

ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND REVIEW PANEL

Meeting held on Tuesday, 26th January, 2016 at Princes Hall,
Aldershot at 7.00 p.m.

Voting Members:

Cr. D.E. Clifford (Chairman)
Cr. Sophia Choudhary (Vice Chairman)

Cr. M.S. Choudhary
Cr. Sue Dibble
Cr. D.S. Gladstone

Cr. G.B. Lyon

Cr. J.J. Preece
Cr. L.A. Taylor
Cr. D.M. Welch

16. **MINUTES –**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 10th November, 2015 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

17. **THE COUNCIL'S CONSERVATION TEAM –**

The Panel received a presentation from Ms. Louise Piper, Planning Policy and Conservation Manager, and Dr. Paul Howe, Biodiversity Officer.

Ms. Piper gave an outline of the work of the Planning Policy and Conservation Team. In respect of planning policy, Ms. Piper gave details of the Team's work on the following areas:

- the Development Plan for Rushmoor
 - Core Strategy
 - New Rushmoor Local Plan
- the wide scope of planning issues
 - housing: employment; transport; design; Farnborough Airport; and, the town centres
 - conservation: heritage assets, conservation areas
 - natural environment: biodiversity; countryside; green infrastructure, Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area; water and flooding
- Supplementary Planning Documents (e.g. Buildings of Local Importance)

Ms. Piper advised Members of the work of the team in respect of conservation, trees and biodiversity. It was noted that, in 2011, a shared service had been implemented with Hart District Council. Rushmoor's officers remained employed full-time, but some salary costs had been recouped through time spent working at Hart. The shared service had impacted on the capacity of the Conservation, Trees and Biodiversity Officers at Rushmoor, however, the shared service had enabled Rushmoor to retain officer expertise and at less cost than previously and for less than employing consultants.

In respect of conservation of the built environment, Ms. Piper advised the Panel that work was carried out providing advice on planning applications and also on listings, amendments and advice on planning applications in respect of nationally and locally listed buildings and heritage assets. Advice was also given on pre-application enquiries (e.g. Cambridge Military Hospital and Louise Margaret Hospital).

Ms. Piper also gave an outline of arboricultural issues (Tree Preservation Orders, dealing with applications for tree works and providing advice and guidance at pre-application stage). Work in connection with biodiversity issues included dealing with sites of nature conservation value at local level (Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and Local Nature Reserves), national level (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and international level (Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area – advice on mitigation/Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace). Wherever possible, a partnership approach was adopted to protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

Dr. Paul Howe, the Council's Biodiversity Officer, then gave a presentation on the Rushmoor Biodiversity Action Plan (B.A.P.) The Panel was advised that the B.A.P. 2009 – 2014 had been adopted in 2009 and had included an audit of biodiversity in the Borough and set out a series of actions. It provided a framework to deliver biodiversity enhancement and protection across Rushmoor. The actions had been delivered through partnership work, planning, volunteer groups and other Council departments. It was noted that the B.A.P. had four main delivery areas on which progress had been made over the five year Action Plan period:

- protect and conserve the biodiversity resource
- create new areas for wildlife
- education and awareness (external and internal)
- partnership work

Dr. Howe gave details of examples of projects that had been carried out by partners, including the Farnborough Community Centre pond, a Community Matters Partnership project, and Brickfields path creation.

The draft Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-21 was currently the subject of a consultation exercise, the closing date for which was 1st February, 2016. The document had built on the preceding Plan and had been updated in a few key areas to take account of: the National Planning Policy Framework Environment White Paper; actions designed to reflect current resource for delivery; continued commitment to partnership working; focus on enhancement on Council sites;

and, the importance of communication. Dr. Howe asked for any comments on the draft Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-21 to be sent to him for consideration for inclusion in the final document.

Ms. Piper and Dr. Howe then answered Members' questions in respect of the recording of the numbers and types of species in the Borough, the involvement of ward councillors, local groups and civic society groups, local businesses and neighbourhood groups in projects requiring volunteers, the use of the Arena magazine to publicise the need for support. It was also suggested that consideration could be given to the creation of a joint database of potential conservation projects.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman thanked Ms. Piper and Dr. Howe for their informative presentations.

The Panel **NOTED** the updates on the work of the Planning Policy and Conservation Team.

18. **CONSERVATION BODIES – UPDATES –**

(1) **Rowhill Nature Reserve Society –**

The Panel received a presentation from Mr. Roy Champion, Chairman of the Rowhill Nature Reserve Society. During the presentation, Mr. Champion advised Members that Rowhill Nature Reserve covered 55 acres and was now returning, in part at least, back into the working wood it had once been. Mr. Champion also made reference to the Society's work in monitoring species at the Nature Reserve and the upgrading of paths, including an accessible trail.

Mr. Champion answered Members' questions on fence making, volunteering by corporate groups and working with children.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman thanked Mr. Champion for the Society's on-going and valuable work for the community. The Chairman thanked Mr. Champion for his presentation and extended an invitation to attend a future meeting for a further update on the Society's work.

The Panel **NOTED** the presentation.

(2) **Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership –**

The Panel received a presentation from Mr. Steve Bailey, Manager of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership. During the presentation, Mr. Bailey advised Members of the role played by the Partnership in co-ordinating projects and actions of all involved parties and stakeholders in the Blackwater Valley to increase sustainable usage of the Blackwater Valley, especially for informal outdoor recreation, and to ensure wildlife and landscape protection. Mr. Bailey spoke about the work of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust, a charity which had been set up ten years ago and supported the work of the Partnership. Mr. Bailey advised Members of the sites managed within Rushmoor and gave examples of works carried out in Southwood Woodland

and Wellesley Woodlands. Mr. Bailey also gave details of wider Blackwater Valley issues, including the Southwood Woodland extension, Farnham Quarry, North Camp recycling and Loddon Catchment Partnership.

Mr. Bailey answered Members' questions on engaging with local communities and Farnham Quarry.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman thanked Mr. Bailey for the Partnership's excellent work in the community. The Chairman thanked Mr. Bailey for his informative presentation and extended an invitation to attend a future meeting for a further update on the Partnership's work.

The Panel **NOTED** the presentation.

(3) **Basingstoke Canal Authority –**

The Panel received a presentation from Ms. Fiona Shipp, Manager of the Basingstoke Canal Authority. During the presentation, Ms. Shipp advised Members that the Basingstoke Canal was 32 miles long and was jointly owned by Surrey County Council and Hampshire County Council. The Basingstoke Canal Authority had been established to manage the Canal on behalf of the two County Councils. During the presentation, Ms. Shipp advised Members of current work along the Canal: a tree-thinning project; the Ash Aqueduct inspection; a telemetry project to provide constant digital information on water levels; and, work to replace the cills at Ash Lock.

Ms. Shipp also spoke about wildlife issues, including the need for good management of vegetation to encourage a wide range of wildlife and the problems caused by crayfish. Volunteers were very important to the work of the Canal Authority and Ms. Shipp referred to examples of work carried out by volunteers. She was pleased to report that the number of volunteers had increased. In respect of future work, Ms. Shipp advised that refurbishment work would soon commence on the towpath between Ash Lock and Eelmoor Bridge and that work would be undertaken to turn Artillery Weir into a sluice which would help to manage water levels.

Ms. Shipp answered Members' questions on cyclists using the towpaths, the mooring of boats, dredging and drainage issues.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman thanked Ms. Shipp for the Canal Authority's important and much needed work. The Chairman thanked Ms. Shipp for her informative presentation and extended an invitation to attend a future meeting for a further update on the Canal Authority's work.

The Panel **NOTED** the presentation.

(4) **Friends of Brickfields Country Park –**

The Panel noted that, unfortunately, Mr. Mike Hatch, Chairman of Friends of Brickfields Country Park, who was to have given a presentation on the work of the group, was unable to attend the meeting due to illness. Mr. Hatch would be invited to attend a future meeting to provide an update.

(5) **Cove Brook Greenway Group –**

The Panel received a presentation from Ms. Hilda Anscombe, Chairman of the Cove Brook Greenway Group. Ms. Anscombe advised the Panel that the Cove Brook Greenway Group was an environmental group of local residents in Farnborough which looked after Cove Brook. It was noted that Cove Brook drained off the hills above Farnborough Airport and ran for 3.5 kilometres through Southwood Meadows and Cove to join the River Blackwater on Hawley Meadows. The Group held conservation working parties, litter picks and open meetings and worked with Rushmoor Borough Council, Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership, the Environment Agency and other parties.

During discussion following the presentation, it was suggested that Rushmoor could host an event to recruit volunteers for conservation groups.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman thanked Ms. Anscombe for the Group's excellent work in the community. The Chairman thanked Ms. Anscombe for her presentation and extended an invitation to attend a future meeting for a further update on the Group's work.

The Panel **NOTED** the presentation.

19. **WORK PROGRAMME –**

The Panel **NOTED** the current work programme.

The Meeting closed at 9.45 p.m.

D.E. CLIFFORD
CHAIRMAN
