
Environment Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Thursday, 7 September 2023 from 7.01 pm - 8.03 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Roger Clark, James Hunt (Substitute for Councillor Julien Speed), Carole Jackson, Rich Lehmann (Chair), Charlie Miller, Pete Neal, Chris Palmer, Ashley Shiel, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Mike Whiting, Chris Williams, Ashley Wise (Substitute for Councillor Angie Valls) and Dolley Wooster (Vice-Chair).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Martyn Cassell, Philippa Davies, Janet Hill and Graeme Tuff.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Julien Speed and Angie Valls.

270 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

271 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

272 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 June 2023 (Minute Nos. 157 – 164) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Part B Minutes for Information

273 **Review of Biodiversity actions and policies**

The Head of Environment and Leisure introduced the report which identified the key policy documents relevant to biodiversity and the ecological part of the Climate emergency. He explained that the report was different from others submitted to the Environment Committee, in that it requested the Committee to consider the report in their scrutinising role, in order to guide future direction of the Council's policies.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Acknowledged the increased tree planting, but concerned with the planned maintenance afterwards;
- agreed that biodiversity was important, but there were projects that had not been delivered;
- some policies were out-of-date, they needed to be looked at sooner, in advance of them becoming out-dated;
- officers did not have time to complete many of the actions, such as coppicing and pruning;
- the Environment Committee should compile a list of what they considered to be priority work;
- considered Barton's Point, Sheerness as a biodiversity resource should be included within the report;
- welcomed the longer grass strategy;

- needed to ensure that any rubbish hidden in long grass was removed when the grass was mowed;
- there was no point in having policies if the work was not carried out;
- needed to remember that Councils were financially stretched, and they had many services to fund;
- welcomed the partnership working outlined in the report;
- it was important to share the Council's skills base and also learn from others;
- biodiversity needed to be built-into the whole Council system of doing things and not be standalone;
- roadside hedgerows were an asset and a very important part of biodiversity, being good for wildlife and capturing carbon dioxide;
- acknowledged that hedgerows needed cutting back roadside, but they could be kept longer field side, so that they became wider and higher;
- concerned that hedgerows were often the first thing to disappear when new developments were built;
- landowners needed to be encouraged not to be so drastic with their hedge trimming;
- it was important not to scale back if the work was not carried out in a particular year, so that programmes were in place for any potential funding bids;
- the climate and ecological steering group was a great cross-party mechanism for monitoring actions;
- considered a lot of biodiversity work was community based, with little cost; and
- needed to limit the use of pesticides.

In response, the Head of Environment and Leisure outlined the maintenance schedules, which were led by officer, resident and Member intelligence and carried out on a priority basis, as per the tree maintenance strategy. He said that it was not always possible to achieve everything at once, but having the aspirations gave direction to the Council. He said that he was not particularly concerned with the expiration dates of policies, so long as the principles within them were still relevant/workable. All work was constrained by resources. He acknowledged the importance of the Barton's Point site in terms of its biodiversity, and said that a key theme in officers' roles was enabling and educating.

The Green Spaces Manager acknowledged the benefits of hedgerows. He said the Council could help to influence farmers, so that increased biodiversity could be achieved by not cutting back hedges.

The Climate Change Officer outlined some biodiversity projects which the Council was involved in which were labour, rather than cost, intensive, and she said that information on the preservation of hedges for biodiversity could be included within the Green Grid meetings where lots of landowners participated. She added that the Kent Climate Change network could be used as a tool to share knowledge about biodiversity.

The Chair moved the following four-part motion:

1. That the Environment Committee worked on determining the biodiversity priorities in order that officers were able to work effectively where funding was limited;
2. That in order to enhance the Council's focus on partnership working, residents, charities and other stakeholders be empowered and involved where possible;
3. That the Council learnt best practice from other local authorities;
4. That it be requested that far greater or as great as possible protection to

hedgerows be included when the Local Plan was next updated.

This was seconded by Councillor Sarah Stephen and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

The Head of Environment and Leisure reminded Members that each year the Climate and Ecological Emergency Annual report was submitted to the Environment Committee and the recommendations/actions could be included in the document.

Resolved:

- (1) That the current biodiversity programmes be noted.***
- (2) That the Environment Committee worked on determining the biodiversity priorities in order that officers were able to work effectively where funding was limited.***
- (3) That in order to enhance the Council's focus on partnership working, residents, charities and other stakeholders be empowered and involved where possible.***
- (4) That the Council learnt best practice from other local authorities;***
- (5) That it be requested that far greater or as great as possible. protection to hedgerows was included when the Local Plan was next updated.***

274 **Forward Decisions Plan**

The Chair reported that as per the decision by the Committee at its last meeting on 29 June 2023 (Minute No. 164 refers), he had written to Kent County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment regarding the proposed closure of the Faversham Household Waste Recycling Centre. He had not received a response to his questions and said that the consultation was on hold.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.***

Chair

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All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel