



**Havering**  
LONDON BOROUGH

11/82 +  
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## Notice of executive decision by individual Cabinet member

THIS IS NOT A KEY DECISION

<b>Subject Heading:</b>	Thames Chase Community Forest – future proposals and transitional arrangements – approval of Forest Centre Business Plan Brief and Service Level Agreement Delivery Plan
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Robert Benham, Cabinet Member for Community Empowerment
<b>CMT Lead:</b>	Cynthia Griffin Group Director, Culture & Community
<b>Report Author and contact details:</b>	Robert Flindall <a href="mailto:bob.flindall@haverling.gov.uk">bob.flindall@haverling.gov.uk</a> 01708 432892
<b>Policy context:</b>	Local Development Framework Thames Chase Plan
<b>Financial summary:</b>	£10,000 per year core funding, plus a one-off grant in 2011/12 of £15k for transition funding, for which funds are available in the proposed 2011/12 budget.
<b>Forward Plan entry number:</b>	
<b>Relevant OSC:</b>	Towns & Communities
<b>Is this a Strategic Decision?</b>	No
<b>If it is a Strategic Decision, when should this matter be reviewed?</b>	
<b>Is it an urgent decision? If so, please refer to the note at the end</b>	No

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

## **Member Key Decision**

Clean, safe and green borough	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Excellence in education and learning	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities for all through economic, social and cultural activity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Value and enhance the life of every individual	<input type="checkbox"/>
High customer satisfaction and a stable council tax	<input type="checkbox"/>

### **SUMMARY**

March 2011 Cabinet considered a report titled: Thames Chase Community Forest – future proposals and transitional arrangements Cabinet agreed:

- 1) to enter into a three-year Service Level Agreement with the Thames Chase Trust to continue the development and promotion of the Thames Chase Community Forest, and to make an annual core funding contribution of £10,000;
- 2) to delegate agreement of the detailed form of the Service Level Agreement to the Cabinet Member for Community Empowerment;
- 3) that £15,000 remaining in the Thames Chase budget for 2011/12, after the core funding contribution has been made, should be used to make an additional one-off grant to the Thames Chase Trust to fund the preparation of a business plan for the transition to the new management arrangements for the Forest Centre, working to a brief agreed by the Cabinet Member for Community Empowerment to ensure it delivers clear, measurable outcomes;
- 4) proposals by Essex County Council as lead authority for winding-up the affairs of the former Thames Chase Joint Committee.

Following Cabinet, staff have been assisting the Trust in the preparation of the detail of the Service Level Agreement (SLA), now contained in the Delivery Plan annex of the SLA and the Forest Centre business plan brief. This Executive Decision proposes that both documents be approved.

## **Part A**

### **DETAIL OF THE DECISION**

This Executive Decision approves the Service Level Agreement Delivery Plan and the Forest Centre business Plan Brief following Cabinet approval of the following in March 2011:-

- to enter into a three-year Service Level Agreement with the Thames Chase Trust to continue the development and promotion of the Thames Chase Community Forest, and to make an annual core funding contribution of £10,000;
- to delegate agreement of the detailed form of the Service Level Agreement to the Cabinet Member for Community Empowerment;
- that £15,000 remaining in the Thames Chase budget for 2011/12, after the core funding contribution has been made, should be used to make an additional one-off

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grant to the Thames Chase Trust to fund the preparation of a business plan for the transition to the new management arrangements for the Forest Centre, working to a brief agreed by the Cabinet Member for Community Empowerment to ensure it delivers clear, measurable outcomes;

- proposals by Essex County Council as lead authority for winding-up the affairs of the former Thames Chase Joint Committee.

Established in 1990, The Thames Chase Community Forest project aims to improve the environment and access to the countryside throughout its area, in accordance with the Thames Chase Plan. As a focus for its work, Thames Chase operations have been based at the Forest Centre which includes the visitors centre, car park, storage barn, 17<sup>th</sup> century barn and stables, an education room and office complex. The Centre is currently owned by Essex County Council.

The management of both Thames Chase and of the Forest Centre has recently undergone a major transition process from control by a Joint Committee of Local Authorities to management by the board of Trustees of a charitable company limited by guarantee – the Thames Chase Trust.

Although funding for the project will continue to come from local government it has been significantly reduced. The position now is that Essex CC, Thurrock and Havering will enter into a three-year Service Level Agreement with the Trust for the continuation of Thames Chase, with an annual core funding contribution of £10,000 each. Therefore, in the future Thames Chase will have to place much greater emphasis on seeking new funding and income streams.

The March 2011 Cabinet considered a report about these future proposals and transitional arrangements and agreed the recommendations listed above. Under this revised model the Trust took over the management of Thames Chase from 1st April 2011.

### **Service Level Agreement Delivery Plan**

Since March 2011 staff from the partner organisations have been involved in the preparation of a draft Service Level Agreement Delivery Plan. This is called the Thames Chase Community Forest – Delivery Plan. It is attached to this report at Appendix A.

The Delivery Plan only identifies a small proportion of the total investment of time and resources to deliver Thames Chase priorities, i.e. only that directly attributable to investment from the three local authorities. Across the three years the Trust and Forestry Commission are committed to ensuring that the three authorities get a fair share of resources. Thames Chase will achieve significant additional resources from the Forestry Commission, in particular related to landscape restoration in Havering. Other funding opportunities include Landfill Tax Credit, Lottery, Central and London Government, local business and European funding. Staff will work in partnership with the Trust and the Forestry Commission to achieve additional funding.

Specifically the Delivery Plan addresses the common themes of:

- quality of life
- quality of place, and
- professional Support

There are generic objectives within these themes that all constituent authorities will benefit from, including:

- the Thames Chase Volunteer Service

## **Member Key Decision**

- active engagement with target groups
- promotion of the benefits of green space
- targeted areas for environmental regeneration
- support for the Local Planning Authorities
- support for Council steering groups, (e.g. Connect2, Ingrebourne Valley project)
- advice on management of green spaces

Tasks that are targeted at Havering include:

- re-forming the Thames Chase Conservation Volunteers
- re-launch of the Forest Forum
- communications strategy
- work with landowners, in particular related to the regeneration of degraded landscapes
- work in partnership to achieve long term funding for community engagement, environmental education and landscape restoration programmes
- investment in 'natural play' initiative at Broadfields Farm
- advice to planning service
- chair East London Green Grid
- manage a Thames Chase Delivery group
- represent Thames Chase at Council steering groups focussed on green infrastructure development (e.g. Connect2, Ingrebourne Valley project).

It is considered that the proposed Delivery Plan meets all of the expectations of the Council and this Executive Decision records its approval.

### **Forest Centre Business Plan Consultants Brief**

With regard to the Forest Centre, the Trust has agreed Heads of Terms in principle with Essex CC to lease the Centre for three years at a peppercorn rent, followed by a long lease. This, however, is conditional upon the initial success of the Trust in running the Centre.

The Forest Centre was initially developed using external funding secured by the former Joint Committee, which may be subject to claw back in full or part if the current uses are discontinued. Since each authority as a member of the Joint Committee had, in law, an equitable interest in the Centre it was proposed that each member authority formally assigned such equitable rights as it had vested in the Centre to Essex CC which holds the legal interest by virtue of ownership of the land. This removes any potential liability for grant clawback from Havering and the other authorities (Thurrock, Brentwood, LB Barking and Dagenham), and will enable a smooth transition to the new proposed lease arrangements between Essex CC and the Trust.

The timescale for taking on these new responsibilities and ensuring the lease is successful will be very challenging, and the Trustees recognise that they need to rapidly develop and implement a new business model which will, in particular, improve the management of the Forest Centre and ensure it has a successful and sustainable future.

The Trustees recognise the financial constraints upon the Council, which have meant the level of support to the Trust in future years has been reduced. In March Cabinet agreed a one off grant from the £15,000 remaining in the Thames Chase budget for 2011/12 to be used by the Thames Chase Trust to fund the preparation of a business plan. This business plan would cover the transition to the new management arrangements for the Forest Centre to enable the Thames Chase Trust to continue to occupy and run the Centre. The cabinet report stated that this agreement should be subject to the preparation of a brief, agreed by the Cabinet Member for Community Empowerment, to ensure it delivers clear, measurable outcomes.

In consultation with staff the Trust has now produced a comprehensive consultants brief for

## **Member Key Decision**

the business plan. A key element of the brief is that the purpose of the business plan should be to demonstrate financial sustainability with a medium to low risk profile. It is proposed in the brief that the development of the work is undertaken in 3 stages to ensure close working relationships with a steering group and other key stakeholders. The first stage will develop the initial options for consideration, stage 2 will evaluate those options and set out the final agreed options, and stage 3 will develop an implementation plan.

The total budget available for this work is clearly outlined in the brief as £15,000 and a timescale for delivery is given as 12 weeks.

The brief is attached to this report at Appendix B and this Executive Decision records its approval.

## **AUTHORITY UNDER WHICH DECISION IS MADE**

Cabinet March 2011, report titled Thames Chase Community Forest – future proposals and transitional arrangements, recommendations 2 and 3, delegated these decisions to the Cabinet Member for Community Empowerment.

## **STATEMENT OF THE REASONS FOR THE DECISION**

As a key stakeholder in the Thames Chase Community Forest project, Havering Council recognises the great value of Thames Chase to the environment and the community and the role of the Forest Centre in delivering the aims and objectives of the project. Options for the Thames Chase Trust to take on the responsibility for the running the Forest centre defined by the business plan will give the project clear and measurable outcomes.

## **OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

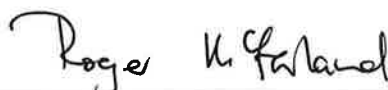
The option of not agreeing to the Thames Chase Delivery Plan and the Forest Centre business plan brief was rejected, because it is considered a high priority for Havering, and good value for money particularly with the reduced level of local authority contributions now proposed. There are no other appropriate options.

## **NAME AND JOB TITLE OF STAFF MEMBER ADVISING THE DECISION-MAKER**

Name: Roger McFarland

Designation: Head of Regeneration, Policy and Planning

Signature:



Date: 30/8/11

## **Part B**

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

There are no legal implications and risks associated with the content of this report which are limited to the details of constitutional and finance arrangements for the continuing operation of Thames Chase Community Forest and the Thames Chase Forest Centre, in particular the Service Level Agreement Delivery Plan between the Council and the Thames Chase Trust and the consultants brief for the Forest Centre business plan .

Vincent Healy, Legal Manager Regeneration; Robin Bloom, Principal Locum Lawyer Contracts

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

There remain sufficient funds in the 2011/12 budget for Havering to make a core funding contribution of £10,000 to the Thames Chase Trust, and an additional one-off grant of £15,000 to fund the preparation of a business plan for the Forest Centre.

Conway Mulcahy, Strategic Finance Partner

### **HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS (AND ACCOMMODATION IMPLICATIONS WHERE RELEVANT)**

There are no direct human resources implications and risks for Havering staff associated with the content of this report. Staff will continue to work closely with the Thames Chase Trust, the Forestry Commission, and the other local authorities to support the new management and operational arrangements.

### **EQUALITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

There are no equalities implications and risks associated with the content of this report.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Thames Chase Trust Brief, Business Plan Preparation – 10<sup>th</sup> June 2011.

Thames Chase Trust Delivery Plan – July 2011.

**Member Key Decision**

**Confirmation of decision**

I confirm that I have made this executive decision, in accordance with authority delegated to me by the Leader of the Council and in compliance with the requirements of the Constitution.

Signed 

Name: Councillor Robert Benham

Portfolio held: Community Empowerment

Date: 31/08/2011

**Lodging this notice**


This notice should be delivered to the proper officer, currently the Democratic Services Manager via Ian Buckmaster, in the Town Hall. A copy of this notice should be retained by the individual Cabinet member making the decision in question.

**Urgency**

Where the executive decision recorded in this notice has been made in accordance with the special urgency provisions of the Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rules, a copy of the written agreement obtained under rule 18 must be attached to all copies of this notice.

For use in Democratic Services

I confirm that this notice was lodged with me on 31 AUGUST 2011

Signed 

11/82  
app A

**Appendix A**

**Thames Chase Service Level Agreement Delivery Plan**