

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 17 December 2020 at 6.00 pm by Remote Meeting

Present: Councillors M Boylan, V J Holt, T L B Janke, T J Nelson, G L Offland and G C W Reynolds (Chair).

Also Present: Councillor C Healy (Cabinet Member for Visitor Economy, Historic & Natural Environment and Climate Change)

In Attendance: J Galkowski (Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer), A Lowe (Associate Director: Policy & Governance), F Mercer (Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services), H Rayet (Climate Change & Sustainability Coordinator), K Robinson (Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer), and D Sargeant (Director: Neighbourhood and Enforcement Services).

ENVSC16 Declarations Of Interest

None.

ENVSC17 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

ENVSC18 RRR - Environmental & Infrastructure Update

The Committee received a presentation from the Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services that set out the Council's Recovery, Reform, and Reset (RRR) agenda.

Members heard that that the RRR was a part of the Council wider recovery programme. There were monthly meetings of a group of core officers and Cabinet Members to develop and monitor actions from the action plan. From an initial nine priorities, the group had now rationalised the initial nine areas into three key areas – connectivity, green recovery, and infrastructure.

COVID had changed the way residents worked, lived, and played. While life had begun to return to a degree of normality, people's lives would be different. Home working was one such difference that would likely remain. There had also been a raised awareness of space standards, in both homes and gardens. Access to reliable broadband had also been highlighted by the pandemic. There was a growing appetite for green spaces.

Attempts were being made to address these issues through the planning system. The Local Plan was being re-examined with the aim of improving

inclusivity, resilience, and sustainability in the Borough. The Local Authority was to examine how it could negotiate schemes so that they were designed holistically from the outset, looking at energy, site layouts and related infrastructure, and provision of electric vehicle charge points, amongst other provisions.

The Council had also engaged with residents. My Wild Telford was launched on Twitter to engage with residents and advertise the Borough's green offer. Rights of Way in Telford were also promoted, with a Definitive Map of the area's Rights of Way due to be published in December 2020, it had last been published in 1965. The new map would be available online and was considered both accessible and timely. The categorisation of public Rights of Way would also be examined, with officers looking at how important routes were, how they could be improved, and how to prioritise maintenance.

Members were informed that the Council had conducted a study on the value of its nature reserves. Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) received 3.6 million visits per year; 2.4 million of these visits were made by active travel and 1.2 million by car. Of the 3.6 million visits, 1.1 million were made by first time visitors.

The Council aimed to leave LNRs in a better state than they had been in the past; the Council had looked at a net gain approach that assigned a common numerical value to sites. The Borough had a value of 6819 biodiversity units (bu), or 12 per hectare. This was effectively £75 million worth of bu - £135,000 per hectare. The value of woodlands had been examined; Telford & Wrekin had canopy cover over 15% of the Borough, higher than the national average. In terms of area, 49% of urban areas had canopy cover, compared to 8% in rural areas. Canopy cover also varied by ward, with Edgmond having the lowest (8%) and Ironbridge the highest (55%). The Council protected 682 hectares of accessible woodland. The Woodland Trust estimated that 70% of residents in Telford and 20% in Wrekin were within 500m of woodland; the average household was within 100m of 62 trees. From this, the Council was able to look at trees per head and target planting.

The Committee were also briefed on the net zero carbon transition. The Council would look at a green recovery and had promoted energy efficiency grants, retrofitting, and improved insulation. On green recovery, the Council would re-examine its existing office spaces due to the long-term impact of home working.

A discussion followed and Members posed a number of questions to officers – *There did not appear to be any measurable outcomes in the presentation, just a thematic overview, would specifics be brought to scrutiny in due course?*

This was an overview but it established the baseline position for Telford & Wrekin, this was an important position to understand where the Borough had to develop in the future. The work on social value, biodiversity value, and spatial distribution had allowed the Council to decide what and where work was needed.

Would My Wild Telford be available on other social media platforms?

My Wild Telford had started on Twitter as the Council wished to see how it worked on one platform, monitoring the engagement received, before spreading to other platforms. The account's posts were, however, often shared across other social media channels and were included in newsletters.

How would the impact of actions be measured?

On Rights of Way, the impact would be measured by how many people used the new tool. In the New Year, categorisation of green and recreation spaces would begin and this would give a base level to measure the impact of actions against.

Would the Council consider, as part of its plan, making LNRs more accessible by active travel?

This was part of why the work on access had been performed, it was important to understand who visits and how they got there. Understanding where connectivity gaps were was key. Officers would examine how to increase active and sustainable travel links to LNRs.

In terms of the Telford Land Deal, would the Council consider the economic alongside the environmental recovery? Could the Land Deal be used to bring green industry to Telford?

That was certainly something to consider and could be discussed with the appropriate directors. This was something that the Government also supported, particularly from a planning perspective.

Would green poverty be included in the planning for planting schemes?

It was a complicated matter as it was important to create and improve a number of different types of habitat, such as re-wetting in the north of the Borough. It was important trees were planted in the correct places with the right habitats.

ENVSC19 Climate Change Update and Plan Refresh

The Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services delivered an update on the Council's work to combat climate change.

The Council had declared a climate emergency in July 2019 and had a declared aim for carbon neutrality by 2030, for the Council, and the aspiration that the Borough would be carbon neutral by the same date. The Climate Change Action Plan was published in February 2020.

Despite the challenges presented in 2020, the Council had been delivering on its plan. Members heard that the Council had six new electric vans, with a value of 1 ton of carbon emissions saved; there was also the potential to replace further vehicles with electric vehicles in the future. The Council had also made progress with its sustainable buildings project, retrofitting buildings with solar panels and LED lighting. These were especially beneficial projects as they reduced emissions, saving 268t CO₂e, and brought about costs

savings and grant funding. Habitat creation had also created 9t CO2 storage from enhancing habitats. There had also been a pilot cutting scheme using hay from rich grassland in other areas.

Members were also informed of actions that had been delivered in the community. The Council's Trees4TW scheme had been a success; having to be closed early due to the popularity of the scheme and the worry that oversubscription was likely. Work was also being carried out with the Council's contractors to introduce carbon reduction plans and food recycling schemes.

Funding had been secured for new cycle stands and facilities and the Local Authority had been successful in a second round bid to carry out further work on cycling and footpath infrastructure.

The Council had engaged with residents over climate change actions; there had been campaigns to raise awareness for residents, a significant amount of work had been done around World Environment Day, campaigns on recycling week, and a reusable facemask campaign. Officers were encouraged by the responses received from residents in the Residents Survey. There was a strong appetite for greater action on climate change.

A number of actions were in progress; eight more buildings would be retrofitted; officers were examining decarbonising heat and installing heat pumps; natural cooling was to be installed for the Council's data centre (an action brought forward from 2025).

NuPlace's Southwater development had received planning approval and work would begin in early 2021. All units would have electric vehicle charge points and solar panels. A planning application for another site, at Donnington Wood Way, was also being submitted with the same environmental provisions and a number of additional features. Fifteen of the properties on the Donnington Wood Way site would be involved in a battery storage pilot scheme that would be monitored with a view to incorporating battery storage in future schemes.

A number of additional actions were under consideration such as establishing a Climate Assembly, renewable generation auctions for residents, and verge rewilding amongst a range of other actions.

A discussion ensued and members asked a number of questions –
It was great to hear that the Trees4TW had been popular; could the Committee hear more on other habitats?

Often people think of woodland when they think of carbon storage but other habitats could be as beneficial. There was a commitment to bring forward schemes for habitat creation and there was Government funding for these schemes that the Council was actively bidding for.

Where was the Council in terms of the parish and town council climate change toolkit?

The toolkit had been shared and the councils were involved in the Climate Change Partnership. There were a number of grant funding opportunities for the councils which had not previously been applied for which were now receiving applications. The main barrier for organisations was match funding.

Could the Council look at requiring private builders to abide by the future homes standard?

House building was difficult as private developer's viability reports stated that schemes would not be viable if they were to abide by such standards. Change would be needed at a national level, but the Council could lobby for change.

Could the Council examine having more local food in its own café and in schools? Would it also be possible to have a veggie day?

The Council wished to strengthen procurement so it had already looked at some of this. Discussions were being held with the café and schools over menus with a view to having vegetarian/vegan days. Work could be done with schools to encourage take up and a change in behaviour.

ENVSC20 Work Programme Review

No updates were proposed. The Committee would be looking at Waste & Recycling and Grounds & Cleansing Service Contract Procurement in the New Year. There would also be joint work with the Communities Scrutiny Committee on the Local Plan.

ENVSC21 Chair's Update

None.

The meeting ended at 7.53 pm

Chairman:

Date: Date Not Specified