

Minutes of the Meeting of the ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 17 October 2023

PRESENT -

Councillor John Beckett (Chair); Councillor Liz Frost (Vice-Chair); Councillors Arthur Abdulin, Tony Froud, Steven McCormick, Julie Morris, Kieran Persand and Kim Spickett

In Attendance: Councillor James Lawrence (Items 8-11 only) and Councillor Bernie Muir (Items 8-11 only)

Officers present: Rod Brown (Head of Housing and Community), Justin Turvey (Interim Head of Place Development), Oliver Nelson (Public Protection Manager), Stewart Cocker (Countryside Manager) (Items 8-12 only), Jeremy Young (Tree Officer) (Items 8-13), Sue Emmons (Chief Accountant), Vanessa Newton (Senior Accountant), Tim Richardson (Democratic Services Manager) and Dan Clackson (Democratic Services Officer)

8 QUESTION AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions or statements were received from members of the public.

9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Julie Morris, Other Interest: Councillor Julie Morris wished to repeat her declaration that she held an allotment in the Borough, following her declaration to the same effect made at the previous meeting of the Committee.

10 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee confirmed as a true record the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 13 June 2023 and authorised the Chair to sign them.

11 CHALK PIT

The Chair announced that in light of recent enforcement activity resulting in an abatement notice being served on an operator at the chalk pit, he proposed that consideration of the matter be deferred until the next ordinary meeting of the committee, stating he was conscious of the Councillor and public interest surrounding the matter and was keen to ensure that the proposed motion be debated in full consideration of the circumstances, including the impact of the recently served abatement notice.

The Committee voted (5 for, 1 against, 1 abstention, and the Chair not voting) to defer consideration of the matter until the next ordinary meeting of the committee.

Following the Committee's decision on the matter, Councillor Kieran Persand requested that his vote against the proposal be recorded in the minutes.

12 THAMES TO DOWNS NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

The Committee received a report asking the Committee to agree that Officers continue to explore the possibility of including Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Manor Open Space, Horton Country Park LNR, Hogsmill LNR and Nonsuch Park in the proposed Thames to Downs National Nature Reserve (NNR).

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **External Funding.** In response to a question from a Member, the Countryside Manager explained that entering into a partnership with other authorities and organisations involved in the NNR will increase Epsom & Ewell's chances to secure external funding for the management of the sites within the borough.
- b) **Affiliate Status.** In response to a question from a Member, the Countryside Manager explained that sites, such as Epsom Downs, that have a high nature conservation value but do not have the primary purpose of nature conservation, could potentially become affiliated to the NNR which may allow them to secure long-term funding.
- c) **Function of NNR and Publicity.** In response to a question from a Member, the Countryside Manager stated that one of the functions of an NNR is to encourage people to become more involved and connected with nature. Through publicity, the NNR will allow more people to discover and experience the included sites. The Countryside Manager suggested there could be targeted publicity to help increase awareness of and accessibility to the sites for underrepresented groups, such as young people.
- d) **Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-30.** In response to a question from a Member in relation to the progression of the Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-30, the Countryside Manager stated he believed that over the long term, inclusion of the proposed sites within the NNR will secure and enhance biodiversity on a significant scale within the borough.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Agree that Officers continue to explore the possibility of including Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Manor Open Space, Horton Country Park LNR, Hogsmill LNR and Nonsuch Park in the proposed Thames to Downs National Nature Reserve, and report back to this Committee if Natural England indicate that we meet the criteria for entry into the proposed National Nature Reserve.**

13 ASH DIEBACK ACTION PLAN

The Committee received a report presenting the Council's Ash Dieback Action Plan and seeking support for its adoption.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Number of Trees in Borough.** In response to a question from a Member, the Tree Officer explained that according to the National Tree Map, there are an estimated 200,000 trees in the borough (unverified). A Member queried as to why there was a discrepancy with the figure listed in the 2023 Tree Management Plan, which states there are an estimated 140,000 trees. The Tree Officer explained that the 200,000 figure had been taken from the most recent iteration of the National Tree Map and was considered to be the more accurate figure.
- b) **Error in Report/Recommendation.** The Chair informed the Committee that there was an error in the report – the frontpage of the report listed the Ash Dieback Action Plan as being attached as appendix 1 to the report, which was also reflected in the report's recommendation. He explained that the Ash Dieback Action Plan had in fact been attached to the report as appendix 2 and that the recommendation should read, '(1) Agree to adopt the Ash Dieback Action Plan set out in Appendix 2'. This was noted by the Committee.
- c) **The Action Plan.** The Head of Place Development explained to the Committee that the plan followed a model used successfully by other authorities, chiefly West Sussex's 2019 plan, and had been peer reviewed and approved as acceptable by Sutton Council.
- d) **Costs.** The Head of Place Development explained that required funding had not been set out in the plan as it was not possible to predict how much would be required with the current data.
- e) **Timescales.** The Head of Place Development explained that different affected trees die at different rates, and it is difficult to predict which ones will die, and when. He informed the Committee frequent inspections will be carried out in order to assess and monitor the health of affected trees.

Councillor Steven McCormick proposed that consideration of the item be deferred to a future meeting of the Committee, to allow for time to hone and formulate greater robustness within the plan and to provide improved clarity with respect to what the Committee is being asked to support.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Kieran Persand.

The Committee voted (3 for, 4 against, and the Chair not voting) against the proposal.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved (6 for, 1 against, and the Chair not voting) to:

- (1) Agree to adopt the Ash Dieback Action Plan set out at Appendix 2 to the report.**

14 CAR PARK WORKING GROUP - TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee received a report setting out the terms of reference for the Car Park Working Group

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) The Committee agreed that the following minor changes be made to the terms of reference:
 - i. To revise the wording within the 'role of the group' to make more explicit reference to the exploration of the possibility of new car parks.
 - ii. To revise the wording at paragraph 1 bullet-point 3, to say, *"To explore options to replace, relocate, or upgrade existing car parks when required"*.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Agree to the continuation of a Car Parking Working Group.**
- (2) Approve the Terms of Reference for the Car Park Working Group as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, subject to the revisions set out in the minutes above.**
- (3) Agree the Membership of the Car Park Working Group for 2023/24 as set out in section 3 of the report.**

15 2024/25 BUDGET TARGETS

The Committee received a report informing the Committee of the Council's revenue budget targets presented to the Strategy & Resources Committee in July. The report sought guidance on the preparation of the Committee's service estimates for 2024/25.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) The Chief Accountant explained, in response to a question from a Member, that appendix 1 to the *Fees and Charges 2023/24* report, that went to the January 2023 meeting of the Committee, details all of the fees and charges that sit within the Committee. She highlighted to Members the target to increase the Committee's fees and charges income by 6% in both 2024/25 and 2025/26, as set out in the report at paragraph 3.2.7.

Stating that he believed the matter ought to be included as a consideration point within discussions regarding the Committee's budget for 2024/25, Councillor Steven McCormick proposed that an additional recommendation be added, as follows:

Agree that an additional cost item be added into this Committee's budget plans for 2024/25 for £40k to cover possible additional independent noise assessment works or other activities that may be required at the Chalk Pit site in Epsom.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Tony Froud.

The Committee agreed (6 for, 1 abstention, and the Chair not voting) to the addition of the proposed recommendation.

Following consideration, The Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Note the implications of the budget targets presented to Strategy & Resources Committee on 13 July 2023.**
- (2) Consider how additional income or savings can be generated to address the projected Council wide funding gap of £1.1m in 2024/25, rising to £2.5m by 2027/28.**
- (3) Note that owing to the Council's projected budget deficit, any additional new revenue growth items (i.e., service enhancements resulting in increased net expenditure) supported by Policy Committees will need to be fully funded from existing budgets.**

Resolved (6 for, 1 abstention, and the Chair not voting) to:

- (4) Agree that an additional cost item be added into the Committee's budget plans for 2024/25 for £40k to cover possible additional independent noise assessment works or other activities that may be required at the Chalk Pit site in Epsom.**

16 URGENT DECISIONS

The Committee received a report on the decisions taken by the Chief Executive and Directors on the grounds of urgency, in compliance with Appendix 2 to the Constitution (The Scheme of Delegation), paragraph 3.1, since the previous Environment Committee meeting on 13 June 2023.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) The Committee considered that the decisions taken were good news items and suggested that communications could be put out to inform residents. It was considered by the Committee that a greater focus could be placed on the communication of such news items in the future. The Head of Housing & Community agreed to liaise with the Head of Operational Services and the Communications & Engagement Manager with regard to putting out communications with respect to the decisions in the report.

Following consideration, The Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Note the urgent decisions taken and the reasons for those decisions, since the last Environment Committee on 13 June 2023.**

17 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee unanimously resolved to exclude the Press and Public from the meeting in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the business involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended) and that pursuant to paragraph 10 of Part 2 of the said Schedule 12A the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

18 PEST CONTROL

The Committee received a report outlining cost pressures in the pest control service and a proposed way forward.

The Committee's consideration of this item is recorded in a separate (not for publication) restricted Minute.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Implement a revised fee and structure from 25 October 2023, as at appendix 1 to the report, for the Council's pest control service.**

The meeting began at 7.28 pm and ended at 8.46 pm

COUNCILLOR JOHN BECKETT (CHAIR)