



# Buckinghamshire Council

## Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee

### Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 22 JUNE 2022 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 11.57 AM

#### MEMBERS PRESENT

B Chapple OBE, R Carington, P Brazier, M Collins, C Cornell, E Gemmell, S Guy, A Poland-Goodyer, M Rand, L Sullivan, D Watson, W Whyte and A Wood

#### OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

G Williams, D King, S Bambrick, E Barlow, A Beckett, D Sutherland, N Thomas, I Thompson and C Ward

#### Agenda Item

##### 1 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor B Chapple OBE appointed Councillor R Carington as the Vice-Chairman of the Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee for the 2022/23 municipal year.

##### 2 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed three new Members onto the Committee and thanked the three outgoing Members for their work. The Chairman also welcomed the new Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment, Councillor G Williams to the meeting and thanked Councillor P Strachan for his work over the past year. The Chairman gave an overview of the Select Committee's portfolio and reminded Members of the importance of cross-party working.

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor R Carington, was invited to provide an update on the ongoing inquiry. The Vice-Chairman thanked all Members for their work during the inquiry and also the Scrutiny Officer's support. The evidence gathering sessions had now concluded and the group would be meeting to consider their recommendations. The main themes that had emerged were road run-off, communication and engagement, and misconnections. It was intended that the final report would be presented at September's meeting before then going to Cabinet.

##### 3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Councillors M Caffrey, E Culverhouse and S Broadbent.

Changes to membership were Councillors M Collins, M Rand and D Watson replacing Councillors K Ashman, D King and M Walsh.

#### **4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor R Carington declared a personal interest in Item 7 as a member of the Natural Environment Partnership.

Councillor G Williams declared a personal interest in Item 7 as a member of the Chilterns Conservation Board and the Bucks, Berks and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

#### **5 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The minutes of the meetings held on 10 March 2022 and 15 May 2022 were confirmed as an accurate record.

A follow up letter to HS2 Ltd would be drafted following a concern raised by a Member of the Select Committee related to flood assessments and work in the River Great Ouse catchment; specifically in the Steeple Claydon and Calvert area.

#### **6 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were none.

#### **7 LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY**

The Chairman invited the Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment to introduce the report. Before doing so, the Cabinet Member apologised for the waste collection performance issues in the south of the county.

Buckinghamshire Council had been one of five pilot authorities to prepare for a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) between September 2020 – May 2021, and the paper outlined the findings from this process. LNRSs were established as a part of the Environment Act 2021 and would be a new system of spatial strategy for nature that would identify opportunities. Additionally, there were multiple benefits to a LNRS such as carbon reduction, wildlife addition, flood alleviation and public health. The following points were highlighted during the office presentation:-

- The LNRS would be evidence based, collaborative and locally led. It had the potential to guide where developer payments should be invested to create or restore habitat, and would also channel external funding from other sources (e.g. new Environment Land Management scheme, Woodland Creation Funds and Carbon Offsetting).
- Buckinghamshire Council had been indicatively identified as the responsible authority to lead on the LNRS to cover Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.
- The pilot involved testing a process to collate data and establish a local baseline and narrative. This led to the creation of a Statement of Biodiversity Priorities and a Local Habitat Map.
- The Statement of Biodiversity Priorities included:
  - A description of sub-areas and key habitats and species.
  - An opportunity for linking, increasing or improving each key habitat.
  - Wider environmental issues that nature-based solutions would help.
  - The outcomes that the LNRS sought to achieve.
- The Local Habitat Map included:
  - Most valuable existing habitats for nature (e.g. nationally designated wildlife sites and Local Nature Reserves).
  - Map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat.
- The pilot involved online engagement with a total of 358 stakeholders across varying sectors. These included agriculture and land managers, Town and Parish Councils, central

Government and agencies, conservation groups and individuals. The engagement exercise suggested 705 outcomes, 715 actions and 228 benefits that the LNRS pilot could incorporate that needed to be reviewed and prioritised.

- A prioritisation matrix was developed to produce a scoring system based on the outcomes that had been suggested. Key themes emerged which included aspirations for better management of habitats, more woodland, more urban trees and improved chalk streams.
- Two illustrative maps were produced to determine a potential approach for the LNRS. Four zones were created across the map:
  - Zone 1: Protected sites and nature reserves.
  - Zone 2: Maintain and Enhance.
  - Zone 3: Restore or Recover.
  - Zone 4: Wider Landscape.
- Five key themes were learnt from the pilot experience which was fed back to Government.
- Most of the £140,000 awarded for the pilot was allocated towards mapping resource, technical resource to produce the prototype LNRS and external consultants to assist with stakeholder engagement.
- Government guidance was expected in Autumn 2022 which would incorporate the learning from all five pilots and the Government's consultation.
- For the real LNRS, the intended approach was to commission Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership to lead preparation of the Strategy via a service level agreement which would require formal approval by each local authority.
- Seed funding by Defra would lead to the recruitment of a Project Manager who would then commence preparatory work.

During the Select Committee discussion, the following points were noted:-

- During the pilot, Defra and the pilot authorities met bi-weekly to discuss the steps being carried out. At the end of the pilot, Defra produced a lessons learnt report based on the experience of all the local authorities.
- The recent granting of city status to Milton Keynes was not expected to impact Buckinghamshire Council being the responsible authority.
- Biodiversify was the consultancy used for systematic conservation planning that helped with mapping whilst 3KQ acted as a facilitator for the engagement sessions. Part of the funding was also spent on works by the Wildlife Trust and the Local Nature Partnership.
- The LNRS would help guide the placement of the new, mandatory biodiversity net gain requirement in the planning system and would ensure new developments increased biodiversity by 10% as close as possible to the site. However the exact weight of the LNRS and its priority in planning, including the Local Plan, was still to be determined by Defra.
- The technical scoring matrix had been formulated quickly and had to balance stakeholder feedback and local targets for habitat creation and restoration.
- The LNRS was designed to work in partnership with the new Environment Land Management Scheme. Land use for food and associated payments would be guided by the Sustainable Farming Initiative.
- The four zones in the LNRS were to indicate opportunities for funding, not constrain land usage.
- The Natural Environment Partnership (NEP) central team did not have the funding or resource available yet for the upcoming LNRS however new burdens funding from Government was expected to cover a new Project Manager post.
- The impact of HS2 was beyond the scope of the LNRS but it was acknowledged that

biodiversity net gain benefits from the project would take many years to materialise.

- Members felt that planning would play an important role in the emerging LNRS and that a balance needed to be struck between the needs of nature and residents. The Cabinet Member was also asked to consider how Member input would be considered in the formulation of the LNRS.
- The Environment Act stipulated that the responsible authority had to report to Government every five years on the LNRS.
- The Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee would have a role in the future scrutiny of the success of LNRS. The Committee may also have a joint role with the Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee regarding the relationship between the LNRS and the local plan.
- The Colne Valley Landscape Partnership was in NEP and had been involved in the LNRS pilot.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for the report and welcomed an update on the LNRS as it developed.

## **8 TREE PLANTING**

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment introduced the report to Members and the following points were highlighted in the presentation:-

- The Government's England Tree Action Plan 2021-24 set out a target of 30,000ha woodland being planted annually.
- The Council was committed to planting 543,000 trees by 2032 as part of the Bucks Tree Mission launched in 2021. 5,860 trees had been planted in the first year.
- Trees provided a wide range of ecosystem services including provisioning, supporting, regulating and cultural. Tree planting had several considerations including soil type and suitability, commercial aspects, stakeholder access and the historic environment.
- £203,000 had been secured in 2021/22 from the Local Authority Treescapes Fund which benefited three charities, two Parish Councils and Transport for Buckinghamshire (TfB).
- £28,000 had been secured in 2021/22 from the England Woodland Creation Offer for contractor planting at Billet Field. To date, 3,450 trees had been planted at the site. The contractor, Pryor and Rickett Silviculture, was responsible to plant (5 years) and maintain the trees (5 years). Maintenance included clearing weeds (without chemical weedkillers), inspecting and minor repairs to fences and gates, dead tree replacement, grass cutting on walking route and litter removal.
- The Council had been featured in a Forestry Commission case study in January 2022 regarding the Bucks Tree Mission and climate change.
- £138,000 had been set aside to replace 158 trees that had been removed from the public highway due to disease or safety concerns. Currently, 146 of these trees had been planted.
- A 50ha site in east Buckinghamshire had a natural break in tenancy contract which was now viable for a Forestry England Woodland Partnership scheme. This site had the potential to plant over 100,000 trees.
- Three potential contractor planting sites were located near High Wycombe (5ha and 7.1ha) and Amersham (7.44ha) with one of these sites currently supporting crop production. These could accommodate 41,700 trees.
- Due to increased external funding support and optimising procurement, expenditure towards the entire Bucks Tree Mission was expected to remain within earmarked budget.
- A successful 2022-23 application for Miyawaki 'Tiny Forests' would have the benefit of a scheme that grew three times faster thereby realising benefits sooner.

- Further value of the tree planting scheme was carbon offsetting, which continued to increase dramatically, increase biodiversity and mental health wellbeing.

The following points were noted during the Select Committee discussion:-

- The arrangement for £138,000 allocated towards roadside trees included the proviso that TfB would provide their own trees. These trees would be at least 10 years old so were more expensive to establish compared to whips. It was clarified that the Highways areas in the report (Aylesbury Vale, High Wycombe and Amersham) related to the TfB depot locations which serviced the whole county.
- The trees selected in the programme design had taken into account Forest Research of a temperature change based on two degrees of latitude south of a site. Where possible, tree stock would be secured from British nurseries however procurement overseas may be required. Members requested that Black Poplar be included if it meets this remit given its association with Buckinghamshire and that the IPCC's increased 3.2°C projection should also be considered.
- Community Boards could choose to supplement the central tree planting scheme by funding applications based on local tree planting projects.
- It would be investigated whether TfB could use non-chemical weedkiller for maintenance.
- Woodland carbon units were traded under a Government backed scheme. Historically, these traded at £10 per unit (one tonne CO<sup>2</sup>) and now traded at £24 per unit. The current trend could see this value reaching £200 per unit in 2030.
- Chiltern Rangers was running a project to facilitate schools and pupils with the germination of tree seeds.
- The Cabinet Member saw merit in the suggestion that the Council consider developing its own in-house tree nursery and/or supporting a local tree-nursery business. The Chairman noted that Lindengate specialised in looking after Black Poplars.
- The contractor at Billet Field, Pryor and Rickett Silviculture, had removed vermin from the site before planting. The procurement of the maintenance contract at Billet Field ensured the contractor replaced trees that failed so it was in their interest to consider long-term pest deterrence.
- Further work was required to consider how the Council offset residual carbon. The Woodland Carbon Code was a Government backed scheme that was one of few recognised methods to officially offset carbon emissions.

The Chairman noted that a further update on this would come back to the Select Committee in future and thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for the report.

## **9 WORK PROGRAMME**

The agenda contained the proposed Work Programme for 2022/23. The Committee was advised that following Member feedback, an item on Tree Protection was scheduled for the meeting on 8 September 2022 and an item on Air Quality was scheduled for 30 March 2023.

RESOLVED –

That the Work Programme be noted.

## **10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

8 September at 10am.