

# POLICY AND PROJECT ADVISORY BOARD

Virtual Meeting held on Wednesday, 24th March, 2021 at 7.00 pm.

## Voting Members

Cllr J.B. Canty (Chairman)  
Cllr P.I.C. Crerar (Vice-Chairman)  
Cllr C.J. Stewart (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Sophia Choudhary  
Cllr P.J. Cullum  
Cllr Nadia Martin  
Cllr T.W. Mitchell  
Cllr Sophie Porter  
Cllr M.J. Roberts  
Cllr B.A. Thomas

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr Prabesh KC.

## 28. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27th January, 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

## 29. SOUTHWOOD WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Board welcomed Tim Mills, Head of Economy, Planning, and Strategic Housing and, Ecology and Biodiversity Officer, Debbie Salmon who were in attendance to present the Southwood Woodland Management Plan, 2021-2026. The Plan covered a five year period, after which a review would take place, followed by a further five year plan.

It was noted that a survey of the site had been carried out to assess what was present and the condition of the site. A number of habitats had been found, these included:

- Birch woodland – classed as secondary woodland and required some maintenance
- Veteran Oaks – over 400 years old
- Heathland – glade created by Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership
- Bog habitats – Head waters of the Ively stream, currently an underground culvert
- Wet woodland – valuable and rare habitat, birch present in this area required thinning
- Ditches – required thinning and re-profiling

Several animal species had also been identified on the site, including, badgers, deer, bats, birds, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. The invertebrate population had been exceptionally good, 675 different species had been spotted in the Woodland and combined over the two sites (the Woodland and the Country Park) 952 species had been identified. The requirement to gain SSSI status for invertebrates was 1000 different species.

The vision for the Southwood Woodland Management Plan was to:

- manage the site to increase its biodiversity value whilst enabling access to nature for all visitors
- re-create the habitats that were present in the 1800's when the site had been open fields with areas of heathland and moorland by removing the majority of the birch from the woodland allowing the wooded heath to regenerate naturally
- compliment the work proposed within Southwood Country Park and join up the habitats already present to create a connected and varied habitat complex for the public to enjoy

The key objectives of the Management Plan were identified as:

- Clearing the birch and conifer trees over the five year period
- Maintain the wet woodland and ditches by thinning the tree canopy and clearing the ditches to increase the aquatic invertebrate species
- Re-naturalising the Ively Brook to meander through the woodland
- Health and safety objectives to include – an annual tree survey and check of infrastructure, this was supported by the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership who volunteered on site and the newly appointed Ranger on the Southwood Country Park site
- Install replacement directional and educational signage

The Board discussed the Plan and raised a number of issues, including land grabbing, garden waste dumping, use by cyclists and future plans for the Country Park site.

It was noted that both land grabbing by neighbouring residents and dumping of garden waste were an issue on the site and action had been taken, and would continue to be taken, to address this with residents. The garden waste issue raised concerns around the spread of invasive species, such as Yellow Arch Angel. It was noted that the invasive plant was currently being tackled through spray treatment, but the digging up of the plants would be undertaken if necessary. It was noted that the Council was aware of the boundaries of all the Council owned open spaces across the Borough and engagement with residents would be the first step in reclaiming land that had been taken. If this was unsuccessful further legal action would be considered.

In response to a query regarding cycleways through the Southwood sites, it was noted that the existing pathways were wide and currently well used by both pedestrians and cyclists. It was important however to strike the right balance for leisure and enjoyment for all in the natural environment and maintain a suitable

environment for the species present. In the longer term the aim was to provide a network of pathways to allow travel between Basingstoke and the Blackwater Valley.

It was noted that a feasibility study would be carried out on the use of the existing clubhouse on the Southwood Country Park site. It was hoped that a cost effective solution would be found to use some elements of the existing structure to create a visitor centre and café. It was suggested that consultation would take place through the summer months with visitors/residents on the design of the country park and visitors centre complex.

The Chairman requested that some changes be made to the key objectives to show a greater balance on biodiversity, the connectivity between the two sites and how public access would be improved.

The Board **NOTED** the presentation and it was agreed that any further comments from Members should be email direct to Mr. Mills and Ms. Salmon.

### 30. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY PEER CHALLENGE - REPORT**

The Assistant Chief Executive, Rachel Barker, gave a presentation on the recent Peer Review carried out by the Local Government Association (LGA) on Equalities and Diversity. The Board were being asked to endorse the report, action plan and recommendations prior to it being presented to the Cabinet in April for adoption. The Portfolio Holder for Democracy, Strategy and Partnerships, Cllr Adrian Newell, was also in attendance for this item.

An overview was provided on the process of the Review which had taken place in January, 2021. Background documents had been shared with the Review team prior to virtual meetings being held with elected Members, staff, managers and stakeholders. A verbal feedback session had been held on 28th January, before the full written report had been produced.

It was advised that 35 recommendations across 4 headings had been set out in the report. An action plan had been drawn up to show how these recommendations could be taken forward through a phased approach. Actions within Phase 1 would be completed by September, 2021 and those in Phase 2 by March 2022. In addition, there were a small number of longer term (to be completed by 2022/23) actions proposed in Phase 3, which included signing up to accreditations and charters, use of grants to improve participation, community engagement on careers in the Council and co-design and co-development of Council services.

Cllr Newell, advised that the Plan helped to implement new initiatives and improve on what was already in place.

The Board discussed the Action Plan and raised a number of issues around the content and focus of the Plan and the critical path of how each phase connected to the next. How the actions would be measured was also raised, it was advised that usually following a Peer Review the LGA would return, around 18 months later, to

assess the Council's position. The Council's Service Plans would also give an indication of whether the actions had been achieved.

The action regarding "celebrating different festivals and events using social media" was also discussed. It was felt important to celebrate different cultural events but consideration needed to be given to which would be highlighted to avoid exclusion of any particular group.

In response to a query regarding data from the recent Census 2021, it was noted that this data was expected to start being shared from the autumn. Two of the LGA's recommendations were around understanding Rushmoor's communities and the Census data would provide a real opportunity in achieving a better understanding of who lived within the Borough.

The Board **ENDORSED** the report, action plan and recommendations, subject to any comments and feedback from Members.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Newell and Ms Barker for their presentation and it was noted that Members had been encouraged to see that some recommendations had already been implemented and others would be embedded into existing strategies moving forward. Thanks were also expressed to all Members of the Board and stakeholders for their involvement in the Review process. The Chairman added that strides had already been taken to reduce cultural barriers across the Borough and the Action Plan would take the process to the next level.

### 31. **COUNCIL BUSINESS PLAN 2021 - 2024 - UNDERSTANDING THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

The Assistant Chief Executive, Rachel Barker, gave a presentation on the Council Business Plan 2021/24 – Understanding the Strategic Context. The presentation showed the processes taken in developing the Plan, with particular focus on the use of PESTLE analysis to understand the strategic context. The Board was asked for feedback to help inform the final stages of the development work.

The proposed approach would be to build on the current plan for April 2020 – March 2023, covering the period to March 2024. It would incorporate new programmes and activities that had come into existence over the previous 12 months including, the updated Property, Major Works and Regeneration Programme, the Climate Change Action Plan, Supporting Communities Strategy, Covid-19 Recovery Plan and People Strategy, and the Peer Challenge Feedback on Equality and Diversity.

The process used in developing the approach had involved, workshops with the Cabinet and the Policy and Project Advisory Board, consultation with the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and individual Portfolio Holders. A further workshop would be held with the Cabinet in April, 2021 followed by final approval from the Cabinet and full Council in June, 2021.

It was advised that the PESTLE analysis looked at external factors that could influence the Business Plan, these factors were:

- Political
- Economical
- Social
- Technological
- Legal
- Environmental

Moving forward, over the next three years, the strategic context would continue to change and be reviewed and the PESTLE analysis would be a key tool when considering the Council’s work over this period.

The Board discussed the presentation and a number of suggestions were made, as follows:

- better translation of national/international risks at a local level around areas such as Brexit and Climate Change
- bundle together the financial issues under one heading of “financial sustainability” - more detail could be provided on mitigation of risk in this area
- Community safety – it was felt that this area was missing from the Plan
- Impact on leisure facilities – more specifically impacts from what remains open and those that are planned to be rebuilt

Following a further discussion it was agreed that this item would be picked up at the Progress Group meeting on 31st March and Members were welcome to provide feedback via email.

## 32. **WORK PLAN**

The Board noted the current work plan.

Cllr Stewart updated the Board on the work of the Elections Group and paid tribute to the team for all the hard work during the polling places/station review and the continued work in preparing for the forthcoming elections on 6th May.

The meeting closed at 9.21 pm.

CLLR J.B. CANTY (CHAIRMAN)

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