

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

BALDOCK AND DISTRICT COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING ON MONDAY, 5TH OCTOBER, 2020 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Michael Weeks (Chair), Jim McNally (Vice-Chair), Steve Jarvis, Michael Muir, Val Shanley and Tom Tyson*

In Attendance: *Alessandro Marsilli, (Affinity Water), Richie Carruthers (Affinity Water), Matt Ramscar (Environment Agency), Iain Page (Environment Agency), Rob Bakewell (Environment Agency), Simon Ellis (Development and Conservation Manager), Ashley Hawkins (Community Engagement Officer), Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 4 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

12 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Audio recording – 30 seconds

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that it was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online. There was also the opportunity for the public and press to listen and view proceedings.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a roll call of Members and Officers to ensure that they could hear and be heard and gave the following advice.

The meeting was being streamed live on the Council's You Tube channel and also recorded via Zoom. If live streaming failed the meeting would adjourn. If the live stream could not be restored within a reasonable period then the remaining business would be considered at a later date.

Please stay in view of the camera at all times.

If for any reason the meeting was not quorate an Officer would notify attendees by interjecting the meeting. The meeting would adjourn immediately. Once the meeting was quorate the meeting would resume. If connection could not be restored within a reasonable period, then the remaining business would be considered at a later date.

If a remote Member lost connection the Chair may adjourn the meeting for a short period to enable connection to be re-established. If the Chair did not adjourn the meeting the Member would be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure and be deemed to have returned at the point of re-establishment. Only Members present for the entirety of debate and consideration of an item are entitled to vote.

Mobile phones and other noise emitting devices should be muted and the mute button on tablets and computers should be muted when not speaking.

When requested to vote, voting would be via the Green tick for “Yes”, Red Cross for “No” and Blue Raise Hand for “abstain” functions.

The Chair, Councillor Michael Weeks, started the meeting proper.

13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 50 seconds

There were no apologies for absence.

14 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 59 seconds

There was no other business notified.

15 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 5 seconds

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio and film recorded and live streamed on Youtube;
- (3) Members were reminded to make declarations of interest before an item, the longer reminder about this and speaking rights were set out under Chair's Announcements on the agenda.

16 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - REVIVEL

Audio recording – 3 minutes 40 seconds

Sharon Moat, Bernard Butt and Richard Meredith-Hardy gave presentations on behalf of Revlvel regarding water abstraction and the impact on the River Ivel.

Sharon Moat gave a verbal presentation including:

- If Affinity Water would agree to augment the springs with more water would the Environment Agency approve?;
- They were concerned about the spring and the upper reaches of the River Ivel;
- The upper reaches was a perennial stream and chalk stream.
- Historically the river flow was sufficient for mills and trout farms;
- The extraction of water ceases the water flow and affects wildlife;
- The springs was now dry;
- They were concerned about the constant abstraction;
- Ground water sources for public consumption were not sustainable;
- We need to care of our chalk streams;
- They wanted the river flow maintained and abstraction rates linked to the flow.

Bernard Butt queried:

- Whether Affinity would measure water flow and enable the flow to increase at Black Horse Farm.

Richard Meredith - Hardy gave a verbal presentation including:

- In the last 3 – 4 years the Environment Agency had calculated an 11 megalitres a day flow;
- According to Affinity flow records the flow has never reached that level;
- What would the Environment do to get a winter flow of at least 153 litres per second.

The Chair thanked Ms Moat. Mr Butt and Mr Meredith-Hardy for their presentations.

17 **AFFINITY WATER & ENVIRONMENT AGENCY**

Audio recording – 12 minutes 6 seconds

Affinity Water and the Environment Agency provided the Committee with an update regarding water abstraction and the impacts on Ivel Spring and the River Ivel.

Alessandro Marsilli, Affinity Water, gave a PowerPoint presentation including:

- An overview of the current abstraction licence and the last 5 years of abstraction rates;
- Details regarding the ecology of the area;
- An overview of flow rates at various points;
- Abstraction at bore holes was decreased;
- Flow rates were between good and failing;
- An overview of intervention options, including augmentation;
- River restoration could be instigated by augmentation;
- Flow records showed the river was dry at times;
- Flow had increased by 6 megalitres a day;
- All intervention options were satisfactory in principle, although the trigger level needed to be discussed;
- They would wish to cap the abstraction rates in 2024;
- During dry periods the river would be dry even without abstraction;
- Historically there were reed beds that were managed by Angllain Water and used to treat effluent;
- Future planned developments have not been included in the 5 year plan as planning permission had not yet been granted;
- The augmentation scheme should be linked to the flow at Black Horse Farm.

Richie Carruthers, Affinity Water, gave a PowerPoint presentation including:

- The Water Resource Management Plan helped balance supply and demand;
- They recognised that, in the short term, they needed to reduce leakage and reduce demand;
- Ground water supply was a longer term planned alternative to abstraction;
- Affinity were looking at shared reservoirs and shared supplies as well as moving water into the area;
- There was a group of regulators looking at future schemes;
- Some money had been made available for schemes;
- There could be opportunities to transport water from the West Midlands using the Grand Union Canal;
- They were looking at better connectivity between areas, regions and companies

- They recognised the wish for unsustainable abstraction to end, but water was still needed.

Rob Bakewell, Environment Agency, gave a verbal presentation including:

- There were 225 chalk streams, 9 were classified as Special Sites of Scientific Interest, 4 of those were special areas of conservation;
- All other surface bodies of water shared the same level of protection which sought to improve matters, or at least prevent deterioration;
- They had investigated all the bodies of water and identified issues and through those investigations identified a preferred action plan;
- The River Base and Management Plan set out the objectives for all water bodies from which a series of actions were extracted. These actions were then considered on a cost/benefit system;
- The actions were then put into a WinEp which was considered by Ofwat;
- This country put a low value on water and we were all part of the problem;
- Abstraction and leakage were problems which added to the challenge of new developments;
- Nationally there was focus on chalk streams;
- They could only go as far as powers allowed them to do so;
- There were no guarantees that alternative sources of supply would be available;
- Unless there was an environmental reason to object, Affinity could pump as much water as they liked into the streams.

Iain Paige, Environment Agency, gave a PowerPoint presentation including:

- The abstraction licences were granted in the 1960s when there were very different views on environmental issues;
- The cost of addressing the issues had been deemed to be too high;
- They were trying to get Affinity to support ecology;
- There was no long term flow gauging station;
- They needed to address the head waters;
- They recognised that Ivel Springs was an area of concern locally;
- Due to the lack of long term gauged flow records they were using modelled flows;
- If want to get Ivel Springs restored, Affinity needed to reduce the amount of abstraction and this could be achieved by capping the licences;
- River augmentation and river support was the most cost effective way to manage the flow;
- The desired level of flow and associated support had yet to be decided;
- The actions taken to date was as much as could be done at the moment;
- A step change was needed including significant investment and significant reduction in abstraction;
- An holistic view was needed in order to meet the needs of the rivers and streams as well as new developments and growth;
- This was the biggest chance for a step change and for people to get involved.

Matt Ramscar, Environment Agency gave a verbal presentation including:

- He gave an explanation of the modelling of flows and outcomes;
- Want to get away from abstraction and back to natural flows;
- The river support schemes were intended to top up rivers at the most crucial times, but regular use of these schemes cause their own problems.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Michael Muir;
- Councillor Michael Weeks;
- Councillor Tom Tyson;
- Councillor Steve Jarvis;
- Councillor Jim McNally.

In response to questions:

Iain Paige, Environment Agency, advised:

- New licences were issued with flow constraint conditions attached;
- The water company had a duty to ensure there was no deterioration;
- This was the biggest opportunity to feed into the plans for the future;
- Consideration was being given to building a new reservoir, but this would take time;
- There was a need to reduce demand.

Allesandro Marsilli, Affinity Water, advised:

- The river Chess option of reducing abstraction was already in Affinity's 5 year plan;
- They had agreed to cap the licence for the River Ivel in 2024;
- They had money to address water abstraction in the future, but they needed to meet demand;
- They had measured flow monthly for 5 years and could correlate flow with abstraction;
- One intervention was to install flow measuring at Black Horse Farm;
- If have to put in infrastructure in order to increase flow, we need to be aware that this would have an impact;
- Affinity policy was to look at alternatives to abstraction from chalk streams;
- Any future reductions would be voluntary with the levels being decided at a strategic planning level;
- Plans could be modified.

Matt Ramscar, Environment Agency, advised:

- Modelling had demonstrated what the natural flow would have been;
- Flow would vary year to year under natural conditions;

Rob Bakewell, Environment Agency, advised:

- They were expecting Affinity to undertake consultation;
- This was a starting point which would then be refined.

The Chair thanked the presenters from Affinity Water and the Environment Agency for their presentations.

RESOLVED: That Affinity Water and the Environment Agency be requested to update the Committee on the River Ivel in 12 months time.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Baldock and District Committee to be apprised of the issues affecting the River Ivel and the proposed actions of Affinity Water and the Environment agency to mitigate impact.

NB: A comfort was taken at 9.11pm

NB: The meeting resumed at 9.23pm

18 ANNUAL UPDATE ON S106 OBLIGATIONS FOR THE BALDOCK AND DISTRICT COMMITTEE

Audio recording – 1 hour 54 minutes 20 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a roll call to ensure Members and Officers could hear and be heard.

The Development and Conservation Manager presented the report entitled Annual Update on S106 Obligations for Hitchin Committee together with the following appendix:

- Appendix 1 - Current held funds for Baldock.

He drew attention to the following:

- It had been hoped that there would be more to report, this was due to the examination of the Local Plan having been delayed due to the Covid.19 Pandemic.
- New dates for these hearings had not yet been set and this had an impact on the presentation of the SPDs.
- The Developer Contributions SPD had been presented to Cabinet in July and was approved, subject to the Local Plan being adopted;
- A report regarding whether the Council would adopt CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) would be considered by Cabinet in December;
- Paragraph 4.2 detailed a new requirement to administer and report to central Government being an audit of all Section 106 activity;
- Paragraph 8.4.5 detailed the funds Section 106 discretionary funds remaining.

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

- Councillor Steve Jarvis;
- Councillor Tom Tyson;
- Councillor Michael Weeks.

In response to questions the Development and Conservation Manager advised:

- That monies allocated for Public Realm had to be spent on permanent infrastructure;
- S106 monies was only collected in respect of developments of more than 10 dwellings;
- Forms were developed in 2019 that enabled comment from parishes on any application for funding;
- Ward Members were able to bring projects to the attention of the S106 officer and the Community Team were regularly consulted;
- Paragraph 8.14 highlighted the proposed White Paper which would include the intention to introduce National CIL rates.

Members requested that the figures relating to villages be circulated to Members.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the content of the report entitled Annual Update on S106 Obligations for the Baldock and District Committee be noted;

- (2) That a report shall continue to be presented on Section 106 contributions to the Baldock Committee on an annual basis;
- (3) That, other than where a contribution has been negotiated for a specific purpose or project, Ward Members of the area where the Section 106 Obligation or Unilateral Undertaking funding is generated, and the Area Committee be consulted prior to funding being allocated away from that area;
- (4) That the Development and Conservation Manager be requested to circulate figures regarding villages to all Members of the Committee.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To ensure that there is a robust system for negotiating and managing Section 106 Obligations and Unilateral Undertakings, that records activity for each financial year and is placed in the public domain.
- (2) To ensure that the process is kept under constant review and Member scrutiny and that the risk associated with this activity is managed in an appropriate manner.

19 GRANTS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio recording – 2 hours 11 minutes 59 seconds

The Community Officer presented the report entitled Grants and Community Update together with the following appendix:

- Appendix 1 - 2020/21 financial year budget sheet.

He drew attention to the following:

- Paragraph 7.3 detailed the budgets available;
- The deadline for submitting grants application for consideration at the December meeting was 26 October 2020;
- Paragraph 8.21 detailed that Covid-19 was still affecting events
- Baldock Fayre took place with one ride, which was required to ensure the future of the charter;
- Baldock Community Centre and the Methodist Centre were successful with their applications to the Community Facilities and District Wide Grants Panel;
- He had been requested to investigate further tree planting. Due to lack of space, cabling etc, this was not possible.

RESOLVED: That the actions taken by the Community Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being for the Baldock be endorsed.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) To ensure the Committee is kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Officer.
- (2) To inform Members of the financial resources available to the Committee. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of the Area Committee's budget. This ensures that all actions are performed in line with the Authority's Financial Regulations, the Council's Constitution, and the guidance of the existing Grants policy as agreed by Cabinet in January 2020.

- (3) The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims of the Council Plan.

20 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording –

Councillor Jim McNally advised that the programme of events in the Baldock area had been decimated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer gave an update regarding enquiries so far in respect of proposed parades and wreath laying services on Remembrance Sunday.

The meeting closed at 9.49 pm

Chair