

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY ON THURSDAY, 28TH NOVEMBER, 2019 AT 7.45 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors Steve Jarvis (Chairman), Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Chairman), Val Bryant, Sam Collins, Mike Hughson (In place of Kay Tart), Ian Moody, Michael Muir and Claire Strong*

In Attendance: *Reuben Ayavoo (Policy and Community Engagement Manager) and Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting Councillors Ruth Brown, Helen Oliver, Martin Stears-Handscomb, Tom Tyson approximately 22 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – unrecorded

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kay Tart.

Having given due notice, Councillor Mike Hughson advised that he would be substituting for Councillor Kay Tart.

26 MINUTES - 11 SEPTEMBER 2019

Audio Recording – unrecorded

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 11 September 2019 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

27 MINUTES - 15 OCTOBER 2019

Audio Recording – unrecorded

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 15 October 2019 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

28 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – unrecorded

- (1) The Chairman welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chairman advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;

- (3) The Chairman drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (4) The Chairman reminded those present that the theme for this meeting was biodiversity

29 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - BUZZWORKS

Audio recording – 1 second

Mr Alex Inzini thanked the Chairman for the invitation to address the Panel and gave a verbal presentation regarding trees and plants that would benefit bees and other pollinators as follows:

- He was a beekeeper and a member of Buzzworks;
- He was a licensed bird ringer;
- Bees came out of hibernation early in the year;
- There were many trees that benefited bees including:
 - Cornelian Cherry;
 - Italian Alder;
 - Poplar;
 - Pussy Willow;
 - Indian Horse Chestnut;
 - Judas Tree;
 - Autumn and Russian Olives;
 - Medlar;
 - White Beams;
 - Mountain Ash.

The following Member asked questions:

- Councillor Michael Muir;
- Val Bryant.

In response Mr Inzini advised that all of the trees mentioned would grow in chalky soil and that Catkins, Blue Tanzey, Honey Wort and Snowdrops all contained lots of nectar.

The Chairman thanked Mr Inzini for his presentation.

RESOLVED: That the list of trees and plants provided by Mr Inzini be forwarded to the Service Manager- Greenspace.

30 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - CHALK STREAMS AND THE RIVER IVEL

Audio Recording – 6 minutes 28 seconds

Ms Sharon Moat and Mr Richard Meredith-Hardy thanked the Chairman for the invitation to address the Panel and gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding the River Ivel as follows:

- When abstraction levels are high the water oxygen levels plummet, pollutants increase and wildlife suffers;
- A flowing river is able to cope with pollutants;
- When the river is slow moving top soil sinks, covers the chalk and the life in the water dies;

- Ivel Spring has had no flow for months;
- There were once very productive watercress beds that are no longer in existence;
- Black Horse Mill once had a large pond, which had now dried up;
- He explained the geology of the area;
- The solution would be to stop or significantly reduce abstraction at Baldock;
- A less satisfactory solution, but short term would be to augment the water level;
- The River Ivel was the only north running river that had no augmentation.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Michael Muir;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Gerald Morris.

In response Mr Merideth-Hardy advised that:

- Although rainfall had been low in the last 3 years, the Ivel had not been this bad in the past when rainfall had been lower;
- There was a history of rivers being polluted by sewage works;
- The water companies had a obligation to provide water to new developments;
- The Environment Agency had a duty to protect rivers and were not doing their job;
- A report was discussed in Central Government regarding a national pipeline, although this was not progressed.

The Chairman thanked Ms Moat and Mr Merideth-Hardy for their presentation.

31 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - TRANSITION TOWNS LETCHWORTH

Audio Recording – 22 minutes 48 seconds

Ms Julia Sonander and Ms Diane Ketcher, Transition Towns Letchworth, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Panel and gave a verbal presentation regarding biodiversity and food sustainability as follows:

- Transition Towns Letchworth has been in existence for 12 years and have spent much of that time thinking about how Letchworth could become more sustainable;
- Organic gardening was an important element and they wanted to help as many people as possible to take part;
- They had taken a stall in the growers market, developed a support group (Letchworth Organic Gardeners) and gone into schools to talk about organic gardening;
- They had a grant from Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and a free allotment from NHDC to provide an educational growing site;
- The Heritage Foundation was a partner in EdiCitNet, a group of 12 cities promoting the use of urban landscapes for food production;
- Some suggestions for the Council to investigate included:
 - NHDC should consider lowering rental on allotments;
 - Community composting could be developed in local areas instead of transporting garden waste to Cumberlow Green;
 - Consider more wildlife planting instead of formal gardens, which would save money;
 - Edible planting in public areas;
 - Need to reduce water usage and raise awareness.

The following Member asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong.

In response Ms Sonander advised that:

- NHDC needed to encourage a change in behaviour, particularly in the way residents used water;
- Australia promoted the 4 minutes shower and this had a big impact on water usage.

The Chairman thanked Ms Sonander and Ms Ketcher for their presentation.

32 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - LETCHWORTH ORGANIC GROUP

Audio Recording – 31 minutes 32 seconds

Ms Sue Lines and Ms Diane Ketcher, Letchworth Organic Group, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Panel and gave a verbal presentation regarding biodiversity and the development of green spaces as follows:

- A radical change of policy was required as a matter of urgency;
- At the moment we are stifling natural diversity both privately and publicly;
- There should be a change to Council policy regarding mowing less often and to a longer length which would enable the grass to survive better both during rain and drought;
- With less mowing natural wildflowers would then be enabled to grow;
- Wildflower planting should be native;
- More trees should be planted in open spaces, which would reduce flooding;
- Pesticides, fungicides and herbicides should be eliminated. Vancouver and Paris have already adopted this. Children and Pets unwittingly traipse pesticides around with the result that there are traces of pesticides showing in the food chain;
- Pan UK give lots of advice;
- Letchworth should look to becoming a pesticide free town;
- Formal gardens prevented biodiversity, investigations should be made into Prairie gardening.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Claire Strong.

In response Ms Lines and Ms Ketcher advised that:

- They were currently thinking about pesticide free towns rather than the wider countryside;
- The Council should take advice from other organisation such as NFU;
- Consultation and information was essential and would require information in outlook, school projects, allotment societies and community panels to name a few;
- NHDC could stop spraying vacant allotments with weed killer.

Members commented that some modest steps to wildflowering and mowing of grass had been taken, however more could be done and it was important to inform people of what was happening in order to change their expectations and understanding of policy.

The Chairman thanked Ms Lines and Ms Ketcher for their presentation.

33 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - BALDOCK FRIENDS OF GREENSPACES

Audio Recording – 42 minutes 49 seconds

Ms Katrina Nice and Glyn Holt, Baldock Friends of Greenspaces, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Panel and gave a verbal presentation regarding the use of greenspaces and the River Ivel as follows:

- Friends of groups were keen conservation volunteers who want to get involved in the local natural environment;
- They worked with NHDC and Countryside Management Service;
- The Council has wild planted some areas, but were not using native species. These areas should be left to seed themselves and not be cleared each year;
- Local residents could be allowed to adopt areas and be responsible for maintaining them;
- People need to be re-educated;
- The Council could encourage residents who wish to concrete over their gardens to use greencrete, which would allow things to continue to grow;
- NHDC could hold front garden competitions;
- In new developments please enforce street tree planting;
- Bus shelters tops could be planted with sedum to encourage and support bees;
- 80 percent of the worlds chalk streams were in Britain;
- They are biodiversity hotspots;
- There is a disconnect between the abstractor and the sewage treatment company resulting in the River Ivel not being maintained;
- The Council can educate people on water usage including:
 - The use of smart water meters;
 - Competitions to use the lowest amount of water;
 - Use of grey water on new builds;
 - Build an isolated water supply for new developments so that surface water is used.

Councillor Ian Moody suggested that the Council could use their website to publicise ways to save water in a similar way to Dorset Council. This information could also be used in emails and in Outlook.

The Chairman thanked Ms Nice and Mr Holt for their presentation.

RESOLVED: that the Communications Manager be requested to investigate ways to use the website to publicise ways to save water in a similar way to Dorset Council. This information could also be used in emails and in Outlook.

34 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - RON'S PLOT COMMUNITY ALLOTMENT GARDEN

Audio Recording – 51 minutes 44 seconds

Ms Mary Marshall, Ron's Plot Community Allotment Garden, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Panel and gave a verbal presentation as follows:

- The Getting Rooted Community Interest Company was set up to:
 - Create, demonstrate and teach models of sustainable and regenerative practices;
 - To foster resilience in communities using permaculture design principles which were rooted in horticulture, local food production and wildlife protection;
 - It used ethics such as care of the earth, recycling and care of the environment, care of people and sharing produce;
- Ron's Plot was an outside shared community garden in Westmill;

- Surplus produce was shared with Hitchin Food Rescue;
- Plant and seedling donations were made to local projects;
- Ron's Plot was maintained by volunteers, who regularly repurpose things that people don't want for use on the allotment site;
- It was hoped to involve Westmill residents in the garden sites at North Place and Redhill Path;
- There was a derelict site, owned by the County Council in Gaping Lane, that needed attention. There was a group willing to do this, but red tape was preventing this from starting;
- Other suggestions for Hitchin included a green gym and community orchard;
- Trees needed to be planted as they encouraged biodiversity, soil and water conservation, facilitate carbon sequestration and increased the number of pollinators and birds;
- More resilient planting schemes should be created to mitigate the impact of climate change;
- Ron's Plot was in the process of applying for native trees that survive in urban environments and attract bees and other wildlife from the Woodland Trust including:
 - Crab Apple;
 - Rowan;
 - Hazel.
- They hoped that developing and modelling more sustainable practices that other people would be inspired to do the same.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Steve Jarvis.

In response Ms Marshal advised that:

- Hazel could be used in other places, providing it was coppiced;
- A community orchard had been tried in the past, but had not been a great success.

The Chairman thanked Ms Marshall for her presentation.

35 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - ANDY WHITE

Audio Recording – 58 minutes 10 seconds

Mr Andy White thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Panel and gave a verbal presentation regarding CO2 production and mitigation as follows:

- Trees, plants and bushes played an extremely important part in CO2 levels;
- There was a high level of development in the region to cope with the increasing population, that results in trees bushes and hedgerows being removed;
- Construction activities generate a significant amount of CO2;
- Although planning requires landscaping, including planting of trees, there is no requirement to measure CO2 levels through a CO2 management plan;
- Without this developers will not be able to manage the CO2 absorption or generation rates;
- There is an opportunity to develop a CO2 policy, particularly in relation to planning applications;
- Easyjet have announce a Carbon policy largely around tree planting and there could be an opportunity for developers to claim some of these trees to plant;
- Small areas of land between major towns could be used to plant trees;

- Contractors should be encouraged to consider how to reduce their CO2 generation by using solar and wind power instead of diesel generators that are on permanently.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Gerald Morris;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Steve Jarvis;
- Councillor Michael Muir;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn.

In response Mr White advised that:

- That CO2 calculations could be used as a carrot/stick, with planning application including information being considered more favourably than those that don't provide this information.

Members considered that the Executive Member for Planning and Transport could consider introducing a CO2 Supplementary Planning Document and that NHDC should lobby the Government regarding changing the planning laws regarding CO2 production and mitigation.

The Chairman thanked Mr White for his presentation.

36 DISCUSSION REGARDING BIODIVERSITY

Audio Recording – 1 hour 8 minutes 58 seconds

The Chairman invited Members of the public to ask brief questions or make brief comments.

In response to questions the Chairman advised that:

- The Cabinet Panel on the Environment was a series of meetings at which ideas were being collected, some of which were being put into place as soon as possible;
- The Council was in the process of developing a Climate Change Strategy, which would be considered by Cabinet together with the recommendations from this Panel;
- NHDC was trying to improve the ways that the work being done and the actions that people can take was communicated to the public;
- The Council could only do what the law allowed and once planning permission was granted there was no mechanism of removing the permission.

The Chairman introduced the discussion regarding biodiversity and summarised some of the suggestions made by the presenters as follows:

- Suggestions regarding the type of trees and plants that could be planted to encourage bees and other pollinators;
- In respect of the River Ivel, Council had agreed a motion that included contacting the Environment Agency, Anglian Water and lobby MPs regarding mitigation of abstraction and the longer term supply of water;
- Ideas regarding the promotion of reduction in water use;
- That the Council should do more to bring allotments into use;
- Ideas regarding community composting, wild flower planting and managing and making better use of green space;
- Suggestion that local residents be able to adopt local areas to manage and maintain;
- Ideas regarding front garden competitions and street planting;
- The role of grey water in new developments;

- Particular endeavours such as Ron's Plot and the community orchard
- Suggestions regarding planning policy and practice looking at the CO2 impact of developments and ways to mitigate that.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Gerald Morris;
- Councillor Val Bryant;
- Councillor Michael Muir.

The following points were made:

- Parish Councils generally did not like wilding of areas and NHDC needed to ensure they are communicated with;
- Therfield Heath was mown and could be left to grow wild, although this was managed by the Conservators and not NHDC;
- Care should be taken when considering wilding verges, that in villages and between villages provision should be left for people to walk on them;
- It was critical to ensure that provision was available to for people to walk or cycle between villages;
- Section 106 agreements should be made for paths;
- Paths did not necessarily need to be beside a road, they could be off road.

37 INFORMATION NOTE - WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER FOR 2019/2020

Audio Recording – 1 hour 22 minutes 1 second

The Policy and Community Engagement Manager presented the information note entitled Work Programme and Action Tracker for 2019/20 together with the following appendix:

- Work Programme and Action Tracker 28 November 2019.

He updated Members on the actions taken or due to be taken on all ongoing items.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme and Action Tracker for 2019/20 be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Cabinet Panel on the Environment to plan and manage its workload and monitor actions requested.

The meeting closed at 9.24 pm

Chairman