

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
21 MAY 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Wepre Park Visitor Centre on Tuesday, 21 May 2019

PRESENT:

Councillors: Mike Allport, Haydn Bateman, Sean Bibby, Chris Dolphin, Andy Dunbobbin, David Evans, Patrick Heesom, Ray Hughes, Joe Johnson, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors: Bob Connah (for Veronica Gay) and Ian Dunbar (for Cindy Hinds)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside; Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection; Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development; Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation); and Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy)

For minute number 5

Tom Woodall, Access & Natural Environment Manager; Steve Lewis, Ranger; and Helen Mrowiec, Team Leader - Sites

For minute numbers 6 and 7

Anthony Stanford, Transport Manager; and Sue Price, Highways Policy Officer

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

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

It had been confirmed at the County Council's Annual General Meeting that the Chair of the Committee should come from the New Independent group.

Councillor Paul Shotton's nomination for Councillor Ray Hughes was seconded by Councillor David Evans.

Councillor Haydn Bateman's nomination for Councillor Patrick Heesom was not seconded.

No further nominations were received.

On being put to the vote, it was agreed that Councillor Ray Hughes be appointed as Chair. There followed a brief adjournment.

On returning to the meeting, the Facilitator explained that the Democratic Services Manager had advised that Councillor Heesom was the New Independent group's sole nomination for Chair of the Committee. If his nomination was not

seconded, Councillor Hughes would be appointed as Chair for this meeting only and the item re-visited at the next meeting.

As Councillor Heesom's nomination was not seconded, it was agreed by the Committee that Councillor Hughes should be appointed as Chair for the meeting.

Councillor Hughes advised that a change in political balance since the Annual Meeting would result in the number of New Independent seats on the Committee being reduced to one following the next County Council meeting.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Ray Hughes be appointed Chair of the Committee for this meeting only and item to be re-visited at the next meeting.

(From this point, Councillor Hughes chaired the remainder of the meeting)

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Sean Bibby's nomination for Councillor David Evans as Vice-Chair of the Committee was seconded by Councillor Ian Dunbar. There were no further nominations.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor David Evans be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee for the municipal year.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 April 2019 were submitted.

Matters Arising

Minute number 58: Greenfield Valley - The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) advised that the Management Agreement had been accepted by the Board and was due to be signed.

Minute number 59: Environmental Enforcement - Councillor Haydn Bateman reported complaints by two dog walkers who had been issued with fixed penalty notices for allowing their dogs off the lead on playing fields at The Rec in Mold. Whilst he agreed with the policy to exclude dogs from marked sports pitches, there were no signs to indicate this on the site and the markings on the field were worn. He suggested that in this instance, the enforcement officers could have provided advice instead of issuing a penalty notice.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) said that the Committee's recommendation to exclude dogs from playing fields/sports pitches - subsequently endorsed by Cabinet - had recognised the need to balance encouraging dog responsible walkers whilst considering the safety of children. Over a period of nine months, the Council had taken time to educate members of the public, rather than issue tickets, to raise awareness of the policy and install signage at sites. Following replacement of a number of damaged signs, a photographic record was now kept as evidence that signs had been erected. The Chief Officer agreed to look into the matter and provide Councillor Bateman with copies of the photographs for this site. He advised that if the Committee wished to reconsider the policy, an item could be included on the Forward Work Programme.

Councillor Owen Thomas commented that playing fields in rural villages were often un-marked and asked that the policy be re-visited. The Facilitator advised that the item was scheduled for the November meeting.

The Chief Officer and Councillor Carolyn Thomas said that Town and Community Councils were consulted on the policy before implementation. If they decided to exclude dogs from pitches under their ownership at a later stage, they were able to make a written request to the County Council.

RESOLVED:

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

5. WEPRE PARK

The Access & Natural Environment Manager gave a joint presentation with Steve Lewis (Ranger) and Helen Mrowiec (Team Leader - Sites) on past activities and future developments to encourage best community use of Wepre Park. The video and presentation covered the following:

- Wepre Park 2015-19
- Wepre Boardwalk 2016-17 improvements
- Wepre Park Run
- Plas Derw parent and toddler group
- Wepre educational orchard
- Herb garden
- Volunteers
- Events with Friends of Wepre Park
- Stakeholders
- Habitat works

During the presentation, officers highlighted the importance of partnership working to help maintain and develop Wepre Park to manage the increased number of visitors. Amongst future plans were improvements to access, car parking and play areas. It was noted that the success of Wepre Park would not have been possible without the contributions of volunteers and community groups.

In praising the progress made at Wepre Park as a popular natural outdoor environment, Councillor Carolyn Thomas welcomed the plans for further improvements. She also recognised the valued work undertaken by Rangers on all sites across Flintshire.

Councillor Chris Dolphin congratulated the team for their achievements and drew comparison with Greenfield Valley which was also a natural environment. However, he said that the two sites were run differently and that some sections of Greenfield Valley were not free to enter.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas said it was important to note that the range of parks across Flintshire provided natural free outdoor space for families to enjoy. Access to Greenfield Valley was free except for the enclosed area.

During discussion, a number of Members commended the efforts made to transform Wepre Park; the work of officers in securing grant funding, the contributions of volunteers and the Friends of Wepre Park. This was echoed by Councillor Sean Bibby who pointed out that the park spanned Shotton as well as Connah's Quay. Councillor Andy Dunbobbin referred to the positive impact on mental health and wellbeing.

Also speaking in support was Councillor Derek Butler who said that the creation of the skate park was a welcomed initiative.

The Chairman thanked officers for the presentation.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee congratulates all involved in the excellent achievements at Wepre Country Park.

6. MOLD TO BROUGHTON CYCLEWAY

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) introduced a report to seek a recommendation to Cabinet for the submission of the Mold to Broughton cycle link scheme for Welsh Government (WG) Active Travel funding. During statutory consultation, the link had been identified as a key strategic corridor on the Council's Integrated Network Map which was subsequently approved by WG. Funding received in 2018/19 had enabled the Council to commission work on a route option appraisal which was now complete, and detailed design of the scheme was nearing completion.

The scheme was part of the Council's Integrated Transport Strategy - which sought to facilitate the integration of all modes of transport (walking, cycling, bus and rail) to enhance access to employment, education and essential services. An update on the Strategy was due to be shared with the Committee in July. Recent announcements on WG local transport grant funding included £5.4m for Flintshire (one of the highest settlements in Wales) to be invested in the local transport network as well as providing long-term benefits and employment opportunities.

The Transport Manager explained that the aim of the cycleway scheme was to link the communities of Mold, Buckley, Penyffordd, Broughton, Saltney and Sandycroft whilst providing links to existing railway stations at Buckley and Penyffordd to provide sustainable access to major employment sites.

The Highways Policy Officer gave an overview of the proposed cycleway route including available options and traffic management solutions where appropriate. The route also provided good connectivity with the Deeside Industrial Park and the Wrexham-Bidston railway line.

The Chief Officer said that good progress had been made in completing the Saltney cycleway which was one of the links on the route. Sharing details of the route would help to raise awareness of this innovative scheme to link communities and provide a sustainable transport solution for future generations.

On the Council's success in securing funding for schemes under Active Travel and Safer Routes in Communities, Councillor Carolyn Thomas praised the officers and said that the cycleway route could be a flagship scheme for the Council and WG.

Councillor Paul Shotton spoke in support of the scheme which would benefit the increasing number of cyclists. He welcomed links with the Wrexham-Bidston line and was informed that the Chief Officer was a member of that steering group. On finance, Councillor Carolyn Thomas advised that funding for the feasibility study had been received and that some funding in this year could be used for sections of the route. Further bids would be submitted on completion of the detailed design.

Councillor Chris Dolphin congratulated both Chief Officers on the progress to date. He highlighted the importance of connectivity with rural villages, for example Gorsedd to Pantasaph. Councillor Carolyn Thomas explained that the grant funding was subject to criteria. In acknowledging the needs of rural communities, she advised that different funding streams were being explored to provide bus links to rural areas.

Councillors Joe Johnson and Bob Connah both welcomed options to address safety concerns in Sandycroft. Councillor Connah said that the stretch between the Bridge Inn and the roundabout by the A380 factory was a particular issue requiring careful consideration. The Highways Policy Officer said that options for an off-road facility would be discussed and that this was one of the areas where land ownership negotiations were unavoidable.

On behalf of the Flintshire and Wrexham Joint Local Access Forum, Councillor David Evans asked that opportunities for bridleways be explored where possible. He also cited the roundabout over the A55 between Penyffordd and Broughton as a problem area and asked about the possibility of a pedestrianised footbridge. On the absence of a link between Saltney Ferry and Sandycroft, the Highways Policy Officer advised that whilst this did not form part of the cycleway scheme, it was included on the Integrated Network Map as part of the Council's 15 year plan covering a wider area. There would be opportunities in the future to bid for funding to bring those routes into use. Officers agreed to look into the potential for a footpath/cycleway on River Lane. On the subject of bridleways, the officer spoke about restrictions such as land ownership and surfacing.

Councillor Haydn Bateman spoke in support of recommending the scheme, particularly the A5118 route. In response to requests for further information on specific areas, the Highways Policy Officer said that the detailed design would be in accordance with the Active Travel design guidance and would be shared with the Committee once it had been completed.

In thanking officers for the report, Councillor Andy Dunbobbin spoke about links to the Wellbeing Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 as well as environment and climate change.

Councillor Chris Bithell acknowledged the increasing demand for cycleways across the County through a phased approach. He welcomed the efforts of officers to overcome issues to achieve a creative plan.

Councillor Owen Thomas raised concerns about the B5129 Sandycroft to Airbus road and commented that the footpath along the river could be introduced more into the route.

Councillor Derek Butler welcomed the initiatives which helped to break down barriers to employment and increase commuter opportunities with links to rail. He referred to issues arising from multi-use routes and the need for education and persuasion.

Councillor Mike Allport said that there was no safe link between Higher Kinnerton and the Airbus factory which was the nearest major employer.

In response to comments from Councillor Evans, the officer agreed to check the link to the Active Travel website which contained links to documents and design guidance. The timescales on the Integrated Network Map were aspirational as they required submission every three years to consider further links. The scheme would be submitted in January 2020 with WG funding available from April possibly provided in phases.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Evans and seconded by Councillor Bibby.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports the proposals contained in the study and notes the opportunity to deliver an exciting and innovative scheme; and
- (b) That the Committee recommends the submission of the Mold to Broughton Cycle Scheme as the Council's strategic application under the Welsh Government Active Travel fund for the 2020/21 financial year.

7. BRIEFING PAPER ON 20MPH MANDATORY SPEED LIMITS WITHIN FLINTSHIRE

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) introduced a briefing paper on 20mph mandatory speed limits in Flintshire. A report prepared in response to a request

by the Committee had been superseded by the recent Ministerial announcement indicating support for 20mph to become the default limit in residential areas across Wales. A decision was awaited from the First Minister on whether there would be a legislative change.

The Transport Manager - representing North Wales on a working group with Welsh Government to set the policy - outlined the background and current arrangements in Flintshire. He referred to the blanket schemes operated by some Counties in response to local pressure and the trial arrangements currently being evaluated in some areas of Wales. A major consideration was the level of Police resources to enforce speed limits; therefore under the current legislation, it was essential that 20mph speed limit proposals were self-enforcing, either by means of existing driver behaviour or physical traffic calming measures should existing speed be above the required threshold. Due to the costs of introducing traffic calming measures, a change in legislation by Welsh Government was essential in achieving the most affordable way of implementing mandatory 20mph speed limits. A report would be brought back to the Committee once a decision had been made by the First Minister.

The Chairman expressed his view that advisory 20mph speed limits outside schools in Flintshire should be mandatory rather than advisory.

This view was shared by Councillor Paul Shotton who also referred to parking issues outside schools which required robust enforcement. On this point, Councillor Carolyn Thomas spoke about funding secured for a mobile enforcement camera which could be used to improve safety outside schools. On speed limits, she said that whilst some people supported mandatory 20mph limits, others were against it due to the impact on pollution levels.

In response to comments from Councillor Joe Johnson, the Transport Manager explained that speed limits were set in accordance with strict criteria and must be subject to consultation.

Councillor Sean Bibby spoke in support of mandatory 20mph speed limits outside schools, acknowledging that this was not a straight-forward issue, and raised concerns about the Police capacity to enforce.

Councillor Chris Dolphin spoke in favour of restricting speed limits on estate roads.

8. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration and advised Members of the Waste Recycling workshop on 3 June. The following changes were agreed to future meetings:

- The next meeting to be moved to 9 July with an item included on the Council's Integrated Transport Strategy.
- An update on Greenfield Valley to be scheduled for the October meeting.
- A site visit at Parc Adfer to be confirmed for the November meeting.

- An update on 20mph speed limits to be scheduled once an update was received.

The Chairman took the opportunity to congratulate Councillors Carolyn Thomas and Joe Johnson on their respective appointments at the Annual General Meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme, as amended, 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.

9. 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 12.30pm)

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Chairman