

<b>Committee:</b> Environment, Enforcement and Housing Committee	<b>Date:</b> 13.10.20
<b>Subject:</b> Thames Chase Community Forest	<b>Wards Affected:</b> All
<b>Report of:</b> Consultant Forest Director	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report Author/s:</b> Name: Dave Bigden Telephone: 0774 6593527 E-mail: david.bigden@thameschase.org.uk	<b>For Decision</b>

### Summary

This report identifies a number of benefits from re-engage with Thames Chase Community Forest and to re-establish robust partnership working for the future.

### Recommendations

**Members are asked to consider:**

**R1. Whether to fund Thames Chase Community Forest at a cost of £8,000 to be identified from the Environmental Initiative Reserve.**

**R2. That officers determine a list of projects in consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Leaders of the opposition to take forward with Thames Chase Community Forest for the initial year should funding be agreed.**

**R3. That the projects entered into at the start of the year be reviewed annually to determine whether funding will continue into the next financial year**

### Main Report

#### **Introduction and Background**

1. Brentwood borough Council ceased its funding with Thames Chase due to financial pressures on the Council at that time. Thames Chase Community Forest have again approached Brentwood Council with an opportunity to re-engage with the initiative.

2. The borough of Brentwood is located within the 40 square miles of Thames Chase Community Forest, spanning the landscape on the edge of east London and south-west Essex.
3. Since 1990, in excess of 1.3m trees have been planted across Thames Chase; there has been a 70% increase in woodlands; over 12,000 volunteer days have been delivered; over 41km hedgerows have been created/restored; and over 800 hectares of non-woodland habitat has been created/restored.
4. Brentwood Borough Council has been an active partner in the Thames Chase Community Forest since its inception in 1990. The Council is one of five local authority partners, alongside Essex County Council, London Borough of Havering, London Borough of Barking & Dagenham, and Thurrock Council.
5. Each local authority partner financially supports the continued creation of the Community Forest and is a member of the Thames Chase Delivery Group; on which Officers then have a voice and the opportunity to influence development of the Forest landscape in their respective area.
6. At this time, Brentwood Borough Council is the only local authority partner not actively engaged with the Delivery Group or financially supporting the Community Forest. As a result, it is very difficult for the Thames Chase team to actively pursue project development in Brentwood or identify and seek to secure funding in partnership.
7. Thames Chase believes that this is a missed opportunity because a) the heavily reduced Council's Parks & Countryside Service could benefit from the additional support provided by Thames Chase and b) Thames Chase is actively pursuing a number of opportunities that could benefit Brentwood but of which the Thames Chase team cannot invest as much time because of the responsibility to its other four "funding and actively engaged" local authority partners.

### **Issue, Options and Analysis of Options**

8. At this time, Brentwood Borough Council is the only local authority partner not actively engaged with the Delivery Group or financially supporting the Community Forest. As a result, it is very difficult for the Thames Chase team to actively pursue project development in Brentwood or identify and seek to secure funding in partnership.

9. The creation of Thames Chase is governed by its overarching strategy: **The Thames Chase Plan**. Within the Plan, there is a series of projects designed to bring benefit to the borough of Brentwood. These are currently not being fully pursued for the reasons detailed above.

10. Projects include:

- a. Forest economy social enterprise start-ups
- b. Develop links with public health bodies
- c. Woodland Management Plans
- d. Green Space Management Plans
- e. Shenfield Common
- f. Green Space Green Links
- g. A127 Landscape and Accessibility Strategy
- h. Brentwood's Woodland Wellbeing
- i. Developing the network
- j. Hartswood
- k. Out and About in Thames Chase
- l. Forest Centre Hub
- m. Community Forest Tree Nursery
- n. Lower Thames Crossing
- o. Roding, Beam & Ingrebourne Catchment Partnership
- p. Hutton Community Woodland
- q. Carbon Offsetting
- r. Free-tree schemes with national partners
- s. DEFRA Nature for Climate Fund
- t. Essex Forest Initiative
- u. Dunton Hills Garden Village
- v. Trees for Learning
- w. Land of the Fanns Landscape Partnership Scheme

11. There are 13 Strategic Opportunities in the Thames Chase Plan which seek to deliver strategically significant improvements against the Forest-wide programmes. Seven of the thirteen directly benefit Brentwood:

- a. Forest Centre Hub
- b. Thames Chase Mosaic
- c. Land of the Fanns Landscape Partnership
- d. River Corridor Links
- e. East-West Links
- f. Brentwood Woodlands
- g. Brentwood Pastures

12. Brentwood Borough Council can once again fully re-engage with Thames Chase through an annual contribution of £8,000 and which will enable Council

Officers to work closely with the Thames Chase team to identify a focussed suite of annual projects to be pursued for the benefit of the borough and the Community Forest.

**13.** The annual financial contribution provided by Brentwood Borough Council not only enables the continued development of the Community Forest within and beyond the borough, with all the benefits this provides to its residents and wildlife but, it opens the door for physical partnership delivery for the benefit of the Council. At the start of each financial year, Thames Chase will agree with the Council a programme of priority projects or needs (usually between 3 and 5) to be delivered or met across the year. This programme is then monitored as we move ahead, in partnership, across that year and then reported against at the end of that period. This provides the opportunity to evidence a genuine Return on Investment for the Council and results in a live and active approach to partnership working that seeks to deliver genuine benefits for both organisations.

- a. For example: The Council may wish to explore increasing staff resource for parks and open spaces; securing grant income for parks and open space projects; increasing volunteering in the borough; increasing tree planting in the borough; improving access between public open spaces. It really is open for discussion as to what the Council needs to achieve from robust partnership working with the Community Forest.

**14.** At the end of each year the projects will be reviewed in order to determine whether funding should continue.

### **Reasons for Recommendation**

**15.** Supports the Council's commitment to develop and consider projects to protect the environment.

**16.** Enables the Council to fully integrate with the Community Forest and its partners, in turn giving direct access to all associated benefits.

### **Consultation**

**17.** None at this point.

### **References to Corporate Plan**

**18.** Developing a clean and green environment for everyone to enjoy.

**19.** Encourage the creation of local environmental partnerships.

- 20.** National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises the importance of Community Forests. A Community Forest Plan can be a material consideration in planning terms and consequently, the Thames Chase Plan sets out five Forest-wide programmes of delivery that are in alignment with core NPPF aims:
- a. Forestry
  - b. Landscape Regeneration
  - c. Access
  - d. People
  - e. Promotion
- 21.** There is synergy between Thames Chase and the Brentwood Local Plan 2019:
- a. Chapter 8 Natural Environment
  - b. P.208 8.6 Refers to Thames Chase Community Forest
  - c. Policy NE01 Protecting and enhancing the natural environment 8.22c 'the Thames Chase Plan'
  - d. Policy NE03 Trees, Woodlands, Hedgerows 8.29 'Thames Chase Project Team'
  - e. Policy NE04 Thames Chase Community Forest 8.38 'The Council supports the aims of the Thames Chase Plan'
  - f. 8.39 'Thames Chase'
  - g. 8.40 'The Community Forest concept'
  - h. 8.41 'The Thames Chase Plan'
  - i. 8.42 'forest-wide scale'
  - j. 8.43, 8.44, 8.45 and 8.46 also apply
  - k. Policy NE05 Air Quality
  - l. Policy NE06 Flood Risk. Links to the Catchment Partnerships.
  - m. Policy NE9 Green Belt. Links to NPPF and the Thames Chase Plan.
  - n. 8.87 'Community Forests in the Green Belt'
  - o. Brentwood 2025 Corporate Strategy: *Protecting our environment.*
- 22.** Community Forests are also heavily referenced in the Government's 25-Year Plan to Improve the Environment and the emerging England's Tree Strategy.
- 23.** England's Community Forests network (9 other CF's nationally) have been working in partnership to respond to the Government's announcement that £640m Nature for Climate Fund has been identified. There are opportunities to secure extensive funding for Community Forests and which, if successful, would benefit Brentwood and could provide a direct return on the Council's £8,000 annual investment in the Forest.

## **Implications**

### **Financial Implications**

**Name/Title: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Director of Corporate Resources**  
**Tel/Email: 01277 312500/jacqueline.vanmellaerts@brentwood.gov.uk**

For 2020/21, the annual contribution of £8,000 can be funded for the Council's Environmental Initiatives reserve. Any request for ongoing funding to support the initiative will be considered as part of the 2021/22 budget and associated Medium Term Financial Strategy.

### **Legal Implications**

**Name & Title: Amanda Julian, Director of Legal & Governance**  
**Tel & Email: 01277 312500/amanda.julian@brentwood.gov.uk**

There are no direct legal implications of engaging with this partnership. The Climate Change Act 2008 introduced the ambition to reduce the carbon emissions in areas by 80% from 1990 levels by 2050, the initiative of planting trees will go a long way to enable the Council to reduce its carbon footprint, this is underpinned by the Government's commitment to planting 11 million trees by 2022.

### **Economic Implications**

**Name/Title: Phil Drane, Director of Planning and Economy**  
**Tel/Email: 01277 312610/philip.drane@brentwood.gov.uk**

There are no direct economic implications. However, schemes to maintain and improve the borough's environment can contribute to the corporate strategy objective of promoting Brentwood as a place to set up and do business from, part of growing our economy. The Council will need to continue to work with the Thames Chase Community Forest to deliver environmental benefits to the borough through specific proposed development schemes in the area, such as the delivery of Dunton Hills Garden Village and Brentwood Enterprise Park, for example.

**Other Implications** (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

### **Background Papers**

None

### **Appendices to this report**

Appendix A: Thames Chase Plan Summary