NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT

MEETING HELD IN THE REMOTE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, 20TH JULY, 2022 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Steve Jarvis (Chair), Amy Allen (Vice-Chair), Carol Stanier, Chris Hinchliff, George Davies, Gerald Morris and Michael Muir*

In Attendance:

Reuben Ayavoo (Policy and Community Engagement Manager), Georgina Chapman (Policy Officer), Andrew Mills (Service Manager – Greenspace), Aimee Flack (Assistant Community Engagement Officer) and Louis Mutter (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 15 *members of the public, including registered speakers.*

42 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1:38

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Val Bryant.

43 MINUTES - 22 FEBRUARY 2022

Audio Recording – 1:48

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 22 February 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

44 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2:13

(1) The Chair outlined that this Cabinet Panel meeting was about the Environment and welcomed all those who were participating this evening;

(2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council policy, this meeting would be audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recordings would be available to view on Mod.Gov and the film recording via the North Herts Council YouTube channel;

(3) Members were reminded to make declarations of interest before an item, the detailed reminder about this and speaking rights was set out under Chair's Announcements on the agenda.

45 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2:43

There was no other business notified.

46 INFORMATION NOTE: WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER FOR 2022/23

Audio Recording: 2:49

The Policy Officer gave a quick update on the work the Policy Team have been involved in and highlighted the following key points:

- Are continuing to work within the HCCSP and have been involved in developing a countywide biodiversity baseline;
- Have rated the action plan of the HCCSP using Green, Amber and Red indicators to show how North Herts are progressing individually with those plans;
- The Behaviour Change Sub-Group, which the team sit on, have produced a draft strategic action plan; having prioritised three key themes;
- Have signed up to participate in a solar bulk purchasing scheme, allowing residents of Hertfordshire to register their interest in getting solar panels and battery storage; launching in August;
- Had a large amount of the carbon emissions assessment done;
- Work is being done on a 'Roadmap To Net Zero' showing how net zero can be reached by the 2030 target;
- Still reviewing the Council's carbon emissions in 2021, each year will be reviewed to show a decrease in emissions;
- Hitchin had an Eco Fest on 14th May and NHC was represented by a stall there;
- Formed a Climate Change and Sustainability Officer Group, trying to draw together all of the work related to climate and sustainability.

The Communities and Policy Manager then presented the information note entitled Work Programme and Action Tracker for 2022/23 and highlighted the following points:

- Page 13 outlines the work programme for the rest of the year;
- Page 14 & 15 shows the action tracker, the majority being on hold or on-going with 1 action completed so far.

RESOLVED: That the information note entitled Work Programme and Action Tracker for 2022 was noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure the Cabinet Panel on the Environment is able to plan its workload and monitor actions.

47 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 14:05

Georgina Chapman, Policy Officer at North Herts Council gave a visual presentation on the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan. Some of the main points were:

- HCCSP contains all Hertfordshire local authorities;
- Progress so far includes: minimising or excluding the use of peat compost, conducting an audit of local authority green space, identify opportunities for grass verge and other grasslands management and developing a biodiversity baseline to quantify levels of biodiversity;
- Upcoming actions include: reviewing how biodiversity is considered within the procurement processes, capturing ecological data from planning applications, developing

a good practice ecological design guidance and engaging with the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The following Members, officers and members of public asked questions:

- Councillor Michael Muir
- Aimee Flack
- Diane Ketcher
- Councillor Gerald Morris
- Councillor Chris Hinchliff
- John Webb
- Deolinda Eltringham

In response to questions, the Policy Officer advised:

- That she wasn't sure why Parish Councils were not involved with the HCCSP but she would raise it at the next meeting;
- An officer at Hertfordshire County Council has the plan for where the ponds will be located;
- The 5 ponds per year figure was county-wide; there has been no consultation with The Wildlife Trust but they work closely with the HCCSP so they will be aware;
- Members of the County Farmers Estate are part of the Rural Sustainability Network Group, some of which are situated in North Herts;
- Have started reduced mowing regimes on roadside verges; the hedgerows that are maintained are mainly in urban areas and will continue to be cut to maintain footpaths for pedestrians and sight lines of drivers; the Council cuts those hedgerows only twice a year;
- Historical data sets have been used when looking at the biodiversity baseline but more information will be provided on this outside of the meeting.

The Chair thanked Georgina Chapman for her presentation.

Andrew Mills, Service Manager - Greenspace then gave a verbal presentation on the Council's Actions on Biodiversity and highlighted the following key points:

- As part of the contract review with John O'Conner the Council discovered 600 square metres of seasonal bedding that was not sponsored, nor part of a cemetery or memorial; and have subsequently taken those areas out; this has decreased the amount of carbon the Council is producing in maintaining and transporting plants;
- Ensured that pots from plant nurseries are returned and recycled rather than disposed;
- Vehicles and machinery contributed to the carbon production a large amount, these polices have been reviewed and have taken out 2 vehicles driving around the district;
- The Greenspace team have received compliments and queries from the public over the decision to allow grass verges to grow more than usual;
- Parks Herts is a forum of officers across the district which originated from an opportunity for benchmarking and sharing best practice between the 10 Districts & Boroughs; the group has been in existence for 20 years;
- NHC & St. Albans were the first local authority to begin allowing local parks and open spaces to be wilded;
- The team have been provided with a budget to work with Countryside Management Services to start planning for the wilding work to take place across key sites across the District as highlighted in the audits.

The following Members, officers and members of public asked questions:

- Councillor Gerald Morris
- Councillor Chris Hinchliff

- Deolinda Eltringham

In response to questions, Andrew Mills advised:

- The species of trees being replanted are all indigenous to the UK; trying to make sure they are indigenous to the County as well. Picking out species that are suitable for the geology and soil type across the District; the ground conditions are different and can be a constraint on the tree species we have;
- Lots more blue infrastructure in proposed developments going forward; those ponds are going to be sustainable drainage systems – the ponds will take the surface water runoff from hard surfaces.

The Chair thanked Andrew Mills for the presentation.

Jill Saunders gave a visual presentation on Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity in Our Region and highlighted the following key points:

- Highlighted Strategic Policies contained in the emerging Local Plan that promote biodiversity;
- Good intentions in the emerging Local Plan are at risk of being undermined if construction companies ignore the policies and are not challenged;
- Ms. Saunders then provided an example of this, in which planning permission was given to a site which objectors claimed to be a corridor for badgers and other species;
- Provided pictures of trees with no root protection on the boundary of a proposed development;
- Understands that there has to be an increase in housing provisions and that greenbelt land will have to be used; but that there must be ways to properly require developers to protect habitats.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Gerald Morris
- Councillor Michael Muir
- John Webb

In response to questions Jill Saunders advised:

- She is not representing an organisation, but is a concerned member of the public.

The Chair thanked Jill Saunders for the presentation.

Aimee Flack - Assistant Community Engagement Officer, Diane Ketcher and Sue Lines gave a verbal presentation, supported by images of a number of topics including:

- Green and Growing Network Group;
- The Waysbrook Project;
- Transition Town Letchworth's Family Learning Allotment

- Aimee coordinates the Green and Growing Network Group; a network for organisation groups who work with greenspaces to help support communities live healthier and sustainable lifestyles;
- Helping communities grow their own food or start their own garden;
- The network meets every six weeks to two months;
- Diane Ketcher explained that the Wildlife Trust's Action for Insects campaign was very important;

- Performed a quadrat survey on a grass area near Waysbrook, comparing the population of insects between cut and uncut grass;
- Many more flowers found in the unmaintained grass; 2 insects in the maintained grass and 20 in the unmaintained;
- In 2021, a year later, the test was performed again – the Council had left the entire grass area unmaintained and as a result showed a larger amount of flowers and insects;
- Transition Town Letchworth obtained an allotment plot, with the intention of teaching families how to grow food in an organic way;
- By August 2021 there were 3 families using the site;
- Sue Lines explained that some planters placed outside Gardensquare Shopping Centre had been left bare; Sue asked to take them over; through the Letchworth District Garden Association and Letchworth Organic Gardeners to help;
- Also got together a team to improve the small area opposite the cinema which has needed maintenance.

The Chair thanked Aimee Flack, Sue Lines and Diane Ketcher for their contributions.

The meeting closed at 9:27 pm

Chair