

Climate Change Sub-Group
7 July 2021

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CLIMATE CHANGE SUB-GROUP held on Wednesday 7 July 2021 at 6.45 pm Via Zoom

PRESENT: Councillors D.Richardson (Chairman)
G.Ganney, T.Jackson-Mynott, J.Lake, R.Lass,
J.Quinton and J.Weston

ALSO Councillor F.Thomson (Executive Member Housing and Climate
PRESENT Speaker Tim Hill, Conservation Manager at Hertfordshire and
Middlesex Wildlife Trust
Reuben Ayavoo, Chair of the HCCSP Biodiversity
Workstream and Community Engagement Manager at
North Herts District Council
Georgina Chapman, Policy Officer at North Herts
District Council

OFFICIALS N.Long, Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and
PRESENT: Governance)
V.Appasawmy, Energy Efficiency Officer
O.Waring, Tree Officer
C.Dale, Head of Planning
Devayya, Economic Development Officer)
J.Anthony (Principal Governance Officer)

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2021 were agreed as a correct record and noted by the Chair.

2. HERTFORDSHIRE'S BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Members received a report from Reuben Ayavoo and Georgina Chapman from North Herts District Council. North Herts District Council is leading the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership's (HCCSP) Biodiversity Workstream. Members were informed that the HCCSP biodiversity sub group had been finalising the Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan for the county. This action plan would identify a) actions to be undertaken by those in the partnership involving changes to their own assets, premises or services; b) actions that required others to act in response to partners' use of their regulatory powers; and c) actions which would rely on partners encouraging, influencing or facilitating others to make changes. A key aspect of the plan was the development of the monitoring framework, including named Officers for each

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action contained. This would help ensure actions are completed within the timescales agreed.

One example of an action proposed in the draft Strategic Action Plan, and which progress had already been made, was an audit of local authority green spaces in each of the local authorities in the county. This was being conducted by Countryside Management Services and would identify opportunities to increase biodiversity.

Another example was the development of a biodiversity baseline for the county. This would use Natural England's metric to quantify existing levels of biodiversity across Hertfordshire. Members learned that a procurement process was underway and would enable this work to be completed before the end of the financial year. The baseline will be used to monitor increases and decreases in biodiversity in the county and help meet targets set in the proposed Environment Bill. Whilst this would predominantly be a desk top exercise, Members and Officers discussed the potential need to bolster the baseline study with site visits in the spring.

The Chair and Members thanked the Officers for their presentation.

3. STATE OF NATURE AND BOROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Members received a report from Tim Hill, Conservation Manager at Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Members were informed of the urgency to act, highlighting the fact that three iconic native creatures had already become extinct in Hertfordshire; the Nightingale, the Adder and the White clawed crayfish. Members noted that only 16% (27,000 ha) of the county was classified as semi-natural habitat. The Trust had now called for at least 30% of land and water to be connected and protected for nature's recovery by 2030 ("30 by 30"). For Hertfordshire this would mean an additional 20,000 ha set aside for natural and semi-natural habitat.

Members were then informed of the work the Trust had been undertaking in partnership with neighbouring borough and district councils and other key partners. This included work within Welwyn Hatfield. In particular Members noted the survey and ecological monitoring exercise the Trust had undertaken in 2018 and 2019 with regards to the verges located in the area. The survey was able to capture the benefits of cultivating these areas to encourage biodiversity. Members were also advised that before any plan was put in place to manage verges, a survey should be undertaken to consider the potential for biodiversity and ground maintenance contractors should be included in any discussions.

Members briefly discussed the use of glyphosate to manage weeds, etc, and the impact it has on biodiversity. Members noted the need to ensure the discussion

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was inclusive and was mindful of the different needs of stakeholders and impacts (both good and bad) of certain actions.

4. WHBC BIODIVERSITY ACTIVITIES

Members received a report from Officers on the biodiversity activities taking place by the Council. Officers confirmed that they would be fully involved in the development of the countywide strategic action plan, which would include actions and targets for Welwyn Hatfield. In response to observations from Members, Officers confirmed that the onsite assessments would be carried out to identify what could be done at a borough level, and that the Council had a rich history in utilising volunteers including on a number of current projects. Once the county wider plan is in place, Officers would consider if any area needed to be further developed or extended.

Members were informed that there had been a big increase in long grass areas this year, which has been successful in supporting biodiversity, as well as the return of programmes engaging with young people. Officers confirmed that the management of the woodlands did consider biodiversity, with the Council's management plans agreed with Natural England. Members noted the role volunteers were playing in woodland management. The Borough's nature reserves also included a biodiversity outlook, with cattle playing a role at some sites.

Members were informed that the Council was part of the Hertfordshire County Council bid for additional funding from central government through the Local Authority Tree Fund. If successful, it would allow the Council to plant an additional 2,000 small trees across the borough. Officers also confirmed that the Council was assisting in the county council's Green Space Opportunity audit, which formed part of the proposed biodiversity strategic action plan. This should identify opportunities for the Council for increasing biodiversity in the borough. Members also noted the Council was committed to planting 300 street trees per year and this programme was ongoing.

Members were supportive of site visits to see first-hand current activities and volunteer groups in action. Members also raised the issue of communication, and the potential need to bring different activity strands together.

5. WHBC CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Officers confirmed the need to further develop the Council's Climate Change Action Plan to include named Officers by each action. This would then be shared with Members who could then ask for updates and raise issues with the relevant Officers' directly.

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Officers also provided an update on the proposed Local Walking and Cycling Plan. Members were asked to formally approve the spending.

RESOLVED:

Members unanimously agreed to the spending of up to £10,000 on a joint initiative with Hertfordshire County Council to develop a Local Walking and Cycling Plan for Welwyn Hatfield.

Members raised, for discussion at future meetings, the heating and ventilation within the Council's housing stock and the use of air source heat pumps.

6. HERTFORDSHIRE CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY PARTNERSHIP (HCCSP)

Members received a verbal report from the Executive Member (Housing and Climate Change) as the Council's representative to the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP). Members noted that the Partnership met every 6 weeks, and oversaw the various themed workstreams and the development of strategic action plans. One area that had been looked at was the importance of behavioural change and initiatives to support this. Members were informed that the Partnership would look to host an event to coincide with COP26 later in the year, which the Council was supportive of.

Members noted that County Councillor Graham McAndrew had remained as Chair of the HCCSP following the recent elections and changes in portfolios at county level. Members were also reminded that minutes from HCCSP meetings were available of the Member Information Hub for Members to review.

7. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Officers confirmed that dates would be circulated, with the proposed frequency being a Member Group meeting on average taking place every other month.

Meeting ended at 7.52
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