

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
15 OCTOBER 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Greenfield Valley Heritage Park, Greenfield, Holywell on Tuesday, 15 October 2019

PRESENT: Councillor Patrick Heesom (Chairman)

Councillors: Mike Allport, Sean Bibby, Chris Dolphin, David Evans, George Hardcastle, Cindy Hinds, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Joe Johnson, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

APOLOGIES: Councillor Andy Dunbobbin and Councillor Veronica Gay.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Haydn Bateman

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside, Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection, Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy), Service Delivery Manager, Bereavement Services Manager, Access & Natural Environment Manager, Countryside & Access Awareness Officer, Gladys Harrison Chair, Greenfield Valley Trust and Highway Network Manager

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

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

25. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration.

In response to an issued raised about flood risk and climate change by Councillor Hinds, the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) advised that a report could be brought to the December meeting.

Members also requested a report on wildflowers on grass verges to be considered at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee Forward Work Programme be noted;
- (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 progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

26. GREENFIELD VALLEY – SIX MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) introduced the six monthly progress report on Greenfield Valley and confirmed that in August the Management Agreement between Flintshire County Council and Greenfield Valley Trust was agreed. He invited the Access & Natural Environment Manager to present the report.

The Access & Natural Environmental Manager presented the key highlights from the last 6 months on the work carried out at Greenfield Valley. These were

- Site Management
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Active Travel Route
- Volunteering
- Fire Alarm / Electrics
- Health and Safety Assessment
- Greenflag

The Countryside & Access Awareness Officer then showed a short video of the park and gave a report on the positive progress that Greenfield Valley had achieved through the following

- Promotions
- Social Media
- Events

The Chair of Greenfield Valley Trust welcomed the new positive relationship between the two organisations and praised the team for their hard work over the last months. She admitted that things still go wrong but with great team work problems were soon put right and now things were moving forward.

Councillor Johnson raised the issue of fly tipping and the Countryside & Access Awareness Officer agreed to put some information on Facebook along with the video that was shown at Committee.

Councillor Owen Thomas questioned where they got their electricity from given the amount of water that was flowing close to the Park. The Access & Natural Environment Manager confirmed that the electric part had been completed but the water wheel was not working. He confirmed that work was underway on the project and it had been given priority.

Members were very complimentary in what had been done in the last 6 months and wanted them to continue to promote the Heritage Centre via social media. Councillor Shotton also added that it might be advantageous to contact local hotels and caravan parks. In response the Countryside & Access Awareness Officer confirmed that local hotels and caravan parks had been given leaflets and people were visiting the Centre some from as far away as Birmingham.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report and the positive progress achieved at Greenfield Valley be noted.

27. WASTE STRATEGY REVIEW CONSULTATION

Prior to the consideration of the report The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside wanted to advise the Committee that Flintshire were performing well on recycling and ahead of targets being the third best in Wales and Wales being the third best in the world.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) gave background to the report and asked the Committee for their feedback on the 6 week consultation on recycling which he would come back with the results once completed. He introduced the Service Delivery Manager who reported on the following

- Recycling Targets and Performance
- The need to Review Recycling Targets
- Review of Current Waste Strategy

The Chairman questioned why the consultation period was so short being only six weeks long. The Service Delivery Manager stated that nearly 7,805 responses had already been received and that the consultation didn't end until 31st October. The electronic survey would do the majority of the analysis but over 2,000 individual comments would need to be gone through.

Questions were asked about the disposal of nappies. The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) said that this was being looked into and that Welsh Government (WG) were investing in a North Wales recycling plant for nappies but for the short term they were still to be taken to Parc Adfer.

Concerns were raised about residual waste. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside commented that on the whole residual waste had reduced due to the increase in side waste enforcement. The Service Delivery Manager added that residual waste would be collected and a sticker would be put on the bin to indicate that it had been taken but side waste should not be presented. This would be followed up by a letter and an FPN for further offences. Councillor Hutchinson questioned why it was not taken as he saw it as people being responsible for waste but he was advised that usually the black bag had recyclable items in it.

The size of bins and frequency of collection was also raised. Councillor Hardcastle commented that older people would not be able to manage bigger bins while Councillor Dolphin suggested that if bins were smaller it might force people to recycle more. Bins would need to be bigger if collections changed to 3-4 weeks.

Councillor Bibby reported that most residents were good at recycling and that the WG should enforce manufacturers to use recyclable or bio degradable

packaging. He also stated that recycling receptacles and bags were sometimes hard to get hold of. He did not support 3-4 weekly collections and that focus should be on encouraging people to recycle more.

Other members were in support of lobbying WG and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside said that the Government were looking into new legislation around producer responsibility.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Allport, the Service Delivery Manager confirmed that they were no longer using the company that supplied the stickers for the brown bins and that they were looking at a tag system as these could be less easily removed and were more robust.

Councillor Hughes raised a concern about the lack of space for bins by terraced houses due to their close proximity and that side waste could not be easily identified to a particular house. The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) advised that a lot of work was taking place with regard to communal pick up areas, including having cameras installed in some areas.

Councillor Evans suggested that door to door consultations take place in problem areas and questioned why consultations in the Connect Centres and Libraries were only during the day.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) was in agreement and said that Officers would engage with residents in problem areas. He also agreed that consultation events needed to be held at different times to suit residents.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Sean Bibby and seconded by Councillor Paul Shotton.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council's current recycling performance be noted; and
- (b) That the feedback on the points raised within the consultation programme and questionnaire be noted.

28. GRASS CUTTING POLICY REVIEW

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) introduced a report highlighting the frequency of grass cutting for each category as defined within the current Grass Cutting Policy. He invited the Highway Network Manager to provide an overview on existing standards. He reported that Contractors had to be brought in to maintain standards until the end of September due to resources being redirected to localised summer flooding incidents and record breaking temperatures promoting the growth of grass.

Councillor Evans asked what the costings were for the removal of grass that had been cut on sports fields and pensioner complexes. He emphasised that this should not be left and should be taken away which would reduce the amount of complaints received.

The Highway Network Manager said that there would be a 70% increase in cost if the grass was to be collected as this would require new machinery and equipment. The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) said that he would report back at the December/January meeting with figures.

Councillor Hughes agreed with Councillor Evans and said that Leeswood intended to wild seed green areas next year so that grass would not need cutting. The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) reminded the Committee that the report recommended that Town & Community Councils put forward areas for consideration for wildflower planting to trial an alternative for less frequent cuts and longer grass.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside shared photos of examples of where wildflowers could be planted at low cost.

In response to a question asked by Councillor Bibby an explanation was given on the grass cutting regime at cemeteries.

Councillor Hardcastle thanked the Chief Officer, the Highway Network Manager and Streetscene for the grass cutting that had been carried out in Aston.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) said he would speak to Councillor Hutchinson about an issue with a contractor after the meeting and he agreed to circulate information on the Voluntary Planting Scheme "Our Backyard".

Councillor Evans proposed that the decision be deferred to consider a report on exact costing of the removal of grass cuttings in certain areas such as pensioner complexes, school playing fields and communal areas.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) agreed to report back in December/January on the cost. This was supported by the Committee.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor David Evans and seconded by Councillor George Hardcastle.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee requests a further report giving an outline of the cost of introducing grass collection within the Grass Cutting Policy
- (b) That the Committee recommends Cabinet approves the promotion of a programme of wildflower planting with those Town & Community Councils who wish to support the initiative.

29. ASH DIEBACK ACTION PLAN

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) gave a brief introduction to the report stating that the purpose was to raise awareness of the problem which was moving quicker than expected and make Members aware of the action plans. He introduced the Access & Natural Environment Manager who explained in more depth the situation.

He explained that this years' monitoring showed that it is now endemic across the county and the disease was likely to wipe out the majority of the 24,000 ash trees with significant environmental impact. Flintshire was fortunate in that they have a dedicated Tree Officer (unlike neighbouring authorities) who have outlined plans to prioritise removing infected trees from roadsides, schools and other public locations. He added that infected trees not on council land would be more problematic. Pictures of infected trees were shown to the Committee.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside reported that the issues highlighted within the report had a financial risk attached and therefore she had raised this with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

The Chairman commented on the importance of communicating the gravity of the situation and drew attention to the quality of the report which he felt should be made available more widely.

The Countryside & Access Awareness Officer said that care needed to be taken on the right communication with the public to avoid panic and that a plan was in place to manage the problem.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) highlighted the budget pressure identified in the report.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the content of the plan be noted; and
- (b) That the awareness of the potential impact for the Authority in terms of finance and health & safety risks be noted.

30. CEMETERY PROVISION AND FUTURE STRATEGY

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) introduced a report to seek support for the purchase of identified land to extend Hope and Hawarden Cemeteries. Also that investigations into future burial provisions at other Cemeteries in the County commence 4 years prior to the anticipated point when the existing capacity has been reached. He invited the Bereavement Manager to provide an overview of the key points on the report.

With regard to the Cemeteries in Buckley the Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) stated that there was a need to start looking at solutions as there was only 9 year capacity left. Councillor Hutchinson reported on issues that he felt the Council needed to re-visit at a future date regarding availability of land in the Buckley area. He had spoken with the Vicar of Bistre Church who had indicated that he would be willing to release a section of land to the Council if required.

In relation to questions asked by Councillor Hardcastle the Bereavement Manager identified the land at Hawarden No. 2 Cemetery was adjacent to the bottom side on the left which would give 30 more years based on the current burial rate.

The Chairman thanked the Officers and Cabinet Members for their attendance.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Cindy Hinds.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports the purchase of the identified land to extend Hope and Hawarden Cemeteries.
- (b) That the Committee recommends that investigations into future burial provisions at other Cemeteries in the County should commence 4 years prior to the anticipated point when the existing capacity will be reached.

31. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

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

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Chairman