

Environment Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 6 JUNE 2023 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Jerry Kunkler (Chairman), Cllr Bob Jones MBE (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mel Jacob, Cllr Dr Brian Mathew, Cllr Tony Trotman, Cllr Iain Wallis, Cllr Derek Walters, Cllr Stuart Wheeler, and Cllr Jacqui Lay (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Ian McLennan (Virtual), Cllr Tamara Reay, and Cllr Graham Wright (Virtual)

26 Election of Chairman 2023/24

Nominations were sought for a Chairman for the forthcoming year. On the nomination of Councillor Iain Wallis, seconded by Councillor Tony Trotman, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee elected Councillor Jerry Kunkler as Chairman of the Environment Select Committee for the forthcoming year 2023-24.

27 Election of Vice-Chairman 2023/24

Nominations were sought for a Vice-Chairman for the forthcoming year. On the nomination of Councillor Jerry Kunkler, seconded by Councillor Derek Walters, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee elected Councillor Bob Jones MBE as Vice-Chairman of the Environment Select Committee for the forthcoming year 2023-24.

28 Apologies and Membership Update

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Councillor Tony Jackson, who was substituted by Councillor Jacqui Lay
- Councillor Tom Rounds
- Councillor Charles McGrath

The changes to the Membership of the Committee following the last meeting of Full Council held on 16 May 2023 were noted. Namely, that Councillor James Sheppard had stepped down, with Councillor Stuart Wheeler taking his place. The Chairman thanked Cllr Sheppard for his contribution during his time as a part of the Committee and welcomed back Cllr Wheeler.

29 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 March 2023 were presented for consideration.

Councillor Mel Jacob raised that she had been recorded as sending her apologies for the last meeting, however she stated that she had been in attendance. It was then confirmed that this would be rectified.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved and signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 March 2023 as a true and correct record.

30 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

31 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman noted that an item relating to the Local Plan was due to be heard at the meeting, however, after consultation with officers, it was agreed to remove the item ahead of agenda publication. A statement (below) prepared by Councillor Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management, and Strategic Planning, outlining the reasons for the decision was read out by the Chairman.

“The Local Plan Review has reached an advanced stage and remains on track to be published on 3 July 2023, as part of a report to Cabinet on 11 July, when it will be made publicly available. This timetable accords with the published Local Development Scheme that was approved in December 2022. Wiltshire councillors will be briefed on the process and the content of the Plan over the next few weeks. Subject to Cabinet, and then Council, approving the Plan in July, the intention is to commence statutory consultation in September 2023. The next step following consultation would be submission of the Plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination in 2024.”

Regarding progress on the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan, work has slowed down while progress is made on the Local Plan Review. As soon as the Local Plan has passed through governance in July, attention will be directed to the Gypsy and Traveller Plan.”

Details were then provided of meetings and briefings that both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman had attended since the last meeting, including Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee meetings, and assessing the impact of separate weekly food waste collections on current waste contracts.

32 **Public Participation**

The Chairman announced that two written questions had been submitted and had received written responses as circulated within Agenda Supplement 1.

33 **Wiltshire Towns Programme and Related Activity Including Web-App Development**

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council, introduced the update alongside Victoria Moloney, Head of Economy and Regeneration.

It was noted that the Wiltshire Towns Programme was underway, with good engagement and results coming forth, whilst also identifying elements that still needed further development. A brief summary of the primary objectives, strategic plans, and background of the programme was given, and it was highlighted that Rebecca Lockwood Norris, Senior Development Officer – Regeneration, had been recruited to help ease resourcing pressure, thus leading to an acceleration in programme delivery.

It was highlighted that the programme was now in the revitalisation phase, moving past the economic shock of the pandemic. The activities identified under the Towns Programme were then detailed, with further updates on each given. Examples of which being: stakeholder feedback in respect of Vibrant Wiltshire had led officers to make the decision to delay the start of the programme until Autumn 2023, in order to help towns fill vacant units. They felt that introducing and supporting new businesses into high streets at this time would ultimately not help the financial strains that existing businesses were facing with regard to the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis. Furthermore, the Wiltshire Marque programme was highlighted as an activity that would help to elevate the brand of Wiltshire and encourage visitors to support existing producers, both small and large.

Officers noted that they had learnt a lot from engaging with Town Councils regarding the Activity Generation Grants, as many of them had action plans, but for other areas it was a barrier. Therefore, officers had realised that attempting to develop action plans with these Town Councils was not proportionate, and instead had taken a more flexible approach, asking for more outline strategies along with the activities that the Town Councils would like to deliver, to support local areas in developing forward thinking and making their events and branding more sustainable.

An update on the two app proposals was then given. Firstly, the 'Heritage Trails' app was raised, with Members being informed that the app would be formally launching with the first tranche of 5 towns onto the platform by the end of June,

and the remaining 5 being added over Summer 2023. It was noted that the app would include a link to the 'Explore Malmesbury' app as an existing offer, and officers noted that if other towns were in a similar position, to contact officers to provide the same opportunity to ensure consistency across the platform. Forward plans for trails were already being submitted to officers which would be a starting point for further trails, thus building a self-sustaining and refreshing offer to drive footfall. It was further noted that the 'What's on in Wiltshire' app still required further development, but officers emphasised that the Towns Programme was a continuously evolving process. Members were encouraged to provide feedback which officers would then review, reflect and address where appropriate.

During the discussion, points included:

- Success of the scheme would be measured through footfall data and vacancy rates, as these were more realistic for high streets that were particularly facing challenges, as opposed to assessing filled units. Furthermore, encouraging all Town Councils to finalise and submit their action plans or outline strategies was noted as another factor to monitor in terms of measuring success.
- Officers highlighted that in order to further attract local voices and community engagement for the 'Heritage Trails' app, they felt that the app and a range of content already needed to be present. This would then encourage people to participate and provide feedback to drive and inform future content and engagement for subsequent app updates.
- It was confirmed that officers were seeking to find residents who actively champion their communities in order to build a strong network of voices to help promote the offerings on the 'Heritage Trails' app. Additionally, if a local business fell on a trail, officers would reach out to them to ask if they would promote the trail in order to encourage return visits. Furthermore, social media would be utilised alongside liaising with partners to advertise in their own communities and networks. When advertising for out of County visitors, promotions would be prominent at key entry points, transport routes, and destinations.
- Officers were encouraged to utilise the Members' themselves as they had their own social connections within their communities. It was then confirmed that newsletters containing relevant links and information would be circulated to Members, Town and Parish Councils in the coming weeks.
- Existing trails, walking routes and subsequent stakeholder relationships were highlighted and it was suggested that officers liaise with these organisers to support each other's offerings.
- The aspirations of the 'Heritage Trails' app were detailed; namely, expanding into further urban and rural communities, and diversifying into promoting points of interest such as environmental assets and Wiltshire's military heritage.

- Ensuring that communities take more pride in their local areas in order to encourage return visits, was emphasised.
- Members reiterated the need to promote more of the rural areas across the County.
- It was clarified that the 'Heritage Trails' app would not focus on simply advertising walking routes, but instead promoting the heritage of Wiltshire and a cogent collection of trails which was not currently being provided within nearby Counties.
- It was further clarified that Town Councils did not have to pay a fee to join the programme as was initially considered during the soft launch of the Towns Programme during the pandemic, as funding had been secured to mitigate this cost.
- Officers noted that funding for the Towns Programme ceased in 2025, however if the programme proved itself during this time, the argument for continued funding would be easier to demonstrate and justify.
- Ongoing discussions with rail companies were confirmed as taking place and their stakeholder managers were aware of the programme, and advertising materials would be shared with them at the appropriate time.
- It was explained that footfall data was in the process of being procured, and that once results started coming through, benchmarks could be developed alongside a further understanding of the different types of visitors both local and outside of Wiltshire, dwell times and other notable impacts.
- The indicative budget of £80k for the 'What's on in Wiltshire' app was raised, and it was noted that although it seemed small in comparison to that of the 'Heritage Trails' app, this was because the platform itself was not as complex and would use a framework that could work for all areas across Wiltshire rather than needing to be geographically specific.
- The importance of the 'What's on in Wiltshire' app was stressed with regard to encouraging people to visit places and events that they usually wouldn't and subsequently supporting local businesses and economies.
- It was clarified that officers were keen to stick closely to the heritage brand within the 'Heritage Trails' app and would therefore not be straying into more commercial aspects such as advertising electric vehicle charging points. However, if there was demand for the inclusion of such in the app, officers would reconsider at a later date.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Cllr Jerry Kunkler proposed to move the recommendations which was seconded by Cllr Bob Jones MBE. After which, it was:

Resolved:

- a) **The Committee noted the content of the update on the Wiltshire Towns Programme and related activity, including web-app development.**

- b) The Committee requested that a further update be delivered in 12 months' time.**

34 **Updates from Task Groups and Representatives on Programme Boards**

The Chairman began the Agenda Item by informing the Committee that the Housing Allocations Policy Task Group would have its first meeting on 19 June 2023.

Cllr Graham Wright, Chairman of the Climate Emergency Task Group, then presented an update on the work of the Task Group since 4 January 2023.

The recent activities of the Task Group were detailed, namely:

- Visiting Rollalong in Dorset, where the new prefabricated Council houses were being built.
- Being involved in workshops and briefings focussing on offsetting Wiltshire's greenhouse emissions.
- Receiving the update on the Council's response to the climate emergency ahead of the Cabinet and Full Council meetings in May 2023.
- Receiving an update on Council programmes helping to fund retrofitting and to support fuel-poor households improve their home efficiency.

Cllr Wright thanked all involved and noted that he felt as if the work was gaining momentum and was keen for its continuation.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

- a) The Committee appointed the Membership of the Housing Allocation Policy Task Group as listed in the report.**
- b) The Committee noted the draft terms of reference of the Housing Allocation Policy Task Group.**
- c) The Committee re-appointed the Climate Emergency Task Group and the Membership listed in the report, with the commencement of the 2023/24 Council year.**
- d) The Committee noted the update on the Task Group activity provided above.**
- e) The Committee noted the activity of the Climate Emergency Task Group (June 2022 – June 2023), see Appendix 1.**

- f) **The Committee noted the Climate Emergency Task Group's draft Forward Work Plan, see Appendix 2.**

35 **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee received the Forward Work Programme for consideration.

Cllr Dr Brian Mathew raised the issue of potholes and noted that he had researched alternative methods and machinery that could increase both the speed and quality of repairs. In response, Parvis Khansari, Corporate Director – Place, reassured Members that the Highways Team also researched these same innovations within the industry and suggested that a report from the Highways Team on this topic be brought to a future meeting of the Committee. After which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved the Forward Work Programme subject to the agreed amendment regarding an update on the council's approach to tackling potholes.

36 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

37 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 25 July 2023.

(Duration of meeting: 2.30 - 3.30 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Ellen Ghey - Democratic Services
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