

Annual Chairman Report. Policy Development Group.
Managing the Environment. April 2012-March 2013.

As Chairman of the above Group, I wish to submit report to Council for the year April 2012-March 2013.

During the last 12 months, this group has been engaged on a number of projects, that due to the current and continuing economic position, take on a more important role in the future policies of this Authority.

Play Areas

Due to that economic restraint, an important undertaking by the Group was to look into the financial shortfall in the maintenance of play areas in the District. The remit was to look into the current situation where-in the 103 play areas in the district, were to be maintained to Health and Safety standards, based on the fact that initial fundings to maintain such were reaching the end of the line, and further funding was not available to continue such action. In May 2012 a Working Group was set up to look into this matter, and report back with findings to the PDG, so that a recommendation could be made to Cabinet as to future policy.

In November 2012 following many meetings by the Play Area Working Group, the PDG received report of a proposed strategy for future Play Area provision. The Play Area Working Group had investigated, following consultations with Town/Parish and other interested bodies, play area stock, both condition and amount, the availability of S106 commuted sums (to allow for future upkeep of equipment) problems in collecting such monies along with play areas lacking some equipment, and the general upkeep and maintenance of 104 play areas linked to ever diminishing budgets to maintain same. Further report on possible costings and savings was requested by the PDG at this time, before a final recommendation would be made to Cabinet. In January 2013 following this requested report, recommendation was made to Cabinet as to the future policy on Play Areas, this was accepted by them later in the month.

Waste Programme

During the course of the last 12 months, continuing progress of Waste Management was undertaken. The main thrust was towards re-equipping waste fleet, to enhance our collection capabilities with increased standards and objectives, to that end the fleet was enhanced with the arrival of 4 new vehicles, that gave MDDC more flexibility and greater safety features for crews. In line with the purchase of vehicles, a new optimisation programme (I.T.) was also purchased to produce programmes that would enable MDDC in the long term to give more

value for money to the public. In order to obtain the best results from this I.T. programme, the PDG also set up a new Waste Efficiency Group to study collected data, and report back to the P.D.G. later in 2013 with such findings that should show much benefit to the Authority and the community over the coming years as the collated information is broadened out and implemented across the service. Currently, county wide, Devon County Council are having discussions with all Local Authorities in Devon on a Municipal Waste Management policy, this hopefully will result in a clearer picture and understanding of recycling matters, MDDC are making a positive input into these discussions. On a local note, MDDC are putting more resources (with the aid of "The Star") into consumer awareness of recyclable items, as it is felt that extra publicity will bring better results, during the course of the year, the PDG will monitor results.

Dog Control Orders

The Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act of 2005 gave local authorities the opportunity to introduce Dog Control Orders, which would strengthen current policies. Therefore, the PDG taking note of the issues felt by the general public (as expressed in a survey early in 2012), and following a report to them in September 2012, made various recommendations to Cabinet that was approved by them in the same month, resulting in the new policy being active from December 2012.

Tree/Hedge Policy

A report was submitted to the PDG regarding current MDDC Tree/Hedge policies, following which it was decided that certain changes should be made in respect of Tree policy that referred to MDDC by bringing it into line with latest information concerning management of Mid Devon owned trees and woodlands. Recommendation was made to Cabinet and accepted in September 2012. In the case of High Hedge policy, there was no need to alter current policy, therefore the status quo remained.

Climate Change/Environmental Strategy

This is an on-going matter to progress a climate change policy which will bring about alterations under a large umbrella of subjects. A report was submitted to the PDG in January 2013, which was discussed and debated with amendments sent back to the officer's for further consultation. As the year continues so will the PDG look at the revised report, prior to making any recommendations to Cabinet.

Whilst the above subjects have played a major role in the PDG's being in the last 12 months, and will so remain, other matters have been and will continue to be discussed/debated by the Group.

Finally my sincere thanks to the Members , who during the last 12 month's have offered me encouragement, advice and their expertise, along with keeping me on track to the subject matter in hand.

Allied to this must be my sincere thanks to all the officer's who have had to put up with me again!!. I do believe that because of the manner in which we all conduct ourselves at all times, this PDG meets the exacting standards required. My thanks to each and all.

M.A.Lucas
Chairman
March 2013