

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT
MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING
ON WEDNESDAY, 9TH SEPTEMBER, 2020 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Chair), Steve Jarvis, Val Bryant, Claire Strong, David Levett (In place of Ian Moody), Adem Ruggiero-Cakir (In place of Kay Tart) and Carol Stanier (In place of Sam Collins)*

In Attendance: *Reuben Ayavoo (Policy and Community Engagement Manager), Andrew Mills (Service Manager - Greenspace), Georgina Chapman (Policy Officer), Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer) and Matthew Hepburn (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 4 members of the public.*

10 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Audio Recording – 0 Seconds

The Chair, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, welcomed everyone to this Virtual meeting of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer explained the procedures for this meeting as follows:

Attendance

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer undertook a roll call to ensure that all Members and officers could hear and be heard.

Live Streaming

The meeting was being streamed live on the Council's You Tube channel. 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 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.

Noise interference

Electronic devices should be muted and all present should have the mute button on their tablet or computer activated when not speaking.

Debate

The raise hand button (located under participants) should be used to alert the Chair that you wish to speak. Please wait for the Chair to invite you to speak before doing so.

Voting.

If the Panel decided to take a vote this would be undertaken using the Green tick for "Yes", Red Cross for "No" and Blue Raise Hand for "abstain", located in the participants section at the bottom of the screen. To enable the votes to be counted, votes should not be cleared until requested to do so.

Details of how Members voted will not be kept or minuted unless a Recorded Vote was requested or an individual requests that their vote be recorded, and it will not be heard or seen on the audio and YouTube recordings of the meeting.

The Chair, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, started the meeting proper.

11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio Recording – 3 Minutes 54 Seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Sam Collins, Ian Moody, Gerald Morris and Kay Tart.

Having given due notice, Councillor Carol Stanier advised that she would be substituting for Councillor Sam Collins;

Having given due notice, Councillor David Levett advised that he would be substituting for Councillor Ian Moody;

Having given due notice, Councillor Adem Ruggiero-Cakir advised that he would be substituting for Councillor Kay Tart.

12 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio Recording – 4 Minutes 23 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 recorded;
- (3) The Chair 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.

13 DISCUSSION REGARDING A NEW NORMAL FOR THE COUNCIL

Audio Recording – 5 Minutes 27 Seconds

The Policy and Community Engagement Manager introduced the item entitled Discussion regarding a New Normal for the Council and gave a verbal presentation, including:

- The Recovery Board were looking at what the impact of the pandemic would be on the Council, including in terms of the positive environmental impact;
- A Staff Survey had been carried out in order to obtain employees' views on homeworking.
- The results would be fed back to the Recovery Board. However, the survey had already revealed that 79% of respondents wanted to work from home more often;
- 89% of staff used to drive to work pre-pandemic; and
- Video conferencing programmes such as Zoom were being used by staff in order to conduct meetings. Therefore, preventing staff from needing to travel across the district to physically attend a meeting.

The Service Manager Green Space provided the Panel with an update regarding the effects of the pandemic to his service area, including:

- The main priority was to maintain the burial service;
- Grass cutting was suspended as it was not considered an essential service. However, this service had now resumed;
- Residents now expected the grass to be cut on a regular basis;
- It had taken approximately 6 weeks for the grass cutting to return to standard;
- The Service Manager Green Space was working with Councillor Steve Jarvis, Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, to look at wilding in select locations;
- An audit was commissioned pre-lockdown to look at whether wilding could be expanded to other locations;
- The proposals from the audit would be investigated and 'reality checked' by the Grounds Maintenance Team;
- Owing to the pandemic, no site visits were undertaken in April;
- To maintain social distancing, John O'Connor implemented a 'one van, one driver' policy which resulted in more vehicles on the road;
- There had been no events taking place on public open spaces except for fitness classes. Fairs and circuses had also not taken place, therefore benefitting the environment;
- The 'Don't be a tosser' litter campaign had been launched. Members, including the Chair of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment, joined on Windmill Hill to pick up litter;
- Litter had doubled and this was resulting in additional work for the Grounds Team.

14 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - DIANE KETCHER AND SUE LINES

Audio Recording – 20 Minutes

The Panel received a verbal presentation from Diane Ketcher and Sue Lines on the topic of biodiversity, including:

- The verges looked lovely having been left to flower;
- The Cambridge Road, on the A505 approaching Walsworth, had for several years, sported large patches of planted meadow mix flowers which had been managed as for meadowland;

- Whether the Council would consider creating bee friendly meadows alongside the football pitches;
- A survey conducted on Waysbrook in August found that the plants in mown and unmown grass were similar but where they had been left to flower the insect population was 10x higher than on the mown grass;
- The channel 4 programme ' Jimmy's Big Bee Rescue' contained some ideas on how to increase the Bee population, which the Council could adopt;
- Peterborough City Council had been concentrating on wildlife corridors alongside roads as well as large scale meadow planting in other parts of the city; and
- Since 2016 Garden Organic had lobbied the EU to ban the use of glyphosate.

The Service Manager Greenspace responded to points raised as follows:

- The Cambridge Road meadowland was a resident led initiative. The Council supported the proposal and organised for the grass area to be cultivated and grass seed thrown down.

The Chair thanked Diane Ketcher and Sue Lines for addressing the Panel.

15 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - JULIA SONANDER

Audio Recording – 33 Minutes 30 Seconds

Julia Sonander thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Panel in relation to EdiCitNet, including:

- Transition Town Letchworth (TTL) had reported on the EdiCitNet project at the November 2019 Cabinet Panel on the Environment;
- At the time [November 2019], the Heritage Foundation had been a partner organisation on this European Funded project and Transition Town Letchworth was a member of the 'City Team';
- Since then, the Heritage Foundation have decided to pull out of EdiCitNet as their focus has shifted towards their core deliverables following the Coronavirus pandemic;
- An option paper was being drafted for consideration as to how best NHDC could potentially support the project;
- TTL considered that ongoing involvement in this fully funded European Project would deliver benefits to Letchworth;
- The aim of EdiCitNet was to extract best practice on how to grow food in urban environments from exemplar cities and organisations across the world; and
- Letchworth was funded as a 'Follower City' to visit Learning Labs being set up in Front-Runner Cities and to test the planning tools being developed with the aim of producing a Master Plan for turning Letchworth into an exemplar Edible City.

The Chair thanked Julia Sonander for addressing the Panel.

16 DISCUSSION REGARDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MEETING

Audio Recording – 39 Minutes

A discussion took place regarding the contributions that had been heard at the meeting, including:

Biodiversity:

- There was mixed opinion amongst residents regarding the Waysbrook. Some residents felt that leaving the grass uncut looked messy whilst others liked it;
- The Community Garden in the Wynd had little Community involvement;
- In Spain, Orange and Lemon trees were planted within the urban space;
- Wilding attracted mixed opinion;
- Residents needed to be informed as to the reasons the grass was not being cut;
- It was hoped that more areas could be found where the grass could be left longer;
- 25% of life on Earth was a risk of extinction as a result of human actions;
- Longer grass could be a hazard to motorists and should not be done near junctions and/or roundabouts;
- Farmers had done well in maintaining the footpaths which had been used more frequently by people as a result of the pandemic;
- Grass on recreational areas needed to be kept short in order to allow people to play sports such as football;
- Whether the Council had a role in encouraging residents to have wild flowers in their own gardens; and
- Biodiversity should feature on the Highways Liaison agenda.

Weeds:

The Service Manager Greenspace provided the following information regarding Weeds:

- Glyphosate was used but only applied to hard surfaces in town centres;
- Weed killers were not used unless there was a weed visible;
- Alternatives to Glyphosate were 8x more expensive;
- Burning weeds had an environmental impact and a risk to the public;
- London Borough of Lewisham had stopped using chemicals to treat weeds. However, they had found that it cost more to maintain standards; and
- Hot foam and water was slower and more expensive.

New Normal for the Council - Advantages

- There was better attendance at Council meetings as Members no longer needed to travel to attend;
- The Public were able to watch Committee meetings via online streaming; and
- The closure of the District Council Offices meant fewer carbon emissions;

New Normal for the Council – Disadvantages

- New Members of Staff were not able to meet other colleagues physically and training was taking place online;
- No longer having a physical public presence in a Committee meeting;
- Before the pandemic, the Panel were able to take questions/points from the 'floor' from member of the public, thus creating a more spontaneous discussion and having valuable contributions made;

- Town centres were losing out on shop footfall particularly at lunch times as many offices in the town centre were closed and employees were working remotely;
- It was difficult for the Council to engage with a cross-section of Society as not everyone had access to technology.

17 INFORMATION NOTE - WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKER

Audio Recording – 1 Hour 30 Minutes

The Policy and Community Engagement Manager presented the Information Note – Work Programme and Action Tracker and advised as follows:

- The Air Quality update had been moved to February's meeting;
- An additional commentary column had been added to the tracker; and
- There was a proposal to survey the Best Before Café.

RESOLVED: That the Information Note entitled Work Programme and Action Tracker be noted and the following amendment be made:

'E24' under additionality commentary be changed to 'E20'.

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

The meeting closed at 9.07 pm

Chair