



Buckinghamshire Council

Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 22 JUNE 2023 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 11.46 AM

MEMBERS PRESENT

B Chapple OBE, R Carington, P Brazier, M Caffrey, M Collins, P Cooper, C Cornell, E Culverhouse, E Gemmell, S Guy, N Naylor, M Rand and L Sullivan

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Broadbent, G Williams, A Beckett, D Johnson, C Platts, L Vallis 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 2023/24 municipal year.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE & CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Councillors D Barnes, E Culverhouse, D Watson and A Wood.

Changes to membership were Councillors P Cooper and N Naylor replacing Councillors A Poland-Goodyer and W Whyte.

The Chairman thanked the outgoing Members for their work and would express this to them in writing.

Action: C Ward

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meetings held on 30 March 2023 and 17 May 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record.

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Three public questions were considered at the meeting as attached to the agenda and verbal responses were provided by the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment and the Cabinet Member for Transport. The questions and answers are appended to the minutes.

The Chairman thanked the public for their questions and noted the importance of trees to Buckinghamshire residents.

6 TREE PLANTING

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment introduced the report and highlighted the following key points from the presentation:

- In the first year of the programme, 5,500 trees had been planted, whilst in the second year around 145,000 trees had been planted.
- The delivery of the 543,000-tree planting target would be through a mixture of partnership work e.g. Forestry England and Chiltern Rangers. Careful consideration was needed when selecting sites and the trees to be planted, these considerations included maintenance arrangements, soil conditions and utility locations.
- Community based tree planting had been supported across Buckinghamshire in the last 12 months with schools, parish councils and charities being engaged.
- The Council had successfully applied to the Local Authority Treescapes Fund for the second year in a row. This Round 2 funding of £184,000 had gone towards the Dorneywood Scout Camp, Releaf Marlow and Miyawaki 'Tiny' Forests at Princes Risborough School and Bourton Park, Buckingham.
- Organised in partnership with Chiltern Rangers, 4,000 trees and shrubs had been planted along Platinum Park Way and 1,000 trees, gifted by HS2, were given away to 30 organisations including parish councils, Lindengate Charity and Hogshaw Farm.
- Over £105,000 grant funding had been secured from the England Woodland Creation Offer to create a 14,300-tree woodland at Bury Farm, Amersham, using a contractor planting model.
- Similarly, a new 14,700 multi-species tree woodland at Grange Farm, Hazlemere, had received £110,000 grant funding from the England Woodland Creation Offer. There had been a volunteer planting day attended by the local school along with assistance from the Chiltern Rangers.
- At the new Wing Woodland site, under the Forestry England Woodland Partnership Scheme, 110,000 trees had been planted. This would reach 132,000 trees by 2023/24. At present, the trees were fenced off for protection to allow them to be established.
- Overall, the service was 35% towards its 543,00 target and was on track to deliver.
- All Council land tree planting sites were registered with the Woodland Carbon Code which contributed towards the UK's national targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions. It was noted that carbon sequestration would increase as trees matured.
- The use of utilizing different planting techniques, working with partners and leveraging external funding had reduced average annual cost per tree from £12.13 in 2021/22 to £6.91 in 2022/23.

The Committee noted the following during its discussion:

- It was clarified that HS2's tree planting activity was separate to the Council and did not contribute towards the Council's overall tree planting target.
- In response to various queries regarding tree watering, the Cabinet Member advised that 'beating up', the forestry term for replacing newly planted trees that did not survive, was built into the contracts and was more cost effective than all out watering of sites.

Nonetheless, watering did take place in some cases, for instance specific Highways trees.

- A number of Members complimented the Wing Woods scheme however concern was expressed regarding potential visitor numbers by car, a lack of parking mitigations and the potential for dangerous on-road parking in future (e.g. Burcott village or Soulbury Road) once the trees matured. One Member drew comparison to a Greensand Trust site developed 20-30 years ago in Leighton Buzzard which had not accounted for visitor numbers and noted that the Wing Woods site had once had historical plans for a bypass. The Cabinet Member advised that local residents had expressed the preference not to have a car park during consultation however the team would monitor the situation as it progressed and liaise with the Parish Council.
- Forestry England had been involved with the Wing Woods site to provide guidance on suitable tree species and their planting locations.
- The Billet Field Wood site had contributed towards the 2021/22 planting season figures and beating up had taken place there this year. The site required a minimum of 90% maintenance in order to keep the Forestry Commission's England Woodland Creation Offer funding. Additionally, the Rural Payments Agency and Defra had introduced an Extraordinary Payments for Replanting in Exceptional Circumstances (EPREC) scheme following the exceptionally hot and dry weather in Summer 2022.
- The importance of retaining mature trees was acknowledged due to their carbon sequestration impact, resilience to heat waves and characteristic features (e.g. Exchange Street, Aylesbury), and it was felt that their protection required cross portfolio working between the Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment and the Cabinet Member for Transport. The Council's mature trees would feature in the emerging Local Plan and Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) had been issued against HS2 for cutting down ancient oak trees. It was clarified that, according to ONS data, the estimated 14,800 metric tons of CO₂eq to be sequestered by 2124 was equivalent to the average emissions of circa 9,800 new homes per year.
- Tree planting featured in the Carbon Strategy alongside other activities such as electric vehicle charger roll-out and home insulation schemes.
- It was a condition of funding that trees were procured from biosecure locations. It would be checked whether the trees originated from the UK.

Action: A Beckett / D Johnson

- The Committee suggested that the Cabinet Member consider the possibility of the Council establishing a tree nursery on its land although it was likely that it would be more cost effective to source from the private sector.
- Members supported the aspiration to plant a tree for every individual in Buckinghamshire and noted this was on track for delivery.
- Trees planted by the Council contributed towards the national schemes of England Trees Action Plan and the Queen's Green Canopy however trees planted by external organisations as part of the national schemes did not count towards the council's number.
- There was a Community Officer that supported planting on non-council land to signpost towards funding streams such as the Local Authority Treescaping fund and Woodland Trust schemes. The council's website had also been updated to refreshed to raise this awareness to communities.
- Members reiterated the encouragement of planting local tree species such as Black Poplar and Aylesbury Prune where possible.
- Buckinghamshire Council was ahead of its 2050 emissions reduction target at around 70%.
- The current cost of £6.91 per tree planted included capital costs relating to establishment such as fencing. Maintenance costs were separate and could be provided.

Action: A Beckett / D Johnson

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for the report and acknowledged the progress being made on the programme.

7 UPDATE ON SCHOOL TRANSPORT ALLOCATIONS FOR NEW ACADEMIC YEAR

The following points were made during the Cabinet Member for Transport's verbal update on School Transport allocations:

- 'Summer ops' were at their peak with the team cross-working with referrals from the Education team who determined eligibility. The provision for transport assistance may be from public buses, rail, taxi or personal transport budgets (PTBs).
- As of 20 June 2023, 622 new referrals had been made. Of these, 567 had been allocated transport, 9 had PTBs agreed, and 46 awaited application following being invited to. More referrals were expected by the end of June. Currently 339 new SEND referrals had been received (Pre-16: 203, Post-16: 136).
- In total, it was estimated that the service made transport arrangements for around 7,500 students (5,000 mainstream, 2,500 SEND).
- The Spare Seat scheme was on its continuous improvement path having recently been simplified to reduced incoming inquiries. The scheme was moving to a flat fee service with easier payment methods (e.g. online rather than direct debit). Applications could be made on the [council's website](#) from 26 June until noon on 10 July.
- Home to School Transport was a statutory service that was subject to budgetary pressures. £28.6m had been allocated in 2023/24 as follows:
 - Mainstream: £7.7m.
 - Pre-16 SEND: £16.1m.
 - Post-16 SEND: £3.9m.
 - Pupil Referral Unit Transport at £0.9m.

The following points were made during the Committee's discussion:

- The team's scope was on transporting to and from school however the team may be able to assist in providing Members, community groups and schools with suitable contacts in the transport sector to assist with transport queries (e.g. classes being taken to and from leisure centres).
- One Member highlighted the important role walking and cycling had for children going to and from school. The Cabinet Member advised that the Council had topped the Modeshift STARS league and that improving access to schools was considered when bidding for Active Travel schemes (e.g. Keep Hill Wood, High Wycombe, and Buckingham).
- PTBs offered families more cost-effective, flexible solutions to make their own transport arrangements.
- The budgetary pressure was a challenge nationally which was acknowledged by Government and the Local Government Association. The team was active in the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers which liaised with Government on policy and long-term outlook. The service also explored efficiency options such as e-ticketing to monitor usage, route optimization and fleets.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for the update and noted the costs involved in this statutory service.

8 POLLUTION IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE'S RIVERS AND CHALK STREAMS: 6-MONTH PROGRESS

UPDATE

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor R Carington, introduced the 6-month progress report to the Committee and noted the progress of the recommendations. The Vice-Chairman thanked the Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor J Jordan, for her lobbying work towards the enactment of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 which would likely be in 2024. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman noted their disappointment in the Minister's letter of response to the Leader.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Environment updated that Thames Water had announced around £14m funding for the River Chess which was in part due to the work of the inquiry group. The Cabinet Member for Transport advised that gully cleansing meant silt levels were around 16% and that silt did have an important role in reducing pollutants entering watercourses.

9 WORK PROGRAMME

The agenda contained the proposed Work Programme for 2023/24 which was a live document. The Committee was advised that the HS2 meeting in March 2024 would be a single item meeting to fully explore the project and that an update on the new Highways contract would be forthcoming later in the year. The Chairman advised that the start of inquiry group's work on Streetworks and Statutory Undertakers had been delayed but would commence shortly.

There was discussion on the suggestion of the Committee receiving a report on parking enforcement and 20mph zones. It was recommended that an item on TPOs related to planning and enforcement which was within the portfolio of the Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee.

RESOLVED –

That the Work Programme be noted.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

14 September 2023 at 10am.

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Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee – 22 June 2023

Agenda Item 5 – Public Questions

Question One

Given that street trees have been proven to:

- Have a dramatic cooling effect in high temperatures;
- Reduce surface water run-off even when not in leaf;
- Remove pollutants from the air;
- Boost biodiversity;

And their presence has even been shown to:

- Reduce prescriptions for anti-depressants;
- Reduce crime levels;
- Reduce speeding;

Will the council build on the excellent work done so far in its tree planting programme with a specific programme to plant street trees in our towns and villages, with a measurable target in terms of numbers planted and/or coverage?

Answer

Raising awareness of the many benefits that trees bring to society is a key part of our work and we welcome the positive comments to that effect. Whilst we fully agree with the benefits listed here it should be noted that planting along the highway is a more difficult undertaking, for example because of buried utilities and the need to ensure traffic safety isn't effected. This is a challenge and the Council must spend additional resource to ensure that any trees planted are not a hazard to road users. Furthermore, we also have to plant larger, more mature trees along the sides of roads to withstand the additional environmental pressures of being at the roadside and exposed to traffic.

Therefore, regarding a specific programme to plant more street trees, this would require costing before any commitment could be made and such a programme does not form part of our tree planting plans.

Question Two

Connectivity of habitats is important for increasing diversity and ensuring the long-term viability of the flora and fauna they support. For Buckinghamshire Council to take the leadership role that it should we need a comprehensive map showing:

- Firstly, where all the Council's present and proposed tree planting sites are;
- Secondly all the planting by other land holders;
- Thirdly identifying gaps in wildlife corridors where particularly on low grade farmland natural regeneration could be encouraged which is very effective environmentally and in terms of cost.

Anecdotally I was unable to locate the Bury Farm site until seeing the map in today's update showed it was in fact an extension to Roger's Wood, not an area of planting I had seen 5km to the west alongside the A404. Will Buckinghamshire Council be implementing such a map

so we can all understand and be involved in this important work which is being done for all of our futures?

Answer

We are in the process of preparing a map using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) software which will show the locations of all the Council Land Tree Planting Programme sites. Once completed, this will be visible to the public. The Council do not hold data for all tree planting across the county, so would not be able to map all planting by private and third sector landowners/parties. There are no active plans to include wildlife corridors within the map under development, but we will add this as a potential feature for inclusion in future upgrades.

Question Three

It is good to see that Buckinghamshire Council have responded to declining tree cover in the county by road-side and larger scale tree planting. In the Princes Risborough – Thame area new planting can be found in town and on the A412 verge east of Kinsey.

As everyone is aware, we have recently had a period of high temperatures and low rain fall and there is no forecast at present for significant rain. In line with good tree planting practices, Buckinghamshire Council have included mulching and a watering system for each tree planted to help the tree cope with dry conditions. Sadly however, the trees on the Kingsey Rd are showing die back. On examination it appears that the mulch is of ineffective depth and the watering systems dry.

To thrive new planting requires mulch to a depth of 75mm and regular watering in dry periods. Can the Council confirm that it will be carrying out remedial mulching and watering immediately to all newly planted trees, including those on the Kingsey Rd, ensuring that all new trees in the County will thrive, grow, and be of benefit to people and the environment?

Answer

The Council are indeed committed to increasing tree cover across the County and are delighted that the effects of this can be seen and enjoyed by residents and visitors to Buckinghamshire and the Princes Risborough – Thame area. With regard to watering of street trees, these are the responsibility of Buckinghamshire Highways (formerly TfB). There has been a slight delay in the initiation of the watering programme this year as a result of the newly mobilised contractors having to prioritise the very large number of safety critical road defects reported as a result of the extreme winter weather, with crews working 7 days a week to repair the worst of the defects. Now that the recovery plan is in full swing, crews are able to attend to other routine maintenance such as the watering programme which was planned for commencement last week. Residents should begin to see the effects of this imminently.

Information Circulated After the Meeting

Tree Planting

- Suppliers confirm that all trees were supplied from UK nurseries.
- The maintenance costs (over the 10-year initial management period) for the tree planting sites planted under the contractor model were:
 - For the contracts entered into for the 21/22 planting season (Billet Field): £4.60 per tree.
 - For the contracts entered into for the 22/23 planting season (Bury Farm & Grange Farm): £3.41 per tree.

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