

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)

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Virtual Meeting held on Thursday, 25th March, 2021 at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr Mrs. D.B. Bedford (Vice-Chairman) (In the Chair)
Cllr Veronica Graham-Green (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr T.D. Bridgeman
Cllr Sue Carter
Cllr R.M. Cooper
Cllr Christine Guinness
Cllr L. Jeffers
Cllr J.H. Marsh
Cllr S.J. Masterson

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr Gaynor Austin, Cllr Mara Makunura and Cllr M.D. Smith

29. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 4th February, 2021 were agreed as a correct record

30. CABINET CHAMPIONS

The Committee welcomed the three Cabinet Champions, Cllr Sue Carter (COVID-19 Recovery Champion), Cllr Peter Cullum (Education and Skills Champion) and Cllr Jacqui Vosper (Armed Forces Champion) who had been invited to give reports on their work during the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

Education and Skills – Cllr Peter Cullum gave an overview of his year as Education and Skills Champion. It was noted that the Council had a limited statutory input in local education and any initiatives had to be carried out with support from the County Council and national educational organisations.

Cllr Cullum advised that initially he had met with the County Council Education and Skills Portfolio Holder, Cllr Roz Chadd, to get a general overview of the situation across the County. This had led to meetings with the head teachers at the local secondary schools and colleges, local employment agencies and representatives from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) to further discuss education and employment opportunities for young people. During these discussion it was evident that Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths should be encouraged in the local schools due to the aerospace focus within the Borough. As a result, Cllr Cullum advised that he, in consultation with the Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS), had

arranged engagement for the schools with a project called “Cool Aeros”. This initiative invited young people to consider aerospace opportunities.

A sense of place had also been raised as an issue for Rushmoor’s young people. Cllr Cullum advised that he was currently in the process of creating an infographic highlighting the major features of the Borough to help young people gain a sense of place.

Other initiatives included apprenticeship schemes and work was being undertaken with the Council’s employment support officer and the FSB to establish the benefits of these government schemes.

The Committee discussed the report and raised queries around grading and Ofsted reports and mental health issues as a result of the pandemic. It was noted that it was difficult to know at present data was not readily available. However, individual schools would be able to provide information on their particular circumstances, especially around the grading of year 11 pupils.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Cullum for his report.

Armed Forces – Cllr Jacqui Vosper advised that a number of projects had not been progressed due to the pandemic during 2020/21. However, some activities had continued, including:

- Covenant Legislation – Cllr Vosper advised that she had led a Housing Sub Group which had been established to look at homelessness and housing allocation for service and ex-service personnel to inform the legislation of the Armed Forces Bill which was currently being considered in Parliament.
- COVID Response - The Council had liaised with the Military on issues relating to the pandemic, in particular, to ensure that messaging had been integrated and consistent.
- Census 2021 – Work had been ongoing regarding the arrangements for Census 2021. Liaison work would continue until late April, 2021.
- Education - The Covenant Partnership has been looking at outcomes for students from military families, particularly at A-Level, and the prospects for attending university/higher education. Work with Hart, Basingstoke and Deane and representatives from the 6th Form College was underway to look at improved data collection to help understand this issue in more detail.
- Events – It was reported that events had been limited during the pandemic with the exception of VE and VJ days and the Remembrance events. It was hoped that more events would start to be held towards the end of 2021 and into 2022.
- Garrison Community Hub – it was advised that the military had been upgrading and extending the offer at the former Connaught Centre – this included work on a new café and meeting space and an outdoor playground.

Later in the year the facility would be made available for use to the wider community as well as those with a military connection, such as local veterans. In addition, for the local veterans, a hub would be opened at the Military Museum and a repair café in Aldershot Town Centre later in the year.

- Defence Employers' Recognition Scheme Gold Award - In 2019, it was noted that the Council had the Silver Award. Consideration was now being given to making an application for the Gold Award. It was noted that a number of changes would need to be made to the Council's working arrangements and these would need to be demonstrated over a period of time. It was hoped that the application would be made in 2023.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Vosper for her presentation.

COVID-19 Response – Cllr Sue Carter reported that there were a lot of positives happening locally despite the difficulties presented by the pandemic. The Helpline and local response networks, set up through Rushmoor Voluntary Services (RVS), had dealt with over 1,300 cases to date. A key outcome from this work would be to embed some of the positive changes into business as usual work.

Other areas where Cllr Carter had been able to get involved included:

- Education – The closure of the schools had had a huge impact on teachers, families and children. The circumstances had had an impact on the mental health of some young people and organisations such as CAMHS, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Hampshire County Council (HCC) were providing measures to help in this area.
- Rushmoor Youth Forum – Cllr Carter advised on the Rushmoor Youth Forum (RYF). The Forum brought together 32 agencies to work collaboratively to move support work forward to help address issues present in young people. Rushmoor Youth Influence (RYI), a group established for 15-30 year olds, fed into the work of the RYF giving the perspective of the younger generation to the work to the Forum. It was hoped that the work of the RYI group would grow to incorporate a buddying scheme to raise confidence and inspire each other.

The Council's Supporting Communities Strategy has identified young people as a priority group. The role of the RYF would be pivotal to engaging young people, prioritising their needs and identifying projects to support them in the longer term recovery phase.

It was hoped that a Shadow Youth Council (SYC) could be launched in September, following the beginning of the new school year. By launching a SYC it would allow young people to have a place to speak and be heard alongside gaining an understanding of local government and the voluntary sector. A SYC would be able to help articulate the needs of young people in a post COVID society and support the Council's main priorities, such as tackling climate change.

- Communications – it was noted that the arrangements for Members to receive regular briefings throughout the pandemic had worked well enabling information to be provided quickly and effectively. The extensive work with the Nepali community had also been noted.
- Vaccination Sites – it was noted that the sites had been in operation since December, 2020. Although they were operated by the NHS, the Council had been providing support. Vaccination availability had been an issue, but the numbers vaccinated across Rushmoor was a credit to partnership working.
- Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing – This was a huge area being worked on by many partner agencies which affected many people, young and old. Signposting to help was being carried out through social media and it was important to ensure schools/pupils had access to relevant information.

In addition, it was also advised that communities were working together on initiatives, in particular Men's Shed facilities in Westheath and Aldershot Town Centre. The Men's Sheds would be a community and skills sharing hub for both men and women.

- Rushmoor Food Hub – this initiative would be central to the recovery process. Using Government funding it was intend to provide a community driven solution to support the local community.
- Partnership working – during the pandemic evidence of strong partnerships work between the public and voluntary/community sectors had emerged. The Council had developed strong working relationships with many organisations which would assist in the recovery processes and help deliver lasting improvements to the local community. Key partners included North East Hampshire and Farnham Clinical Commissioning Group, Hampshire Adults and Children Services, Citizens' Advice, RVS and VIVID Housing. This work would give a robust platform to move forward and address health and wellbeing issues.

In response to a query regarding feedback from residents on the Borough's handling of the pandemic it was acknowledged that most feedback had been extremely positive. It was noted that thanks should be conveyed to the Officers and partner organisation/charities for their hard work and efforts during these extremely challenging times.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Carter for her report.

31. **AIR POLLUTION**

The Committee welcomed Operational Services Manager, Colin Alborough, and Environment and Airport Monitoring Officer, Richard Ward, who were in attendance to give a presentation on air pollution issues across the Borough.

Mr. Ward, gave an overview of the team that sat within Operational Services. The Environmental Control and Pollution Team covered several other areas in addition to

air quality management these included, statutory nuisance, noise nuisance and animal licensing. It was noted that Mr. Ward was the lead officer for local air quality management and also had responsibility for air quality issues relating to commercial and domestic bonfires, planning consultations and policy and was the regulator for 27 permitted installations across the borough for the Local Air Pollution Prevention and Control (LAPPC) process.

Air pollution was very varied and complex, with a large number of contributors. Pollutants could have both short and longer term effect on the health of the population and had the most effect on the most vulnerable.

The team worked within the remit of frameworks set out by the Environment Act and the National Air Quality Strategy. It was noted that monitoring in Rushmoor was primarily based around nitrogen dioxide, for which there were currently 20 monitoring sites across the Borough. Reports on the data from this monitoring, which showed a gradual reduction over time across all sites, were submitted to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on an annual basis.

The Committee were also advised of ongoing projects on the M3 and A331. The A331 project had commenced in 2017 and through partnership working with neighbouring authorities, work had been undertaken to reduce nitrogen dioxide on the A331. A speed restriction of 50mph had been implemented in June 2019 on a 1.8km stretch of the road to assist in reducing nitrogen dioxide levels.

Looking to the future, it was advised that consideration would be given to the content of the Environment Bill due to be signed off later in 2021, this was expected to include longer term targets for air quality measures and an annual mean level for PM2.5 (particulate matter) levels. The Council's Climate Change Action Plan would also impact on the work of the team.

The Committee discussed the presentation and raised a number of queries.

In relation to the impact of the pandemic on pollution levels it was noted that it had been too early to determine the long term effects. However after the initial lockdown levels had been slowly creeping back up to normal.

With regard to having a local impact on nitrogen dioxide levels, it was noted that objectives in the Council's Climate Change Action Plan and work carried out by Hampshire County Council with school children to educate and raise awareness on the subject of air pollution would help on a local level to improve air quality.

In response to a query regarding wood burners and their impact on air pollution, it was noted that wood burning stoves contributed to a third of PM2.5 in the air. It was thought that moving forward, smoke control areas and regulation on target levels may be introduced to control the use of these heat sources.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Ward for his presentation.

32. HOUSING OPTIONS UPDATE

The Committee welcomed the Housing Options Service Manager, Suzannah Hellicar, to give an update on the work of the Housing Options Team and in particular the impacts of COVID-19.

Ms Hellicar, advised that as Service Manager she had responsibility for housing, homelessness, housing options and private sector housing. The move to remote working had meant that home visits and face to face interviews had been restricted but the Team had been able to provide a full service to its customers during the previous twelve months. A challenge for the Team had been keeping in contact with some of their homeless clients and mobile phone had been provided to a number of these individuals which had assisted with this issue. A big positive to come from the pandemic had been the partnership working, organisations and charities had come together to provide for those in need at this difficult time and the Team had adapted amazingly to the challenges faced.

In March 2020, the Government instructed local authorities to accommodate all rough sleepers, through the "Everyone In" scheme. Locally 150 vulnerable people had been accommodated and a benefit to come from this had been engagement with some individuals who had previously refused help. Some challenges resulting from the scheme had been anti-social behavior, costs of accommodation and future accommodation options. It was noted that VIVID Housing Association had provided significant support during this time.

The Committee was advised of the outreach work that had taken place. It was noted that some individuals had refused the offer of accommodation and the Team had provided PPE, food parcels, sleeping bags, support and continued offers of accommodation during the height of the pandemic. It was report that four individuals had remained on the street.

It was advised that the eviction ban on private and social tenants was expected to remain in place until May, 2021. The Team had been working with landlords and tenants to resolve issues and were proactively looking to provide alternative accommodation where possible in cases where eviction was pending and matters couldn't be resolved.

Ms Hellicar explained the Housing First project, a scheme being carried out in partnership with Two Saints and VIVID Housing Associations to house the Boroughs most vulnerable residents. In April 2021, five units, provided by VIVID, would be available for use in this project. The Council would identify individuals who would benefit the most from the scheme and Two Saints would deliver the intensive support required to each resident. It was noted that an application had been made for five additional properties through the Rough Sleeper Fund.

Moving forward, it was noted that a small team would return to the office in April, 2021 to deal with demand. It was thought that demand would relate to eviction, the rise in unemployment figures and relationship and mental health breakdown. A new customer online portal and software package was also planned to be introduced to assist with demand. In addition, it was noted that the Rough Sleeper Strategy was

due to be presented to Cabinet in April, 2021 for adoption. The Team would also continue to build on the work with partners particularly around the development of the Temporary Accommodation Strategy.

The Committee discussed the presentation and raise a number of concerns. In response to a query regarding the numbers on the housing list it was noted that the Team had not seen a big influx, with the number remaining at around 1,400 – 1,500. It was thought this could increase as the situation evolved.

With regard to bed and breakfast accommodation, it was noted that the duration of a stay was limited wherever possible and suitable alternatives were sought quickly. Alternative accommodation, such as housing pods/containers, had been considered but it had been found that installation of services could be expensive depending on the site. However, if the right site became available this option could be considered moving forward.

Following a discussion on Clayton Court, it was noted that negotiations were underway to consider extending the lease on the property. It was advised that the site wasn't always appropriate and options for alternative temporary accommodation were being considered to add to the portfolio of available temporary housing. It was noted that currently there were two empty rooms in Clayton Court.

The Chairman congratulated and thanked Ms Hellicar and her team for the work they had carried out over the past twelve months.

33. **WORK PLAN**

The current Work Plan was **NOTED** and an update was provided as follows:

- It was noted that the annual report would be prepared for the Council meeting on 22nd April
- A meeting of the Educational Improvement and Highways Agency Task and Finish Groups would be scheduled for early in the new Municipal Year

The meeting closed at 9.09 pm.

CLLR D.B. BEDFORD (VICE-CHAIRMAN) (IN THE CHAIR)
