected because so much of the community is vaccinated that it prevents the circulation of disease). Uptake targets vary for the adult programmes; both nationally and locally, the uptake of key vaccinations is generally lower than the 95% level and has been dropping slightly year-on-year since around 2014. There is a national push to increase uptake in childhood vaccinations; for example, in early 2019, a National Measles and Rubella Elimination Strategy was published. There is also a local strategy focussing on how we can improve vaccination uptake across the East of England.

The Group agreed that the data provided by NHS England seemed to suggest that the level of vaccination uptake in the Braintree District were in alignment with the vaccination rates for Mid-Essex, and that the County as a whole frequently demonstrated levels of vaccination uptake that were slightly above that of the national average.

The Group reflected that the key aim of the Scrutiny Review was to ascertain whether there was an issue with vaccination uptake at District level, and if this compared favourably or not with the wider Mid-Essex area, Essex as a whole and nationally. Members compared the information received from NHS England with that of the European Region of the World Health Organisation (WHO). The WHO sets a

target which stipulates that 95% of children are vaccinated and immunised against preventable diseases by vaccination and targeted for elimination or control.

From the data provided by NHS England, the following areas of note were identified:

- The data related to GP Surgeries only and as such did not necessarily give an accurate representation of the entire District's vaccination and immunisation rates. It is likely that some residents travelled beyond the District for the service, and others perhaps sought private medical care or attended pharmacies instead.
- The data related primarily to routine vaccinations amongst children (e.g. MMR, Polio etc.) and did not encompass older age groups or the rate of optional vaccination uptake, such as for those travelling abroad or for seasonal influenza.

Despite there being some discrepancies with the data, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The data provided by NHS England gave a portrait of the District's vaccination and immunisation rates that was, as much as possible, an accurate and fair representation.
- Members agreed that the data was both positive and reassuring for the District as it indicated that the WHO's target of 95% was being achieved across most areas.
- The District did not appear to have any major issues regarding rates of vaccination uptake.

Based on the conclusions drawn from the evidence available, the Community Development Group did not feel it was necessary to continue with exploring the topic of Vaccinations. The findings of the Group were both positive and conclusive in nature and there did not appear to be any major issues regarding vaccine uptake within the District. It was therefore concluded that the Scrutiny Review had met with its substantive Terms of Reference and there was no scope to make any recommendations to the Cabinet or any of its partners as a result of its findings.

The Community Development Group would like to thank the following representatives for their help and the time taken to identify and provide the necessary data to support the Scrutiny Review:

- Dr Mike Gogarty, Director Wellbeing, Public Health and Communities at Essex County Council.
- Clinical Leads and Officers of NHS England (East of England branch).

<b>Scrutiny Review into Community Woodlands - Draft Report</b>		<b>Agenda No: 6</b>
<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Environment and Place Health and Communities</b>	
<b>Corporate Outcome:</b>	<b>A sustainable environment and a great place to live, work and play A well connected and growing district with high quality homes and infrastructure Residents live well in healthy and resilient communities where residents feel supported</b>	
<b>Report presented by:</b>	<b>Councillor Mrs Diana Garrod, Chairman of the Community Development Group</b>	
<b>Report prepared by:</b>	<b>Jessica Mann, Governance and Members Officer</b>	
<b>Background Papers:</b>	<b>Public Report</b>	
<a href="#"><u>Agendas, Minutes and copies of Power Point presentations delivered during evidence gathering sessions of the Community Development Group 2019/20</u></a>	<b>Key Decision: No</b>	
<b>Executive Summary:</b>		
<p>In October 2019, the Community Development Group began their next topic assigned for the purposes of scrutiny review: the topic was 'Community Woodlands.' As part of their initial review, Members of the Group were required to establish a clear definition of what constituted a community woodland when compared with that of a regular woodland, and from this to undertake research into the background of community woodlands and examples of these within the Braintree District. Members also explored the impacts of woodlands on climate emissions and other ecological benefits, as well as the community benefits of woodlands in the form of a cost/benefit review.</p> <p>Once all the available evidence streams had been examined and conclusions drawn, the Community Development Group were asked to make their recommendations to Cabinet and then to Council going forward. The recommendations of the Group are set out below and in the main body of the report:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The progress of planting more trees is monitored and measured.</li> <li>2. The Council's Tree Strategy 2016 should be updated to include more information about the Council's objectives and aspirations for new community woodlands. A new updated Action Plan could be considered.</li> </ol>		

3. The Council should protect the District's trees, woods and forests and improve our woodland assets. Where possible, the Council should expand woodland cover and possibly create new woodlands, perhaps as part of the Local Plan or close to new large developments where woodlands would help to manage risks such as flooding and improve biodiversity.
4. The Council adopts a long-term view and plants more resilient species appropriate to soil type, and gives consideration to after care and management costs, as employing contractors is expensive.
5. The Council should give consideration to the expansion of woodland cover where it would most benefit communities, support and contribute to health and well-being, education, the economy and environment.
6. The Council should exercise its right to insist to developer that certain species of tree be planted at development sites with a more robust approach to ensure appropriate trees are planted and maintained (using the Tree Strategy and associated policies).
7. Liaison between the Council and Writtle College about opportunities and collaboration regarding the maintenance of woodlands should continue, and there should also be better support towards Town and Parish Councils and voluntary organisations through the provision of information in relation to the ownership and maintenance of woodlands.
8. The Council should identify ways to improve and encourage community involvement with Community Woodlands and raise awareness of their benefits.
9. The Council considers the development of a public 'woodlands' website which local residents could utilise in order to make suggestions on ways that the maintenance of existing woodlands could be improved, or new locations for tree planting.
10. The Council explore funding opportunities such as the Urban Tree Challenge Fund, and whether it could submit an expression of interest for this. The Council could also work with partners who have access to funding, such as Dedham Vale AOBN.
11. The Council produces a guide for Town and Parish Councils and community groups who wish to set up a community woodland covering.
12. The Council focuses its resources on managing its existing woodland rather than planting additional woodlands; however, it should still try to support groups who wish to set up additional community woodland sites (e.g. Witham Tree Group).
13. The Council improves residential access to our existing woodland by use of signage and paths.

**Recommended Decision:**

1. The Community Development Group are asked to review the draft report and to finalise the content and draft recommendations to ensure that they are in keeping with the Terms of Reference of the Scrutiny Review and the evidence gathered.
2. Authorise the Chairman to finalise the draft report, prior to its submission to Full Council, and to give authority to Governance Officers to make any necessary administrative changes to the report.

**Purpose of Decision:**

To finalise the draft Scrutiny Review Report into Community Woodlands prior to its submission to Full Council.

**Any Corporate implications in relation to the following should be explained in detail.**

<b>Financial:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Legal:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Safeguarding:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Equalities/Diversity:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Customer Impact:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
<b>Environment and Climate Change:</b>	No matters arising out of this report.
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**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GROUP**  
**SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO 'COMMUNITY WOODLANDS'**

The Community Development Group selected 'Community Woodlands' as their topic for Scrutiny Review within the Terms of Reference set out below:-

- What is the “background” of Community Woodlands in the Braintree District?
- What are the current/past examples of Community Woodlands?
  - I) List of woodlands
  - II) Successes/challenges encountered with past/current woods
- Are there any policies/criteria that the Council holds in relation to Community Woodlands?
- What is the impact on climate emission of woodlands?
  - I) Ecological benefits
  - II) Carbon emissions diminished by woodlands, and any statistics available in this area?
- What are the community benefits of woodlands, as part of a Cost/Benefit Review?
  - I) Costs associated with maintenance of woodlands vs. benefits

As part of their initial review, the Group were required to establish a clear definition of what constituted a community woodland when compared with that of a regular woodland, and from this to undertake research into the background of community woodlands and examples of these within the Braintree District.

There were three evidence gathering sessions in total which took place on the following dates:

- 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019
- 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020
- 19<sup>th</sup> February 2020

In order to support the Group's evidence gathering, officers in the Landscapes team were able to provide the Group with much of the necessary background information through verbal presentations at evidence gathering sessions with Members. The Landscape Services team identified a number of key evidence streams for the Group and gave suggestions as to appropriate external representatives and partners of the Council who could attend meetings and help to inform the review.

## **RESEARCH OF THE GROUP**

### **The research of the Group established the following:-**

#### **Woodlands**

The Group identified two useful definitions to define woodlands when compared with 'community' woodlands.

Forest Research<sup>1</sup> defines a woodland as land under strands of trees with a canopy cover of at least 20%, or having the potential to achieve this. The definition is in relation to land use, rather than land cover, and as such integral open space and felled areas awaiting restocking are included as woodland.

Llais y Goedwig<sup>2</sup> defines community woodlands as: "Fundamentally, any woodland where the local community has some degree of control over how the woodland is run or managed."

On 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019, the Group agreed to a number of lines of enquiry to facilitate the Scrutiny Review, including;

- The identification of those woodlands that were under the responsibility of Braintree District Council and which were not;
- The impact of woodlands on carbon emissions and other ecological benefits;
- Whether any woodlands within the District had been assigned a Tree Preservation Order (TPO);
- The impact of invasive species and diseases on woodlands, such as Ash Dieback;
- Projects in respect of tree planting that was being implemented by Essex County Council; and
- The apparent reluctance of some Parish Councils to adopt local woodlands.

#### **Evidence supplied by Braintree District Council's Landscape Services Team**

The Landscape Services Team Supervisor provided the Group with the following data:-

- General information in relation to the definition of a woodland, woodlands within the ownership of Braintree District Council (e.g. Cuckoo Wood in

<sup>1</sup> Forest Research - <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2018/woodland-areas-and-planting/woodland-area/>

<sup>2</sup> Llais y Goedwig (Voice of community woodlands in Wales) - <http://llaisygoedwig.org.uk/about-community-woodlands/what-is-a-community-woodland/>

Braintree) and a number of the benefits of woodlands to local communities and the environment, such as increased biodiversity and leisure facilities.

- An overview of the various community woodland sites located across the District and the ways in which different woodlands are used and maintained by different groups, such as volunteer organisations (e.g. Witham Tree Group).

The following key areas were noted from Mr Taylor's presentation:-

- Research by the Forestry Commission indicates that there are broadly five types of community woodland which are largely based on a particular set of circumstances and the commitment of the members of local communities who want to actively engage in woodland management:
  - **Urban regeneration:** Often on neglected public land where there has been a local community involvement with management often in the form of a Friends Group, or similar.
  - **Community resource:** Woodland owned and managed by the local community, normally through a Parish Council.
  - **Economic partnership:** Land owned by others - community management for economic benefits such as firewood or charcoal production.
  - **Community place:** Land owned by others. Community volunteers often manage and work for conservation or wellbeing/therapy workshops.
  - **Lifestyle alternative:** Group work and live in the woodland.
- Braintree District Council was reportedly responsible for the management of 15 different woodlands sites, which included: Coggeshall Pieces in Halstead; James Cooke Wood in Witham; Cuckoo Wood in Great Notley; woodlands on the Bocking Blackwater/Marks Farm development area and the woodland sites located adjacent to the River Brain, such as Hoppit Mead and Marshalls Park respectively.
- Braintree District Council was responsible for the maintenance of approximately 9,000 trees across the District, and possessed a duty of care towards managing the risks associated with woodlands (e.g. damage from storms, onslaught of diseases, etc) The Council also retained a budget of £25,000 to enable it to manage potential risks.
- James Cooke Community Woodland, off Maldon Road, Witham - Witham Town Council and local people planted the woodland in 1993/94 to provide an area of quiet relaxation for local people and to create habitat that is attractive to a wide variety of wildlife. The woodland was planted using British trees local to the area and open grassland areas within the

wood provide a wide range of habitats in which to view birds, butterflies and other wildlife.

- Apart from the woodlands within Council ownership, most of the more aesthetic and attractive areas of open space in the District tended to be concentrated along the main river corridors of the Colne, Blackwater and Brain.
- A deliberate policy of planned new planting would limit the space available for some other forms of recreation; a new community woodland planted on agricultural land would need to be considered as a land purchase or as part of an integrated mosaic of open space provision for a new garden community development(s). Parcels of land on the edge of the major settlements which may be attractive as a starting point for a new woodland would probably be in use for agriculture and in the current climate. Many areas were subject to speculative planning applications with the attendant prospect of a higher land value.
- The public's perception of woodland management was sometimes antagonistic, with some resistance to change.
- The Landscape Services Team was a statutory consultee following the receipt of Planning applications. It was highlighted that potential opportunities for the development of woodland areas were always sought, as well as suggestions made where possible for the development of footpaths and other means of accessibility to woodlands to help improve the level of visits from the public.
- It was a requirement for developers to include areas of open space in new development site areas (e.g. as at the Mulberries Redrow estate in Witham).
- The costs associated with employing contractors to undertake the maintenance of wooded areas, such as the watering of trees, could be excessive. The support provided by volunteer and friend groups, such as the Witham Tree Group, in the maintenance of woodlands, was therefore imperative in helping to ensure the sustainability of woodlands.

### **INPUT FROM WITHAM TREE GROUP**

At the invitation of the Group, Mr Barry Fleet, Chairman of the Witham Tree Group provided a presentation on a local perspective on subjects relating to woodlands such as the planting of trees, liaison between various partners and the impacts of climate change on the District's woodlands.

The key points that arose from the presentation included:-

- The close liaison between the Witham Tree Group and Witham Town Council, to whom it supplied tree warden services.
- The success of the Group's partnership with Aegon Insurance, who regularly assisted the Group with the movement of heavy trees, and its

constructive relationship with the general public, with whom the Group would consult regularly with on new areas for tree planting. Increasingly, residents were also offering their suggestions as well via the Group's website.

- A project that was underway between the Witham Tree Group and Braintree District Council for the creation of World War One Memorial Tree Park. Over 50 trees had been planted thus far, and it was expected that further trees would be planted in 2021 in order to bring the total number of trees to 80.
- Emphasis on the formation of new woodlands as a means through which the issue of climate change could be combated. The presence of woodlands also served the purpose of creating new habitat for wildlife, as well as leisure opportunities for local residents, which could also help address issues associated with mental wellbeing.
- Wholesale tree-planting schemes in conjunction with the community were possible, as had taken place previously at James Cooke Wood in Witham. Similar initiatives involving tree planting were reported to be underway at Chelmsford City Council and Colchester Borough Council.

## **ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Policy - The Council's Tree Strategy 2016**

Following the presentation from the Witham Tree Group, the Chairman requested that any policies the Council held in relation to Community Woodlands be circulated to Members. These included:-

- The [Council's Tree Strategy](#): this Strategy was approved as a planning guidance document by the Council on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2016; the Strategy incorporated a Five Year Action and provided a number of corporate and management objectives, including management of the Council's tree stock, tree protection and replacement.
- Members' comments on the Strategy was that the document did not appear to include a detailed strategy for the planting of new woodlands. Members also questioned whether the action plan within the Tree Strategy has been subject to an annual review as indicated upon its adoption.

### **Possible Site Visit 2020**

As part of its evidence gathering, the Group were asked to consider the benefits of a possible site visit to one or more of the local District's woodlands, as this would allow Members to witness different types of woodland conservation and maintenance work in practice. Sites that were suggested for a potential visit included Hoppit Mead Nature Reserve in Braintree and Coggeshall Pieces in Halstead.

Members agreed that a visit was not necessary as it was unlikely to bring any further value to the overall Scrutiny Review into Community Woodlands beyond the evidence that had already been provided by witnesses in their presentations and information shared in discussions between Members at scrutiny sessions.

## **CONCLUSIONS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW**

In conducting a Scrutiny Review of Community Woodlands, Members were mindful not to duplicate their work with that of the Climate Change Working Group. In concluding their Scrutiny Review, Members have identified the following recommendations below. Each recommendation listed below includes the Group's evidence in support:-

### **Recommendation 1**

*The progress of planting more trees is monitored and measured.*

The Community Development Group noted the Council's decision at the meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019 to "...substantially increase tree planting within the district on public and private land." There is generally an increased value and invigorated appreciation of trees and woodlands, and the wildlife it supports. There is a willingness to protect our natural environment and mitigate the impact of climate change and air pollution. It was conveyed by Members during meetings of the Community Development Group that there seems to be a general discord regarding destruction of woodland in favour of construction and development and problematic pest and disease outbreaks.

### **Recommendation 2**

*The Council's Tree Strategy 2016 should be updated to include more information about the Council's objectives and aspirations for new community woodlands. A new updated Action Plan could be considered.*

The document does not appear to include a detailed strategy for the planting of new woodlands. At the presentation held during the meeting of the Local Plan Sub-Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2017, it was stated that the Five Year Action Plan (2016-2021) within the Tree Strategy "...would be subject to annual review."

### **Recommendation 3**

*The Council should protect the District's trees, woods and forests and improve our woodland assets. Where possible, the Council should expand woodland cover and possibly create new woodlands, perhaps as part of the Local Plan or close to new large developments where woodlands would help to manage risks such as flooding and improve biodiversity.*

The Community Development Group recognises the economic, social and environmental benefits of Community Woodlands (as part of a holistic approach), and also realises the benefits for both people and nature, with added quality of life for all.

#### **Recommendation 4**

*The Council adopts a long-term view and plants more resilient species appropriate to soil type, and gives consideration to after care and management costs, as employing contractors is expensive.*

It was noted that the District had some very active voluntary groups who had contributed considerably to the planting, maintenance and upkeep of woodlands. Native hardwood and other broad-leaved tree types were the more favourable options for the planting of new trees, as these tended to be more robust. Any new trees planted should be capable of competing with the existing tree stock in a given area.

#### **Recommendation 5**

*The Council should give consideration to the expansion of woodland cover where it would most benefit communities, support and contribute to health and well-being, education, the economy and environment.*

Preferred sites should be closer to towns where more residents would be able to access and enjoy them. Locations within the local plan should be considered, and potential sites must also enhance local environments and wider landscapes.

#### **Recommendation 6**

*The Council should exercise its right to insist to developer that certain species of tree be planted at development sites with a more robust approach to ensure appropriate trees are planted and maintained (using the Tree Strategy and associated policies).*

The Community Development Group was advised that, when granting planning permission, the Council was within its rights to insist to developers that certain species of trees be planted at the development sites. Other agreements between the Council and the developer might require the developer to plant a specific number of trees, or to maintain that number by replacing any trees that had died. It was noted that it was more cost effective for developers to replace dead trees than it was to arrange maintenance.

#### **Recommendation 7**

*Liaison between the Council and Writtle College about opportunities and collaboration regarding the maintenance of woodlands should continue, and there should also be better support towards Town and Parish Councils and voluntary organisations through the provision of information in relation to the ownership and maintenance of woodlands.*

It was inferred from the scrutiny review that Town and Parish Council's were seemingly apprehensive to take ownership of local woodlands due to Health and Safety regulations, insurance costs and legal requirements. The Council

could perhaps work with Town and Parish Councils to help reduce unnecessary regulations in this area.

### **Recommendation 8**

*The Council should identify ways to improve and encourage community involvement with Community Woodlands and raise awareness of their benefits.*

The Community Development Group recognises that Community Woodlands can bring a number of benefits to residents within local communities (e.g. in the form of leisure provision, aesthetic of the landscape, etc). There were also environmental benefits, such as added habitat and the opportunity for increased biodiversity, as well as means of reducing carbon emissions, thus helping to combat climate change.

### **Recommendation 9**

*The Council considers the development of a public 'woodlands' website which local residents could utilise in order to make suggestions on ways that the maintenance of existing woodlands could be improved, or new locations for tree planting.*

The Witham Tree Group already has such a website, which provided the Group a useful tool through which members of the Group and local residents could exchange ideas for improving or adding to woodlands site. A website could also help to improve the transparency of communication between the Council on public on this matter, in addition to improving knowledge and awareness of the benefits of woodlands to residents. Updates or change to relevant policies could also be made easily accessible to the public.

### **Recommendation 10**

*The Council explore funding opportunities such as the Urban Tree Challenge Fund, and whether it could submit an expression of interest for this. The Council could also work with partners who have access to funding, such as Dedham Vale AOBN.*

Increased funding opportunities would allow the Council to support wooded areas within urban locations across the District.

### **Recommendation 11**

*The Council produces a guide for Town and Parish Councils and community groups who wish to set up a community woodland covering.*

Town and Parish Councils appear to have limited knowledge in respect of woodland provision, ownership and maintenance that they can support within their local areas. A more informative guide could explain how to plan a community woodland, what to look out for, recommended tree species for different soil types and locations, planting guidance and maintenance. We could allow advertising in this to offset the costs.

## **Recommendation 12**

*The Council focuses its resources on managing its existing woodland rather than planting additional woodlands; however, it should still try to support groups who wish to set up additional community woodland sites (e.g. Witham Tree Group).*

Any new trees planted are required to be capable of competing with the existing tree stock in a given location. Focusing resources on the current woodlands within the Council's remit of responsibility would help to identify ways of managing and resourcing them more effectively and efficiently. The provision of support to local groups (e.g. funding, advertising, etc) would help to increase woodland cover and improve existing tree stocks. Furthermore, the Council could foster improved relationships with such groups, as well as identify potential future opportunities for funding and other project working.

## **Recommendation 13**

*The Council improves residential access to our existing woodland by use of signage and paths.*

Increased signage and improved accessibility to woodlands would help to increase the public's awareness of such areas and the benefits that they can bring, as well and improve access of those sites to a wider demographic, thus increasing rates of visitation.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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- Mr Shaun Taylor – Landscape Services Team Supervisor, Braintree District Council
- Mr Barry Fleet – Chairman of the Witham Tree Group