ENFIELD CHASE CARBON WOODLAND

Report of the Director Resources

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Executive Member: Ralph Sangster, (Resources & Performance)

Local Members: Stephen Boulton (Hatfield Rural)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide information regarding the Rural Estates carbon fund woodland creation project at Enfield Chase. The project comprises funding from the Forestry Commission to plant over 37 acres of Carbon Woodland as a buffer to the M25. The woodland will be income generating, have carbon funding credits; improve the local landscape by buffering the M25, improve the lettable agricultural unit and increase public access with permissive footpaths and parkland areas.

2. Summary

2.1 The Enfield Chase Estate freehold title is owned by Hertfordshire County Council and extends to approximately 300 acres in total (plan Appendix 1). The estate is held as part of the County Council’s Green Belt Estate and is also subject to Duchy of Lancaster restrictive covenants which limit the use to agricultural or recreational. The site of the planting includes the holdings of Chequers Mead and New Cottage Farm which forms part of the Enfield Chase Estate and comprise of approximately 140 acres of agricultural land, both arable and pasture.

2.2 The site has been partly vacant for four years and has been subject to significant security issues including unauthorised access and fly-tip. In addition the site has poor access and infrastructure (e.g. derelict buildings and poor fencing). Rural Estates explored alternative uses for the site which would improve the holding long term as well as increase attractiveness to potential agricultural tenants.
2.3 The Forestry Commission have a Carbon Fund Woodland Creation scheme which offers funding for tree planting and capital works in priority areas. Enfield Chase is located within a high priority area due to its proximity to the M25. Phase 1 of the application for this fund has been completed, which outlines the design concept plan for the new woodland (Appendix 2) and has received a very positive response from the forestry commission. Phase 2 which is the stakeholders’ consultation and the funding application is also now underway.

2.4 The Rural Estates objective for planting Enfield Chase woodland and others is to create a community asset which fulfils Hertfordshire’s ‘County of Opportunity’ ethos. Enfield Chase Woodland will have more public access routes of improved quality therefore providing residents of Potters Bar and local areas the ‘Opportunity to be Healthy and Safe’. Local resident involvement will include a tree planting activity day with the neighbouring school and involvement with the Beekeeper’s Association, who intend to use part of the site as an apiary offering the ‘Opportunity to Take Part’.

3. Recommendation

3.1 That the Resources and Performance Cabinet Panel noted the content of the report.

4. Background

4.1 Rural Estates have recently planted 6.5 acre woodland comprising of over 4,000 trees near Napsbury and two smaller woodlands near Kings Langley and Elstree. These have all been funded through various woodland creation schemes. These successes alongside other good news stories such as Heartswood Forest (near Sandridge) encouraged Rural Estates to seek further funding for a larger new woodland at Enfield Chase.

4.2 The site of the carbon woodland covers the holdings known as Chequers Mead and New Cottage Farm and comprises approximately 140 acres (57 hectares) which have been partly vacant for four years. Despite tendering the site has remained vacant due to a number of security issues including unauthorised access and fly-tip as well as poor access across the site. Rural Estates therefore looked to alternative sources of income to improve and manage the site whilst improving the holding long term.

4.3 As the site sits in a priority area, the Forestry Commission will provide 100% funding for trees, 100% funding for capital items associated with recreation i.e. fencing off footpaths, gates etc (capped at 10% of total application cost) and 40% towards cost of tracks to maintain the woodland and extract timber (capped at 10% of total application cost). By improving the infrastructure and upgrading the surface of the
bridleway, improving access, and erecting fencing and gates, it should make the remaining grazing land more attractive to incoming tenants.

4.4 The Forestry Commission have been very encouraging thus far and have contacted Rural Estates requesting that the Enfield Chase Carbon Woodland be a case study for the Forestry Commission and is used to illustrate the scheme nationally. Having received such a positive response, Rural Estates are proactively exploring other woodland funds to see if more woodlands can be planted across the Rural Estate, one possibility is HS2 woodland fund.

4.5 There is also interest from a local forestry journalist who lives in Potters Bar, and at key points the Rural Estates team will ensure relevant publicity takes place to promote the project as a whole and the good news story.

4.6 Rural Estates are in communication with the Welwyn and Hatfield Beekeepers Association and hope to be able to accommodate a new apiary as part of the Woodland.

4.7 Phase 2 of the funding application is currently underway and the Forestry Commission are eager for the tree planting to start as soon as possible, hopefully November/December 2018. Due to the number of trees required (approximately 34,500) it will be a two year project, aiming to complete in spring 2020.

4.8 It is anticipated the project will really support Hertfordshire’s County of Opportunity objectives as it will be income generating, have community involvement from local schools and improve the environment and habitat of the area. In addition it will improve public access to the countryside, as well as being a very positive news story for the County Council to publicise.
5. **Town Planning**

5.1 The site is not covered by any area of search for the future development within the Hertsmere Local Plan.

5.2 Consultations with Planning Property Team (PPT) state that planting a woodland belt along the M25 will create a natural buffer from noise, site and visual pollution and provide mature landscaping to improve the prospects for any future development of the northern half of the holding.

6. **Property Implications**

6.1 The remaining area, approximately 75 acres (30 hectares) will be an improved agricultural holding. The capital funding will be used to improve roadside access as well as stock proof fencing across the site. The County Council already has interest from two parties who would like to rent the holding once this work has been undertaken.

6.2 Rural Estates aim to let the remaining land on a Farm Business Tenancy as a stock farm which will bring a revenue income.

6.3 The additional trees will improve the habitat corridor between the existing woodland (Fir and Ponds Wood and Five Acre Wood) whilst also restoring the Enfield Chase historic woodland, a previous heritage site.

7. **Financial Implications**

7.1 Rural Estates are seeking significant funding from the Forestry Commission to undertake the planting of 35,000 trees and additional capital works.

8. **Equality Act Implications**

8.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking.

8.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council’s statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.

8.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and
(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

8.4 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out as this report provides an update and does not require a decision.

Background Information
None
Appendix 1 – Enfield Chase Estate
Appendix 2 – Proposed Carbon woodland planting scheme