

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 APRIL 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Greenfield Valley Heritage Park on Tuesday, 17 April 2018

PRESENT: Councillor Ray Hughes (Chairman)

Councillors: Mike Allport, Haydn Bateman, Sean Bibby, Chris Dolphin, Andy Dunbobbin, Cindy Hinds, Dave Hughes, Joe Johnson, Colin Legg, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

APOLOGIES: Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development; and Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: Rosetta Dolphin and Patrick Heesom; Sally Gee, Flintshire County Council Senior Auditor; Gwladys Harrison (Chair) and Mary Auty (Trustee) of Greenfield Valley Trust Ltd

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection; Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside; Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy); Access & Natural Environment Manager; Community and Business Protection Manager; and Pollution Control Officer

IN ATTENDANCE: Environment Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officers

67. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

68. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 March and the joint meeting on 15 March 2018 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

69. GREENFIELD VALLEY MUSEUM HERITAGE PARK VISIT AND PRESENTATION

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced an update on progress to address the recommendations of the Internal Audit report on the governance, funding and operating arrangements at Greenfield Valley Heritage Park.

The Access & Natural Environment Manager gave a presentation covering the following:

- Background
- Scope of Audit
- Audit - areas managed well
- Audit - areas for further improvement
- Key changes in 2017/18
- Business Plan objectives

During the presentation, the Manager explained a number of key developments such as the appointment of an admin/finance officer to support improvements to back-office systems and the move to a more integrated model under the Planning & Environment portfolio. As part of structural changes, the two Team Leaders were undertaking a key role in publicising countryside activities, improving site presentation and increasing public engagement, particularly via social media. Governance arrangements had been strengthened by the recruitment of four new Trustees and retention of some of the former Trustees to provide support through the transitional period. The three year business plan would form the basis of the revised management agreement and ensure that the needs of the partnership were being met. The Manager said that the previous challenges were recognised and advised that there was now a positive working relationship between the team and the Trustees to work together to achieve the same objectives.

As Cabinet Member, Councillor Carolyn Thomas expressed her appreciation for the work done and future plans to raise the profile of the site.

Councillor Shotton thanked officers for the report and highlighted the need to publicise the park, particularly to tourists visiting from abroad. It was explained that marketing was an important element of work by the team using existing links and creating new ones to develop a long-term strategy, and that the new website was due to go live.

Councillor Chris Dolphin spoke about the level of appreciation and support for the park, commenting that issues had only arisen in recent years. He raised concerns about the findings of the audit report and questioned actions being taken on the governance arrangements, adding that minutes of the Board of Trustee meetings should be accessible. He commented on the implementation deadline for the audit recommendations and expressed disappointment at the lack of detail in the covering report which he hoped would be addressed in the next update. He referred to the negative impact on the community arising from the previous decision to remove fishing pegs from the pool at the site to prevent fishing.

The Chief Officer clarified that September 2017 was the deadline by which the Trust had been required to give a commitment to take on board the recommendations from the audit report which had been included on the agenda to show transparency. Internal Audit would be monitoring actions and report back to the Audit Committee in June 2018. The Board of Trustees included some new members with important skills to support the development and sustainability of the site. To retain a level of continuity, some of the former members had agreed to stay on, including the Treasurer (as indicated in the audit report) who would remain on the Board for transitional period.

Gwladys Harrison referred to the findings of the audit report and explained that some of the information sought had been available elsewhere at the time. As in the Manager's presentation, she gave assurance that the partnership was working together to make the Trust profitable and called upon the help of elected Members to achieve this. In response to Councillor Dolphin's concerns about the removal of fishing pegs, she read out a statement detailing the background to the decision, adding that representatives of the County Council and Holywell Town Council on the Board of Trustees at the time would have been aware. She explained that despite the best efforts of the Board at the time, there was no other option but to impose the fishing ban due to a culmination of potential life-threatening issues, security problems and impact on wildlife. She referred to planned discussions to re-introduce fishing at the site later in the year.

Councillors Johnson, Perfect, Legg, Hinds and Hughes all spoke in support of the progress achieved and the future objectives which they hoped would be successful. A number of suggestions were raised on extending the marketing of the site to areas such as Merseyside, including other local sites of interest in the same promotional material and raising awareness in newsletters of Town/Community Councils and Council Members.

In welcoming the improved links with Holywell Town Council, Councillor Rosetta Dolphin hoped that the plans for the park would succeed. She asked about the projected timeline to improve the 'red' risks in the audit report and was informed by the Chief Officer that progress would be reported to the Audit Committee. He agreed that the business plan would be made available to the Committee and to Holywell Town Council, once it had been submitted to the Board of Directors in May.

In response to a query about comparison with arrangements at Wepre Park, the Manager explained that this was a different model which was managed in-house. Governance arrangements for the Greenfield Valley Trust were different as the site included a museum. Following comments from Councillor Dunbobbin, clarification was given on 'Friends of Wepre Park' as a community group with an interest in the site, including key stakeholders and elected Members.

The Chairman spoke in support of the plans and expressed his appreciation to the Access & Natural Environment Manager and Gwladys Harrison for providing a tour of the site prior to the meeting.

During discussion on the recommendations, an amendment was proposed by Councillor Chris Dolphin and agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the update and presentation be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee receive an information update every six months.

70. AIR QUALITY IN FLINTSHIRE

Councillor Chris Bithell presented a report on the findings of the regional Air Quality report, prepared in August 2017, to consider how the Council could do more to promote air quality considerations when taking key strategic and operational decisions. In highlighting the importance of the topic, he was pleased to note that good standards of air quality were recorded for North Wales, noting that further improvements were needed.

The Community and Business Protection Manager spoke about the impact of air quality on health and advised that the collaborative approach to commissioning the report had been commended by Welsh Government. She advised that the topic was now a priority for the Public Services Board and introduced the Pollution Control Officer who demonstrated monitoring tubes used to give an indication of air quality levels.

In response to questions, he provided explanation on monitoring locations and the approach to more intense monitoring. He said that a link to the Welsh Air Quality Forum could be emailed to the Committee. The introduction of projects for schools to carry out their own monitoring would help to raise environmental awareness amongst pupils.

The Manager explained that the annual report was a statutory requirement and that the findings must be taken into account for any planned developments.

Following comments on the impact of traffic management, Councillor Carolyn Thomas said that delays were often due to work carried out by utility companies and that any concerns should be passed to the relevant Area Supervisor. She referred to the Flintshire Bus Strategy which promoted use of public transport, with some operators using low-emission buses.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council encourage all decisions and policies, where appropriate, to proactively consider the impact on air quality;
- (b) That the Council work with the Public Services Board, as part of their environmental theme, to promote a multi-agency approach to addressing air quality; and
- (c) That the contents of the North Wales Combined Authority Air Quality Report be noted.

71. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration. She gave a reminder that Members had been asked to submit any specific questions on Enforcement and Environmental Care in advance of the item scheduled for the next meeting. Similar arrangements would also apply to the September meeting for an item on Natural Resources Wales.

The meeting dates for the 2018/19 municipal year would be included in the Forward Work Programme once the diary had been agreed at the Annual General Meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted; and
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

72. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 12 noon)

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Chairman