REPORT of
HEAD OF LEISURE AND LIVEABILITY
to
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 SEPTEMBER 2009

WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10
(a) RIVER BLACKWATER: PHASE 2

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report is designed as a discussion paper on the River Blackwater, informing Members of a number of different areas that impact on its use.

2. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

2.1 Access

- The River Blackwater is the largest estuary on the east coast yet access to it is relatively poor. The same applies to the Crouch which has fewer communities on its banks.
- In the District of Maldon there is only one freely accessible launch point at Promenade Park. The rest of the launch points are controlled by clubs and marinas where launching facilities are membership only or for a fee for visiting boat owners. There is a launch facility controlled by the parish council at Tollesbury but local parking restrictions apply making this facility quite difficult to use.
- There are no public launching facilities on the Crouch if you are not a member of a local club or marina.
- Outside of clubs and marinas on-shore facilities are usually poor.
- A number of launch points are controlled by caravan parks and their use is restricted to caravan residents only.
- As with most estuaries on the east coast access to the water is governed by the tides. There are few deep water mooring areas and these are exclusively controlled by local clubs. Bradwell is the only marina that can be used at most states of the tide.
- Access on foot for activities such as walking and fishing is varied. There is good access at Maldon, Heybridge, Tollesbury, Bradwell and Burnham. A lack of parking facilities and summer parking restrictions make access to other parts of the coast more difficult at certain times of the year for visitors.
- Access is usually restricted to day visitors and the district is poorly served for visitors who wish to stay for a short break.
- Access on horseback and for the cyclist is very poor.
2.2 Promotion

- There are a number of leaflets that promote rivers and waterways but there is no co-ordinated effort to promote the coast as a whole.
- There are a number of websites that promote the district the most important being www.visitmaldondistrict.co.uk, however there is not one point of single co-ordination for this work.

2.3 Issues

- In 2005 due to a lack of funding, the District Council withdrew its support for the Blackwater Project and the Crouch and Roach Estuary Project. Both projects played an important part in raising the profile of the Maldon coast, delivering local projects and promoting access.
- Since 2005 the Leisure and Liveability Team has lost 6.5 full time employees (FTE) through redundancy and lack of funds to renew temporary employment contracts. 3.5 FTE staff were dedicated to coastal work and this resource has now been lost.
- Work in delivering the management plans for both estuaries had to cease due to a lack of staff resources and operating budgets.
- The Council does not employ a dedicated tourism officer and the Tourist Information Centre’s for the District are also unable to work at their full staffing capacity.
- In October 2009 work will begin on a new Coastal Strategy that will mop up activity left by the two moribund management plans.
- We are entering the busiest time that the Maldon coast has had in years with significant activity developing around the Shoreline Management Plan, Marine and Access to the Coast Bill, the Coastal Initiative, East Anglian Coastal Group, Flooding and Water Resources Bill, LGA Coastal Special Interest Group and a recent raising of the profile of the UK coast in general.

2.4 Summary

- The existing team members of the Leisure and Liveability Team remain dedicated to the management and promotion of the coast, parks and open spaces, biodiversity, landscape, events and the wider environment but a critical lack of staff resources means that most ideas are unable to be taken forward due to lack of staff resources and operational budgets.

- The current team is made up of:
  Team Leader (x1)
  Countryside and Coast Development Officer (x1)
  Leisure and Sports Development Officer (x1 currently vacant)
  Leisure Development Assistant (x1)
  River Bailiff (x1)
  Tree Officer (0.5, post shared with planning)
  Temporary contracted posts running play lottery, junior ranger scheme and fitsteps programme (x2)
• Staff lost since October 2005:
  Blackwater Project/Coastal Officer (x1)
  Blackwater Project Assistant (x1)
  River Warden (x1)
  MAYA Project Officer (x0.5)
  Arts and Events Officer (x1)
  Parks Development Officer (x1)
  Administration Officer (x1)

3. **LINKS WITH CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

3.1 The scope of this review supports the Council principles of being efficient and effective, being focussed on the customer, working in partnership and embracing continuous improvement. The Rivers and Waterways function, as part of the Leisure and Liveability services, works to protect our rural heritage.

4. **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Committees views are sought on how the asset can be better promoted, including its impact on tourism and local businesses.

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*Background Papers:* None.