

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
held in Committee Room 1, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxon  
at 2.00pm on Thursday 15 June 2017

### PRESENT

Councillors: Mr D A Cotterill (Chairman) A H K Postan (Vice-Chairman), R J M Bishop, M Brennan, A S Coles, P J G Dorward, H B Eaglestone, E J Fenton, A M Graham, Miss G R Hill, H J Howard and Ms E P R Leffman.

#### 4 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence were received from Mr P Emery and Mrs E H N Fenton.

#### 5 MINUTES

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meetings held on 30 March and 26 April 2017 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

#### 6 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers in matters to be considered at the meeting.

#### 7 PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC

Mr Ian Chatt sought leave to address the meeting regarding the Madley Park Playing Fields Project on behalf of the Woodstock Road Witney Residents Association. It was explained that, under the Council's Rules of Procedure, a submission to a meeting of a Committee or Sub-Committee must only relate to an item of business on the agenda for that meeting. Further, a person making a submission under the scheme of public participation should have only one audience and Mr Chatt had already spoken on the matter when it was considered by the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 May.

Under these circumstances, Officers advised that it would be inappropriate for Mr Chatt to address the meeting.

Having been proposed by Mr Coles and seconded by Mr Graham it was agreed that Mr Chatt be heard. A copy of his submission is attached to the original copy of these minutes as Appendix A.

#### 8 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2017/2018

The Committee received the report of the Strategic Director seeking consideration of a work programme for the committee for 2017/2018.

##### 8.1 Thames Water Flood Prevention and Infrastructure Issues

Members noted that representatives of both the strategic and operational management at Thames Water are to attend the next meeting. In response to a question from Mr Howard, the Strategic Director advised that, whilst it might not be possible for the Head of Planning and Strategic Housing to attend that meeting as he would be heavily involved in the Local Plan Examination in Public, the Development Manager, Mr Phil Shaw, and the Council's Principal Engineer, Mr Laurence King, would be present.

## 8.2 Open Space Grass Cutting

The Chairman of the Committee suggested that this item be deleted from the Work Programme as the matter was perhaps best left in the hands of the town and parish council clerks.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services advised that, whilst the Council had sought to rationalise open space grass cutting throughout the District, it had found it difficult to make progress. There were other, more significant, issues facing the service such as the introduction of the new waste collection contract which had a greater priority and, whilst the matter could be revisited subsequently, it was most unlikely that resources could be diverted to this project during the current year.

Ms Leffman suggested that Members might be able to assist in identifying various uncertain land ownerships and that it would be helpful if the map produced to identify responsibilities could be circulated to all Members of the Council. The Head of Environment and Commercial Services explained that, whilst some work had been carried out, the mapping exercise had proven to be resource intensive and, whilst the results could be re-circulated, the information available remained incomplete.

Mr Coles expressed some concern at the suggestion that the matter should be dropped from the work programme without the issue having been resolved, particularly given the reduction in funding provided by the County Council. He suggested that all levels of local government should work together to address the issue.

Mr Cotterill reiterated that, without the necessary resources in place, it would be impossible to further the project at present. Mr Fenton suggested that, rather than delete the item from the Work Programme entirely, it should be considered as adjourned.

Mr Graham bemoaned the lack of a cohesive approach between the various levels of local government, suggesting that West Oxfordshire should take the lead in order to meet the expectations of local residents. The Chairman explained that many town and parish councils already had grass cutting contracts in place but that there were many instances where land ownership and maintenance responsibilities were uncertain. West Oxfordshire had attempted to address this issue to enable more effective arrangements to be put in place.

The Head of Environment and Commercial Services stressed that the Council had also agreed to supplement the shortfall occasioned by the withdrawal of County Council funding and the current issue was simply an attempt to rationalise existing local arrangements to secure greater efficiency. In response to a question from Mr Graham, she explained that, owing to other demands upon her team, this work had assumed a lower priority.

Ms Leffman suggested that a sub-committee be formed to seek to pursue the matter but it was concluded that this would be equally demanding upon staff resources. Mr Postan noted that land ownership issues and local preferences shaped services at a local level and suggested that local knowledge was the key to resolving this issue. The District Council could provide guidance to assist local councils in resolving their individual problems.

Mr Howard agreed that, without resources being available, the project should be put on hold. Mr Brennan advised that the Carterton Town Council remained willing to co-operate with neighbouring parishes in securing more efficient contracts and Mr Postan commended this approach.

It was **AGREED** that the project be adjourned for the present and revisited when resources allowed.

### 8.3 Car Parking Strategy

It was noted that the Cabinet would give consideration to the implementation of the Car Parking Strategy during the coming year and **AGREED** that this item be added to the Committee Work Programme.

### 8.4 Waste and Recycling Collection Contract

It was **AGREED** that updates on the implementation of the waste and recycling collection contract would be provided as appropriate.

In response to a question from Mr Howard, Officers advised that some 28,000 green waste collection licences had been issued. This exceeded expectations which had assumed a reduction in previous collection levels to a total of some 22,000 customers.

Mr Fenton and Mr Coles took the opportunity to remind Members of their wish to see alternatives to the current 'card only' payment arrangements being put in place

### 8.5 Review of Member Structures and Democratic Costs

Members noted that the Council had invited the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to give consideration to, and make recommendations upon, the options for amending the Council's Committee structure and the question of the electoral cycle and the number of members of the Council. It was **AGREED** that this be incorporated into the Work Programme.

**RESOLVED:** That, subject to the amendments detailed above, the Committee's Work Programme for 2017/2018 be approved.

## 9 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that there were no items on the Cabinet Work Programme published on 14 May 2017 relevant to the terms of reference of the Committee.

## 10 AIR QUALITY MONITORING

The Committee received a presentation regarding the Council's Air Quality Monitoring activities and Air Quality Action Plan. A copy of the presentation is attached to the original copy of these minutes as Appendix B.

In response to questions from Mr Cotterill it was confirmed that the majority of monitoring took place in fixed locations. Dr Alison Simmons, Senior Environmental Health Officer, explained that the Council had built up a substantial body of data over the years from monitoring in fixed locations. Since she joined the Authority she had reviewed the network and relocated a number of stations where background levels had been found to be consistently low. This had allowed monitoring in other locations and released equipment to respond to any particular expressions of concern.

Dr Simmons gave details of the monitoring sites and explained that monitoring was undertaken both close to and away from the highway and that, as could be anticipated, background levels away from the highway were considerably lower than those taken close to.

There were 23 monitoring sites in the District with three in Bridge Street and one each in Mill Street, West End, Newland and Woodgreen; an increase in the previous number of locations. Where sites were close together, similar results were evident and Dr Simmons explained that the highest concentrations could be found in areas such as Bridge Street which were heavily congested with slow moving or stationary traffic. In such locations where narrow roads were surrounded by high buildings pollutants were unable to disperse effectively, particularly during the winter when inversion layers resulted in a build-up. Where traffic was free flowing, air quality was significantly better.

Whilst a matter of concern to local residents, there were only two areas in West Oxfordshire (Bridge Street in Witney and Horsefair in Chipping Norton) in which air quality levels fell below national guidelines at peak times.

Dr Simmons explained that, whilst heavy goods vehicles could give rise to higher levels of pollution, particularly when operating under strain, the picture was more complex. Free flowing traffic was significantly less problematic than slow moving or stationary vehicles and new vehicles benefited from improved technology which reduced emission levels.

Mr Graham asked why levels had fallen over time and what was being done to address air quality issues in Chipping Norton. In response, Dr Simmons advised that, as a small island within a large continental land mass, meteorological factors played a significant role in this respect. When variations were identified, they were found to be uniform throughout the UK. Secondly, improvements in design and technology driven by European legislation continued to have an impact with newer vehicles having improved performance. However, given the lifespan of large vehicles, improvements in air quality were slow. The Government's current strategy was reliant upon technological developments being sufficient to enable air quality targets to be met over time.

Dr Simmons advised that she intended to seek Government funding to support a project seeking to establish how long it would take for air quality to improve under new emission standards and to establish if this would be sufficient for air quality standards to be met. She noted that the problems experienced in West Oxfordshire were by no means unique but were reflected in similar towns throughout the country.

There was also a second possible project, conducted in conjunction with the Economic Development service and the County Council to assess the potential impact of the introduction of a clean air charging zone such as had been employed in major UK cities. However, Dr Simmons pointed out that, where such zones had been created in major urban conurbations, nitrogen dioxide levels of between 90 to 95 parts per million were a constant compared to West Oxfordshire where peak levels were only just over 50 parts per million in two localised areas. In addition, Central Government had expressed a commitment over the introduction of clean air zones to 12 major cities.

Mr Coles advised that he had joined local residents in conducting a traffic survey in Mill Street and the High Street in Witney when some 10,000 vehicles had been recorded in a 12 hour period. He expressed his concern over the damage such traffic levels caused to the fabric of old buildings and suggested that, given the level of recently approved residential development, the current problems would only get worse in the future.

Mr Coles also noted that local bus companies tended to deploy their new fleet vehicles in areas such as Oxford City whilst continuing to use older, less advanced vehicles in outlying areas such as West Oxfordshire. He questioned whether national air quality targets could be prejudiced following the UK's departure from the European Union. In response, Dr Simmons advised that current EU targets had been incorporated into national legislation. She acknowledged that the Government could change air quality targets but considered that it would be most unlikely that they would chose to do so.

(Mr Fenton left the meeting at this juncture)

Mr Coles also enquired why real time data such as that available in relation to Oxford City was not provided for West Oxfordshire. It was explained that, whilst a real time analyser had been installed in West Oxfordshire, this had now reached the end of its useful operational life. During the time that it had been in use it had never recorded levels close to the national target hence it was not considered to be cost effective to provide a replacement unit. Whilst Defra did maintain a national network of real time monitoring stations, these tended to be situated in locations at which pollution levels were at their worst.

The Strategic Director advised that the Council was well aware of the specific problems in Witney and Chipping Norton and one way in which these could be dealt with was by reducing traffic flows in these areas. The emerging Local Plan included proposals for development that would fund the provision of alternative routes which would alleviate traffic flows on existing routes. However, if the Plan, or these particular elements of it, were not approved, alternative solutions would need to be found.

Ms Leffman made reference to discussions with the County Council to restrict HGV movements in parts of the District. Mr Cotterill advised that this was an initiative promoted by Burford Town Council but that the cost of the necessary signage was significant.

In response to a question from Mr Brennan, Dr Simmons advised that one monitoring unit was located in Carterton at Garner Close. More extensive monitoring was not considered to be necessary as recorded levels of nitrogen dioxide in the town had never approached the national target. In response to further questions from Mr Howard, she advised that only nitrogen dioxide levels were monitored and that the national target set to be achieved by 2020 was not a legally binding limit.

In conclusion, Dr Simmons advised that, with the exception of the two areas previously mentioned, air quality in West Oxfordshire was generally good.

Given the current trend towards the introduction of hybrid and electric vehicles with a consequent fall in pollution levels, Mr Postan questioned whether it was necessary to continue to seek to identify 'hotspots'. In response, Dr Simmons advised that the Council was under a statutory duty to protect the health of its residents by ensuring that air quality was safe and was consequently obliged to investigate any possible pollution problems.

**RESOLVED:** That the information provided be noted.

11 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - YEAR END 2016/2017

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Leisure and Communities providing information on the Council's performance as at the end of year 2016/2017.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

12 START TIME OF MEETINGS

The committee received the report of the Head of Democratic Services seeking consideration of the start time of meetings for the remainder of the 2017/2018 municipal year.

**RESOLVED:** That meetings of the committee for 2017/2018 commence at 2.00pm.

13 ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

At the request of Mr A S Coles, the Committee gave consideration to the following environmental matters:-

13.1 Release of Balloons and Sky Lanterns

Mr Coles expressed his concern over the dangers posed by the release of balloons and sky lanterns in terms of fire and the risks posed to livestock and wildlife. He advised that both the National Farmers Union and the Marine Conservation Society were running campaigns and some 20 councils had already banned the release of balloons and sky lanterns from land in their ownership. A copy of his submission is attached to the original copy of these minutes as Appendix C.

Whilst acknowledging that the Council had little land under its direct control and recognising that there were questions surrounding the enforcement of a ban, Mr Coles proposed that Officers be requested to give consideration to the current campaigns and report back on ways in which the Council could devise a scheme that could work in West Oxfordshire at a future date.

The Chairman suggested that town and parish councils were more likely to be in a position to operate a more effective ban given their more extensive landholdings. Mr Brennan indicated that this issue could be more successfully addressed by manufacturers and Mr Postan indicated that the impact of education on public opinion was key.

**RESOLVED:** That Officers be requested to give consideration to the current campaigns and report back on ways in which the Council could devise a scheme that could work in West Oxfordshire at a future date.

13.2 Discarded Elastic Bands

Mr Coles advised that he had been approached by one of his constituents who had raised concerns over the number of elastic bands discarded by post office delivery workers and suggested that the Committee should request Officers to write to the relevant Delivery Office Managers advising them of this concern.

Mr Postan advised that standing instructions were that bands should be removed and returned to the offices for re-use and suggested that this was likely to be a localised issue.

**RESOLVED:** That Officers be requested to write to the relevant Delivery Office Managers advising them of concerns over the number of elastic bands discarded by post office delivery workers.

14 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Mr Howard made reference to difficulties encountered in securing the removal of a fallen tree. The Strategic Director requested that he provide specific details of its location in order that the matter could be investigated.

The meeting closed at 3.30pm

Chairman