

ENVIRONMENT POLICY ADVISORY GROUP (SBDC)

Meeting - 20 November 2017

Present: L Sullivan (Chairman)
M Bradford, B Harding, L Hazell and J Lowen-Cooper

Also Present: J Read

Apologies for absence: G Hollis

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the PAG held on 19 June 2017 were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. REPORTS FROM MEMBERS

None received.

4. CURRENT ISSUES

The PAG received an update regarding a road traffic accident involving the Chiltern contractor's refuse vehicle that had resulted in a fatality. Members were advised that the accident was being investigated, and that although there was no operational liability, risk assessments were being reviewed in case there were any learning points for the South Bucks contractor. There was no video recording equipment on the refuse vehicle involved in the accident, but this was being considered.

5. REPORTS LIKELY TO LEAD TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET

6. PORTFOLIO BUDGET 2018/19

The PAG received a report which provided information about the draft revenue budget for 2018/19, which included the context of the overall financial position of the Council. The report detailed the Council's priorities, issues and projects and explained how these would be delivered under increasing financial pressures.

Members were advised that, as all services were now jointly provided, it was appropriate to simplify the cost share arrangement which had resulted in a negligible cost effect.

Members were advised that a report on the review of car park charges would be presented to a special meeting of the PAG after Christmas. The final report highlighted to Members the

key financial risks facing the Council, primarily the cost of the Biffa contract and income from car parks.

Councillor J. Lowen-Cooper entered the meeting at 6.15 pm.

Having considered the advice of the PAG, the Portfolio Holder **AGREED to RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that the following be approved:

- 1) The 2018/19 revenue budget; and
- 2) The 2018/19 fees and charges.

7. LITTLEWORTH COMMON OWNERSHIP UPDATE

The PAG received a report which updated members about the ownership of Littleworth Common and requested that members agree the proposed transfer of the land to SBDC. Members were advised that the current owners were happy for the Council to take ownership of the freehold interest in the Common, and that the Council was now in a position to complete a transfer.

It was noted that there would be a nominal cost in transferring ownership, and that this could be met within existing budgets. Members were concerned that the Common would fall into disrepair if the Council did not act to take ownership, and that residents of surrounding properties would be adversely affected. The PAG were advised that, in taking ownership of the Common, the Council would receive some additional income and have the opportunity to apply for grants. Members felt that Council management of the Common would benefit the work being done by local community organisations.

Having considered the advice of the PAG, the Portfolio Holder **AGREED to RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that the Council take a transfer of the freehold ownership of Littleworth Common shown edged black on the plan attached to the report and delegates final agreement of the transfer terms to the Head of Environment in consultation with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

8. BEACONSFIELD OLD TOWN COMMON LAND UPDATE

The PAG received a report clarifying the Council's responsibility regarding the Common Land in Beaconsfield Old Town. Members' views were sought regarding a proposed change to the Council's approach regarding the management of the land in light of increasing financial constraints and to avoid future liability that may arise from insurance claims, whilst having regard to the obligations set out in the Scheme of Management and legal advice which clarified that the Council's legal duty was limited to keeping the land free of encroachment. The fact that historically the Council had undertaken maintenance that it was not obliged to do left it open to assuming any insurance liabilities, and this position needed to change. This was a separate matter from how the various land owners might co-operate in the future in managing the land.

In the discussion which followed it was suggested that a joint fund could be created between the Council, Bucks County Council and Hall Barn Estates to help fund the maintenance of the common land. It was considered that this could potentially give a conflicting message about the Council's intention to change its approach towards the management of the land, and

would require agreement from each party. The PAG, being mindful of the possibility of any potential liability, were of the opinion that the Council should no longer undertake maintenance work to those areas of the Common land that were owned by Bucks County Council and Hall Barn Estates and should notify the other parties involved and the public of its position. An agreed letter template could be used to respond to queries regarding maintenance clarifying the ownership of the land and their responsibilities. It was felt that this change in approach would need to be communicated clearly, and the use of signage should be considered to help inform the public in particular. The PAG noted the potential sensitivity around the Council changing its approach to management of the Common land, and therefore care was needed in how the change was implemented.

Members requested that a clearer map be provided in order to help clarify the complex ownership of the Common Land.

Having considered the advice of the PAG, the Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that:

- 1) The Council changes its approach regarding maintenance of the Beaconsfield Old Town Common Land, by limiting its involvement only to ensuring that the land remains free from encroachment and no longer undertaking maintenance of areas of the Common land that are owned by Bucks County Council and Hall Barn Estates.
- 2) The Council communicates this change of approach to the landowners, Town Council and general public.
- 3) Authority to agree the wording of any appropriate signage is delegated to the Head of Environment, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment.

9. **CAR PARK STRATEGY AND ANNUAL CAR PARK REVIEW**

The PAG received a report which informed members about the proposed Car Park Strategy for the District that had been agreed by the Resources PAG prior to the changes in Portfolios. The proposed strategy showed how the Council would manage car parking going forward. It was agreed to reconsider the strategy document in light of updated information on capacity and consider if any amendments to the document were necessary. Thereafter the Head of Environment, in consultation with Portfolio Holder, would be authorised to consult on the strategy as and when resources allow.

Having considered the advice of the PAG, the Portfolio Holder **AGREED** to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that the report be approved.

10. **REPORTS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION**

11. **WEED SPRAYING**

The PAG received a report which informed members of a trial being implemented to spray weeds at the kerbside, using new equipment retrofitted to an existing road sweeper. Members were advised that, as Bucks County Council had halted weed spraying, the Council was launching a trial to assess the effectiveness of spraying weeds before they became established, as a low cost method of managing the problem. The equipment would be fitted

Environment Policy Advisory Group (SBDC) - 20 November 2017

in February to one sweeper, and the trial would be limited to main routes already used by drivers.

Members were advised that an approved safe chemical would be sprayed at kerb level, in order to protect grassed verges and prevent weed growth. The frequency of spraying would reflect existing road sweeping cycles, with weeds being sprayed when sweepers are fitted with soft brushes. Sweepers would then be fitted with steel brushes, with the intention that these would clear away weakened weeds. Reservations were raised over the effectiveness of spraying after brushing, as weeds would be flattened and therefore less likely to absorb the spray.

The PAG was advised that pictures would be taken before and after spraying, as well as sample measurements, in order to assess the success of the trial.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

12. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None

The meeting terminated at 7.00 pm.