

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 9 JUNE 2015

REPORT BY CHAIRMAN OF ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

WARD(S) AFFECTED: none

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To review and determine Environment Scrutiny Committee's future work programme

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION:

<u>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION:</u>	
(A)	the work programme shown in this report be agreed; and
(B)	that a Conservation Area Appraisal reference group be set up as a trial, to report back to scrutiny in Feb 2016

1.0 Background

1.1 Items previously required, identified or suggested for the Environment Scrutiny work programme are set out in **Essential Reference Paper B**.

2.0 Report

2.1 The draft agenda for 2015/16 meetings of Environment Scrutiny Committee is shown in **Essential Reference Paper B**. The timing of some items shown may have to change depending on availability of essential data (eg from central government).

2.2 Members are asked whether there is any additional topic they wish to put forward for inclusion on any future agenda.

- 2.3 Members are also asked whether they wish to extend an invitation to one or more of the Executive Members to attend a particular meeting or for a specific agenda item.
- 2.4 One issue discussed at the last meeting of this committee and which still needs to be resolved, is the potential future role of Ward Members and Environment Scrutiny in progressing and supporting the Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) management plans.
- 2.5 It was proposed that Councillors (with CAA plans in their ward) would be set up in Reference Groups, as the plans are ready and approved – to meet together under the guidance of lead officers to discuss progress on the management plans. The groups could look at balancing progress of quick/easy ‘wins’ against investing resources into large/complex ‘problem’ sites. Councillors would be encouraged and supported to work with local householders, landowners and relevant agencies (eg town/parish councils) to progress items on the management plan.
- 2.6 In response to concerns raised at the earlier Environment Scrutiny meeting in February, there is no intention that important duties are to be delegated down in some way to an informal Member group. The aspiration is that Members, with the benefit of their local knowledge and understanding, collectively with officers, will be better placed to ensure that actions are achieved. Where any Reference Group determines that formal action is required or that an action is more appropriately undertaken by Officers, then that can be referred to officers in the normal way.
- 2.7 Councillors would be acting in their role of community leaders to help bring people together to find practical and pragmatic ways forward (including identifying possible sources of grants etc).
- 2.8 A concern was raised at the previous meeting that the suggested approach would take important duties away from Officers in relation to looking after important buildings in the district. However, buildings on their own, whilst an important element of the character of the Conservation Areas, do not make up that character totally. Often the character is a result of the interaction of spaces, boundaries, trees, buildings and uses. As a result, harmful impacts do not arise solely as a result of poorly maintained buildings – but also untidy spaces, poorly managed boundaries and trees etc. No-one is better placed to understand, appreciate and advise on this than the Ward Councillor.

- 2.9 Working in these Reference Groups will give councillors the chance to be supported by specialist officers, learn from each other and identify successes and any areas of challenge or common problems. It will also give experienced ward councillors and newly elected councillors the chance to work together on an important project.
- 2.10 The Groups' experiences could then be reported annually to Environment Scrutiny – to record progress against the management plans but, more importantly, to make the committee aware of any common barriers or challenges. This will allow scrutiny to consider the issues and make recommendations to the Executive Member (or other agencies) as to how progress might be achieved.
- 2.11 It is recommended that an initial, trial Reference Group be set up covering the areas of:
- Hunsden
 - Much Hadham, Green Tye
 - Widford
 - High Wych
 - Little Hadham, Bury Green
- 2.12 Other groups would be set up as further CAA plans are approved.
- 2.13 Environment Scrutiny is asked to support the setting up of an initial Reference Group (as outlined above) and to accept a first report on CAA management plan progress at their meeting on 23 Feb 2016.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers: none

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