

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
7 FEBRUARY 2023

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Environment and Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Tuesday, 7 February 2023

PRESENT: Councillor David Evans (Chair)

Councillors: Mike Allport, Mel Buckley, Chris Dolphin, Mared Eastwood, Ian Hodge, Richard Lloyd, Mike Peers, Vicky Perfect, Dan Rose, and Roy Wakelam

IN ATTENDANCE AS OBSERVERS: Councillor Paul Johnson (Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Finance, Inclusion, Resilient Communities including Social Value and Procurement),

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Chris Bithell (Cabinet Member for Planning, Public Health and Public Protection), Councillor David Healey (Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy), Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation), Democratic Services Manager, Programme Manager (Climate Change & Carbon Reduction)(for minute no 50) Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment)(for minute nos. 51, 52 and 53)
Service Manager (Planning Strategy) (for minute no 54)

IN ATTENDANCE: Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officers

APOLOGIES:

Cllr Ray Hughes, Cllr Dave Hughes.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

53. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the Forward Work Programme and Action Tracking report. She confirmed that in addition to the items included for the March meeting, David Matthews from Ambition North Wales would be attending to provide an update on the Land and Property Programme. Referring to the joint meeting to discuss parking outside schools with the Education Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee she reported that this had been re-scheduled for the 23 March 2023 at 2.00 pm The Facilitator then provided an overview of the items scheduled for the forthcoming

meetings and asked members if they had items that they would like to put forward for inclusion.

In response to a question from Councillor Mike Peers on whether enforcement would be included, the Chief Officer (Streetscene) confirmed that it would cover parking enforcement outside schools. As regards other enforcement issues she confirmed that discussions had taken place with the Chief Officer (Housing) and Cabinet Members and it was proposed that a joint portfolio workshop be arranged which could also include fly tipping enforcement. Councillor Mike Peers asked if parking enforcement in general could be included in the workshop, which was agreed.

The Facilitator then referred to the Action Tracking report and provided an update on the status of the items listed. She referred to the list of questions action from Councillor Mike Peers and confirmed that the Democratic Services Manager had provided that information.

Councillor Mike Peers felt the action was still open as the link to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting in January did not include a copy of the questions raised by members. The Democratic Services Manager confirmed that he had contacted the Corporate Finance Manager and would speak to him again. He would speak to Councillor Peers outside of the meeting following guidance from the Chief Officer (Governance) on whether this information could be shared.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be approved;
- (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; and
- (c) That the Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions.

54 CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

The Chief Officer (Planning Environment & Economy) confirmed that the report would be presented to Cabinet next week and that any comments received from this committee would be welcome. This report had been presented to the Audit and Governance Committee and Climate Change Committee.

The Programme Manager (Climate Change & Carbon Reduction) commenced by saying the Climate Change Strategy was adopted in February last year and that the Council's 2021/22 Carbon Footprint data had been submitted to Welsh Government (WG). She then highlighted specific areas within the report which included the Council's carbon footprint and emission targets. Information was provided on the themes within the plan and an update on targets achieved for buildings, mobility, transport and procurement.

Moving on to the Priorities for 2023/24 the Programme Manager (Climate Change & Carbon Reduction) outlined the improvements in data collection methodology, especially around procurement, and reported on the work being undertaken with the commissioning officers and suppliers. An overview of the information on the priorities for business mileage, recording of employee vehicles, employee commuting and home working and tendering process when working with suppliers was given. She then provided information on carbon literacy training, the baselining of building and land stock and improvements to electrification of fleet, together with a net zero carbon school and aim for net zero carbon care home and local area energy plan.

The Programme Manager (Climate Change & Carbon Reduction) confirmed that in addition to herself a Climate Change Project Assistant had been appointed with a Climate Change Project Officer starting in two months. It was also confirmed that there was a revenue pressure under the MTFS for an Energy Projects Co-ordinator to lead on renewable energy, energy saving and EV infrastructure support. She also reported on the collaborative work with Denbighshire County Council for a Carbon Procurement Officer and access to additional funding both from WG and the private sector.

Following questions from Councillor Mike Peers the Programme Manager (Climate Change & Carbon Reduction) firstly referred to solar panels on schools. She said the most optimised option was provided for the roof space of each building with consideration made to identify what the pay back on investment would be and renewable energy achieved to off-set the cost. She agreed to speak to another team on the point of revenue generated and report back.

Referring to the point on decreases in heating costs from buildings or streetlighting she confirmed that these had been achieved through upgrades through the invest to save programme with these figures shown against the 2018 baseline information.

Regarding the opportunities to decarbonise buildings the Programme Manager (Climate Change & Carbon Reduction) confirmed that this was included as a priority to better understand what was able to be achieved within the existing council stock.

In response to the Insulation of lofts and conservatories the Programme Manager (Climate Change & Carbon Reduction) confirmed that these were supported through the Domestic Energy Team and she agreed to refer this question to them.

A question was raised by Councillor Dan Rose on measurements in procurement to which the Programme Manager (Climate Change & Carbon Reduction) confirmed that at present there was not a standardised measurement in place. Welsh Government (WG) were developing a toolkit which would make it easier for councils to include carbon weighting in tendering and for suppliers to report on carbon emissions within contracts.

Responding to a question from Councillor Richard Lloyd on the use of open fires in council properties, the Programme Manager (Climate Change & Carbon Reduction) was not aware of any policies from Welsh Government but

reported on several enquires received asking for the reinstatement of open fires which would not be supported. The Chief Officer (Streetscene) confirmed that Welsh Government had published a White Paper on a Clean Air Bill for Wales which would probably follow what was taking place in England.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy thanked the Programme Manager for her work saying there were lots of positives within the report, but that procurement was a real problem. He felt that once the Welsh Government (WG) toolkit was available it would be beneficial both for major contractors and the Council. He said that it was unfair that this was linked to the value of the goods supplied rather than the number of miles travelled and that with inflation included it was a no-win situation for all authorities.

The recommendations within in the report were moved and seconded by Councillors Mared Eastwood and Roy Wakelam.

RESOLVED:

- (a) To receive the report and note its contents
- (b) To support the improvement of internal communications to raise awareness of the Council's positive progress in moving to achieve its climate change ambitions.
- (c) To support the introduction of embedding carbon measures into procurement processes within a pilot portfolio of the Council.
- (d) To support the case for an Invest to Save post and resources to introduce Building Management Systems within more of our building assets to improve the management of energy use.
- (e) To support the embedding of climate change principles throughout the Council, through delivery of Carbon Literacy training to Elected Members, Senior Managers and other key decision makers

55. WOODLAND STRATEGY UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Planning Environment & Economy) introduced the report and confirmed that the Urban Tree and Woodland Strategy was adopted in 2018 to assist with tree planting and increasing tree canopy cover. The Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) continued saying the Urban Tree and Woodland Strategy was established to provide an increase in canopy cover and ensure the sustainable management of trees, highlighting the benefits that trees provided to residents within Flintshire. He outlined the targets set for increasing canopy cover from 14.5% to 18% by 2033. Natural Resources Wales carry out the canopy cover assessment, although this had not been reviewed since 2018 so up to date information was not available at present.

The Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) reported that in recent years, tree planting had taken place on sites identified within the county utilising funding from Welsh Government Woodland Improvement Grant and the Local Nature for Places Grant. He outlined how the canopy cover had been increased with well-planned tree schemes, ensuring the aftercare was in place, with local communities involved, to ensure the survival of the trees. The Service Manger (Countryside Access and Natural Environment)

outlined the process involved to ensure these planting projects were successful. Over 23,000 trees had been planted over the last 4 years and the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) commended his team for their hard work to enable this to happen. Engagement with communities was key to this and he provided story map of tree planting projects across the county which highlighted the work undertaken.

The Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) then provided information on the proposed development of a Flintshire Forest. It was suggested that a Flintshire Forest could mirror the direction of National Forest from Welsh Government (WG). He outlined the objectives for creating areas of new woodland, spaces for leisure and nature, capturing and storing carbon as well as providing timber. There would be a need to align the key objectives from the Urban Tree and Woodland Strategy and the Flintshire Forest. He referred members to the framework at 1.11 in the report and provided an overview of the key elements, vision and engagement with the public.

In response to a question from Councillor Roy Wakelam on the protection of existing older trees, the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) outlined the mechanisms such as Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) and planning conditions. He referred to public consultations undertaken in advance of planting projects and some resistance to tree planting which had been received, he said public engagement to highlight the benefits of trees as well as ensuring the right trees were planted was key to their ongoing protection. The promotion of good tree planting with the correct trees planted in new developments would ensure better outcomes. Referring to losses of tree he confirmed that approximately 1,000 trees had been lost due to Ash dieback over the winter on highways but more trees were being planting to replace these. This work was critical.

In response to questions from Councillor Dan Rose the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) firstly responded to the success of the 23,000 trees planted point and said that there was roughly a 20% failure for small whips with maximum care taken to ensure the survival of the larger standard trees. During the drought last year with 5,000 trees planted at Wepre Park it was not possible to ensure all trees survived. This year the whips which were lost were being replaced.

Responding to the mulch from felled trees point the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) confirmed this was already used for keeping moisture in the grounds and preventing weeds on standard trees and hedgerows. He also confirmed that work had been undertaken on carbon sequestration on sites across the county to ensure tree planting did not disturb or disrupt an established environment.

In response to the records point the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) confirmed that records were kept of species and orchards planted and provided information on the tree days and apple juice sessions held using fruit from heritage variety fruit trees.

In response to the question on protection of new areas of planting the Chief Officer (Planning Environment & Economy) said the areas under review

were on Flintshire land and as landowners would be protected. If development occurs next to the council's land assessments would be undertaken to ensure that the trees would not be affected.

The Chair referred to the Local Development Plan (LDP) and asked if there was a way of insisting that Developers included more established trees in their plans. The Chief Officer (Planning Environment & Economy) said this was not for every site but that the Development Management Team should consider this when assessing potential impacts on site.

Responding to questions from Councillor Mike Peers, the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) firstly referred to the forest question. He confirmed that public engagement was undertaken in areas being considered for tree planning. All proposed trees planting to increase canopy cover, would include a survey of the ground conditions, settings and existing trees before deciding on what type of tree to plant. Trees with thorns or poisonous berries for example, would not be considered in a school environment.

Responding to the green corridor question from the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy, the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) explained that tree planting and woodlands would not be planted in isolation. There were constraints regarding available land and its connectivity to the wider environment but landowners were engaged in this process.

Responding to a question from Councillor Dan Rose, the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) outlined the collaborative work undertaken over several years with the partners within the Public Services Board. This had enabled the mapping of green assets within the county with several successful smaller projects. The position regarding landowners was different in terms of funding but that there were options.

The recommendations within in the report were moved and seconded by Councillors Mike Peers and Ian Hodge.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Members note the content of this update and support the officers in their ongoing tree and woodland management work.
- (b) That Members support plans to develop the Flintshire Forest in accordance with the framework details provided.

56 WEPRE PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

In presenting the report the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) explained that the Wepre Park Management Plan was their core operational document to guide the work, actions and development over a 5-year term. He provided information on the changes in format from the 2016/2021 plan and outlined how the new plan would be structured. The Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) then provided information on the ongoing maintenance schedule and programme for the park

moving forward. Information was included at Appendix 3 on the extensive public consultation carried out last year and an overview of the rise in visitor numbers. An outline was given of specific areas within the Management Plan for the park which ensured the protection of sensitive areas of conservation but also welcomed visitors. He then referred to Appendix 2 which included Actions for the day-to-day business running of the park and he provided information on resources and external funding, ranger and natural environment team and the volunteers who support the park.

In response to questions on funding from Councillor Mike Peers the Service Manager explained the core funding included the base budget was for staff and to enable the day-to-day operations of the park with the support of the volunteers. Some of the work highlighted in the actions in Appendix 2 could be undertaken within that budget. As regards additional funding requirements for projects he confirmed that these would be sourced from external funding streams which were difficult to predict. It was essential to provide that confidence to funders that they were buying into something which had been recognised, had undertaken consultation and was included in the Plan for the park.

Following a request for an update on the hydropower experiment on Wepre Brook from the Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Economy, the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) explained Wepre Brook was dammed in the 1800s to provide electricity for Wepre Hall. Discussions held regarding a previous scheme which was shelved and he then reported on the approach from the University College of London (UCL) who had developed new equipment that they wanted to test. The temporary equipment was installed last autumn and UCL were pleased that it had worked well and had furthered their research. Once the figures around water flow and turbine efficiency had been received this would enable costs to be established for the new turbine to be installed. This would be in keeping with the park and link up to the visitor centre and pay back for electricity generated. This was expected to be received within the next couple of weeks then a decision would be made to move forward or not.

The recommendations in the report were moved and seconded by Councillors Ian Hodge and Richard Lloyd

RESOLVED:

That Members endorse the new 5-year management plan for Wepre Park.

57. OPEN SPACES AND HIGHWAY MEMORIAL POLICY

In presenting the report the Chief Officer (Planning Environment & Economy) explained that currently there was no policy in place for memorials placed on the highway network or on council land. He felt this policy struck the correct balance between the initial cost, long term maintenance and consideration of location as this was a sensitive issue.

The Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) reported that within countryside sites and opens spaces requests had been received from members of the public for a commemorative bench or tree to be

planted in memory of a loved one. Over the last few years these requests had increased significantly and had led to concerns that open spaces were not turned into memorial gardens. This was a sensitive issue and the council had to be mindful of families and their circumstances.

The purpose of this policy was to work with families in a sensitive way and consider all options when it came to memorials in addition to benches, such as planting a tree or section of hedgerow, stiles or donate a gate which were also considered in country parks. Referring to highway memorials the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) said these were slightly different as safety had to be considered because of the distraction for drivers. This policy would enable officers to speak to the families to ensure a positive outcome was achieved. There were also funding issues which had to be considered to include the initial purchase, maintenance and refurbishment of the item which should be borne by the applicant. He then reported on the sensitivity required when families met to release balloons which was an issue as they release plastic and litter into the countryside. Discussions with families would take place to find alternative ways for families to mark family members' passing.

In response to questions on planting memorial trees and balloon releases from Councillor Dan Rose, the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) confirmed that families could plant trees. There were risks to this which had to be discussed with the family such as trees dying during drought conditions, suffering vandalism and they had to be maintained. He was not in favour of plaques but a commemorative book at visitor centres or online could be used to record this. Referring to balloon releases he said it was difficult for his officers to approach a grieving family to ask them not to release the balloons. Publicising and providing information on the risks of doing this was the way forward

Councillor Dan Rose asked if bio-degradable plaques would be considered as a short-term measure which the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) confirmed that he would be agreeable to considering.

Councillor Roy Wakelam suggested families be encouraged to leave unwrapped flowers tied with twine. In response the Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) said rotting, composting flowers still had to be removed and maybe suggesting that fresh flowers were left unwrapped but had to be removed within two weeks would be more appropriate. Officers felt reluctant to remove something that had been left in memory, but this policy would allow for the removal of rotten flowers.

Councillor Mike Peers sought clarification on the legacy donation point on page 109 at sections 1.10 and 1.13 and suggested that the following wording be considered :- "you may give a donation to Flintshire County Council or Countryside Services after your instructions had been discussed and agreed by both parties". The Service Manager (Countryside Access and Natural Environment) was happy to include this additional wording

The recommendations in the report were moved and seconded by Councillors Roy Wakelam and Councillor Mared Eastwood

RESOLVED:

That the committee approved the policy subject to the amendment suggested by Councillor Mike Peers

58. DWR CYMRU WELSH WATER DRAFT WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024 - PUBLIC CONSULTATION LAUNCH

In presenting this report the Chief Officer (Planning Environment & Economy) confirmed that this was a live consultation and that the role of Welsh Water was critical especially with regard the LDP and management of phosphates.

The Service Manager (Strategy) firstly spoke on the previous item of biodiversity saying that the Local Development Plan (LDP) included a sweep of policies which would help with those issues to protect trees, woodlands or hedgerows. There was also green space and urban space protections included together with new policies on biodiversity net gains.

Moving on to the report the Service Manager (Strategy) reported that this consultation from Welsh Water had been sent to key stakeholders and related to an update of their Water Resource Management Plan which was a statutory document which had to be refreshed on a 5 yearly basis. This was to ensure the long-term security of water supply for business and domestic use. Welsh Water had highlighted the drought experienced last year and had introduced drought reliance within this plan. Members were referred to the map which highlighted the 23 planning zones in the report and at point 1.03 included the key objectives and drivers on how these measures would support those areas in deficit. The overview of water supply by Welsh Water was given at 1.04 in the report to ensure that when severe events happen that Welsh Water were able to cater for supply as much as possible. The Service Manager (Strategy) explained that Flintshire was in the Alwen Dee zone and then provided information on how calculations were made. Four areas had been identified as areas that would be in deficit with three in South Wales and one in North Wales. He outlined how the demand management could affect the county and measures put in place to reduce daily consumption. Increased water metering was also being promoted.

He referred to 1.10 of the report and the bullet points listed and explained why further clarification was required:-

- He wanted clarification that the growth in Flintshire's LDP had been factored into this planning.
- That the Council fully supported the wider resilience measures to support leakage improvement
- Supported raising customer awareness on efficient use of water.
- that reductions in waste water going to treatment works from each domestic and commercial property could assist with less phosphates going into rivers
- Encouraged greater connection between waste resource planning and waste water planning to enable improvements to be brought forward
- Seek a commitment for more regular liaison and collaboration with Welsh Water as a key partner whether on a strategic level or local level.

In response to questions from Councillor Mike Peers the Service Manager (Strategy) firstly responded to the point on leakage reduction saying maybe if a definitive programme was publicised it would help. Welsh Water had an aging infrastructure they are working through but it was more a reactive process as it was a costly exercise. Coordination with other statutory providers when undertaking road works to enable opportunities for shared work could be explored.

In response to the question on run off and surface water the Service Manager (Strategy) explained developers had to consider more sustainable ways of dealing with surface water run-off. Developers were still struggling with SUDS and this was something which had to happen.

Councillor Ian Hodge asked if all new developments were required to automatically go on a water meter. In response the Service Manager (Strategy) did not know as it was not a planning requirement but was a requirement for the water bodies. Within the information provided from Welsh Water it appeared it was not which could be part of the problem and should be more actively encouraged especially allaying fears from larger families who do not want them.

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Public Health and Public Protection referred to future developments of the LDP with more properties being built and asked had Welsh Water taken this into consideration. The upgrading of the sewerage treatment works which would be affected by the phosphate issues and ways of dealing with phosphates had been included in the LDP

In response the Service Manager (Strategy) reported that Welsh Water had been a key stakeholder involved throughout the LDP and were aware of the growth, amount of houses and their understanding that the SUDS requirements would be included as part of surface water management. Ensuring better communication and dialogue with Welsh Water was the best way to ensure they understood what the council was required to undertake and what their requirements were too. The upgrading of the treatment works could not happen quickly enough as it was the best way to deal with the phosphates problems.

In response to a question on the Milwr Tunnel from the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy, the Service Manager (Strategy) confirmed he would take this back as a separate matter and write to Welsh Water and ask specific questions as to the utilisation of the Milwr Tunnel for water abstraction and hydro power.

The Chief Officer (Planning Environment & Economy) suggested an invitation be sent for a representative of Welsh Water to attend committee for a future meeting. This was agreed by committee members

The Service Manager (Strategy) said that dependent upon the date when a representative could attend committee, he was happy to draft the letter with regard to the Milwr Tunnel and that the consultation comments could go as per the recommendations.

The recommendations in the report were moved and seconded by Councillors Ian Hodge and Mared Eastwood

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Members note the content of this report and the main outcome of the draft Water Resources Management Plan 2024, that shows no supply resilience issues for the Alwen Dee zone that Flintshire is part of
- (b) That Members support the content of paragraph 1.10 of this report and give the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) delegated authority to prepare a final response and agree this with the Chair of this committee, prior to responding to the consultation by the due date.

59 MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.32 am)

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Chair