

Committee:	Environment Committee	Agenda Item
Date:	10 November 2009	5
Title:	Lead Officer's Report	
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Summary

- 1 This report updates Members on matters that are not included elsewhere on the agenda.

Situation

Saffron Walden Castle

- 2 Members are advised that early discussions are being held with Saffron Walden Town Council about the potential transfer of this asset. Remedial works need to be carried out to the monument to prevent its further degradation. Transfer of the asset would open up funding opportunities for the works. The details will be set out in a future report, should the discussions suggest this to be the best way forward.

White Street Car Park Lighting

- 3 The three month trial of reduced lighting between midnight and 5am has had to be modified as it was not possible to isolate a single lamp post. This would have required underground re-cabling works. A compromise was made following discussions with the Chairman of the Environment Committee. The lights that will remain on all night are reduced to those on the cable run closest to the Town Square/ Co-op supermarket.

Climate Change Working Group

- 4 The Climate Change Working Group is a cross departmental officer group that manages the implementation of the Council's Climate Change Strategy and the Carbon Management Strategy and Implementation Plan. This group is now formally reporting to Environment Committee via the lead officer's report, and the latest minutes are available through CMIS.
- 5 At present the Climate Change Strategy (October 2007) is being brought up to date to reflect the council's priorities, changes that have occurred to staffing levels and to respond directly to the new external pressures of reporting on National Indicators (NI185, NI186, NI187, NI188 and NI194) and the Audit Commission reviews of our performance on Key Line of Enquiry 3.1 (Use of Natural Resources), the first of which is next year. It is proposed the strategy is renamed the Natural Resources Management Strategy to reflect the broad

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range of issues it encompasses, which is where the council has direct control or some influence on the use of resources, including fuel, water, materials and the environment generally (i.e. its ability to absorb the impact of human activities). A draft of the revised strategy will be put forward for approval to Environment Committee on 19 January. It will be important to adopt a revised strategy prior to 31st March 2010 so that there is an 'improvement plan' in place addressing any weaknesses in this area. Then it can be officially considered by the Audit Commission when they visit.

- 6 The Carbon Management Strategy and Implementation Plan addresses the specific issue of the Council's own energy use and carbon emissions, and achieving reductions therein. It needs to be reviewed for the next Full Council to see if the '10:10' initiative (10% carbon reductions in the 2010-11 financial year) is achievable. A major component of this is the outsourcing proposal being considered at this meeting.

Insulation and renewables grant schemes

- 7 The council is now part of the Herts Essex Energy Partnership (HEEP), a consortium of 15 local authorities in West Essex and Hertfordshire who have secured £6.63M for two years from the EERA-administered 'Regional Housing Pot' fund to support a scheme of grants and loans for improving insulation, heating and installing renewable energy systems such as solar panels and heat pumps in private households. The scheme is centrally administered by a managing agent, Climate Energy Ltd. The existing offer to private householders from the council to give a £25 council tax rebate to those that pay to have insulation installed has been withdrawn, as the offer from the HEEP scheme of £99 for loft or cavity wall insulation is already more generous than our previous scheme without this further subsidy.
- 8 The HEEP scheme came about following a successful bid for funding from EERA in late 2008, led by East Herts and Uttlesford DCs with the support of the 'London commuter belt sub-region' Private Sector Housing Group, for a scheme to reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty in the area. Participation of all 15 authorities in the sub-region was agreed, with the scheme steered by lead officers from 5 of the authorities, including Hertsmere as the 'banker', handling the grant and invoice payment. An EU procurement process eventually led to the appointment of Climate Energy Limited to centrally manage the scheme, and it officially launched on 8 July 2009. As of 28 September there were 1887 leads for measures logged from interested households, and 117 completed installations.
- 9 The objective of the scheme is to bring about a step change in relation to home energy efficiency to both the number of households assisted by local authorities and the range of measures and level of financial assistance offered. The scheme also seeks to join up the confusing array of funding sources and providers to offer householders a 'one-stop shop'. There is a scheme website running now at www.heepgrant.org

- 10 Householders who are most vulnerable and are eligible for Warm Front may be able to obtain up to £12,000 worth of works to raise the energy rating of their home to a 'safe' level, tackling 'hard' measures such as solid wall insulation if necessary. Also householders who are on low incomes but who have not had access to the government Warm Front scheme may now benefit for similar measures from ours. Finally householders who may not be at risk from fuel poverty can obtain measures also, including loft or cavity all insulation with £99 as the standard price for each, and a combination of grants and interest free loan to cover 50% of the cost of a costly measure such as solar panels. The target for the scheme (over the whole area of Herts and West Essex) is to assist a total of 13,500 households and take 1000 vulnerable households out of fuel poverty over the course of the scheme.
- 11 The HEEP scheme replaces our previous arrangement with Miller Pattison Insulation. The previous scheme was strictly for loft and cavity wall insulation. Funding was regrettably stop-start, but the offer was for free insulation for those on certain benefits and over 70s, and £147 for cavity wall and £199 for loft for paying customers. The council, as a continuation of an arrangement started with British Gas was also offering paying customers £25 credited to their council tax bill, meaning a net cost to the customer of £122 or £174, or £321 for both. In 2008-09 a total of £1,450 was paid out by the council in rebates, however £3,960 was also brought in from referral fees from Miller Pattison. A total of 396 households were assisted, although it must be noted that this was as high as it was because of the 'boom' caused by over 70s being made eligible for free insulation under government rules at the start of 2008. These and other free jobs were not eligible for a rebate but brought in referral income, leading to net income from the scheme (the referral fee is £10 per household). Over time we could expect this to even out and the insulation scheme to result in net costs to the council, when the expenditure on our marketing efforts is taken into account.
- 12 As the £99 offer represents a much greater subsidy, albeit one that comes from the EERA funding rather than from the council's own budget, and lower cost to the customer, the £25 rebate has been withdrawn. Miller Pattison may still obtain leads generated by our old literature in circulation (the 'Green Guide to Uttlesford') but they will be instructed to no longer promote the rebate. Naturally, our referral fees from Miller Pattison will also reduce, however, the new HEEP scheme is making use of 'referral fee' type income from its loft and cavity wall insulation installers to fund centrally co-ordinated marketing efforts, so in a sense this has not been lost. The effect this will have on the relevant budgets has already been taken into account.

Heatseekers

- 13 Within the HEEP, the Mark Group, who are installers contracted to the scheme, are going to generate leads by using infrared thermal images to identify properties needing loft and/or cavity wall insulation in partnership with UDC. The service is called 'Heatseekers'. The images are also used to interest householders; Mark puts a short report containing the images of a

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dwelling through its letterbox, and follow up with a home visit. The images are gathered by a specially equipped vehicle, and are only used by Mark and UDC; they are not made publically available. The Mark Group will only survey in areas we direct them to, and the aim is to survey 4000-5000 properties in Uttlesford in order to get approximately 275 jobs. For more on Heatseekers see <http://www.homeheatseekers.co.uk/>.

14 It should be noted that:

- As the thermal camera reads surface temperature, it cannot see through windows, so there are no privacy issues.
- Canvassing will avoid Essex 'No Cold Calling' zones.
- District and parish councillors will be informed if thermal surveying is planned in their area.

15 There are no financial implications for the council for this undertaking. It will help us meet our targets for the HEEP scheme (which is for loft and cavity wall insulation 400 jobs this financial year) and ensure we make the most of our EERA funding allocation for this.

Golds Update

16 As members are aware the Council holds the lease tenant interests for the industrial units in Elsenham under a 25 year lease dated 15 February 1985 that is due to expire on the 29th November 2009 when the site reverts back to the owners.

17 The Council must hand the property back to the owners in good and substantial repair at the end of the lease. If the Council does not comply with these obligations the Landlord can carry out any necessary work and recover the cost from the Council.

18 The Council has therefore been working with its managing agent to ensure that it has complied with its obligations relating to the physical state of the property ready for handover at the end of the month.