

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE ACTION SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY, 8TH FEBRUARY, 2024

MEMBERS: Councillors: Hivran Dalkaya (Chair), Nia Stevens (Vice Chair), Patricia Gregory, Ahmet Hasan, Mohammad Islam, Joanne Laban, and Michael Rye OBE.

Officers: Marcus Harvey (Head of Parks and Open Spaces), Ian Russell (Principal Engineer), Cheryl Headon (Director of Leisure, Parks & Culture), Doug Wilkinson (Director of Environment & Street Scene), and Harry Blake-Herbert (Governance Officer).

Also Attending: Cllr Rick Jewell (Cabinet Member for the Environment), members of the public, and an officer observing.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Enfield Youth Parliament Representatives, Cllr Destiny Karakus, and Cllr Maria Alexandrou, who was substituted by Cllr Michael Rye OBE.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received regarding any item on the agenda.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED the minutes of the previous Environment & Climate Action Scrutiny Panel meeting held on Tuesday 24 October 2023.

An update on actions from the previous meeting was received.

4. REWILDING

Items 4 and 5, rewilding and cattle grazing respectively, would be reported on/ considered together.

Ian Russell and Cheryl Headon introduced and highlighted the key aspects of the report, including but not limited to: beaver reintroduction, cattle grazing at Forty Hall, wetlands, landscape recovery projects, woodlands, footpaths/ cycleways, work with farmers, Enfield Chase landscape and biodiversity.

In response to Members enquiries regarding tree planting and maintenance, officers advised that a percentage of loss was always going to take place, and

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trees were particularly vulnerable in their first few years, but if they survived this, they would be more resilient in the future. They said that whilst watering during periods of significant heat was unrealistic; new full-time operational positions and grants/ external funding had been secured which provided options that would allow for better control and maintenance. It was expressed that officers were speaking to/ working with external experts and had taken away lessons from last year. Officers advised that planting during the right conditions, and putting down mulch/ tree bark could improve survival rates/ chances. Officers felt that some of the external auditing/ performance reviews had not been entirely accurate, and pointed out that the benefit realisation for such projects was not immediate.

In response to Members questions relating to revenue/ budgetary pressures, officers advised that feasibility studies had been conducted and a variety of funding streams were available to them. They advised that they had just gone through a feasibility study with Natural England for Countryside Stewardship, which generated funding for land management practices with around £40,000 per annum achieved. Officers expressed there had been an increase from 5 to 18 parks which would generate a breadth of income, and aftercare periods had been included to ensure maintenance was budgeted for. They added that business cases were being carefully crafted and scrutinised to make sure the funding for such projects were fully considered and built in.

In response to Members queries regarding wetland maintenance, officers advised that it could take some time for wetlands to establish, and that they try to engage with local residents on the work that they are doing. A ditch at Cheyne Walk was said to be overgrown and have a blocked drainpipe, which officers were trying to clear to prevent flooding on the path; some of the issue had been resolved but work was still ongoing. Officers were said to have been on site the day after the last large downpour, and a communication piece could be picked up with residents around the work being done. Officers agreed to visit Little Bury Road and come back to with a plan of action regarding the fencing. It was described how the service restructure would ensure there were enough staff and a change in method would see teams responsible for the maintenance of such projects.

In response to Members enquiries relating to beavers, officer advised that they had worked with the Beavers Trust and incorporated their expertise into the project; the beaver enclosure was said to be large and deemed a suitable/ appropriate size. An agreement was said to have been reached with Council planning enforcement services and a tree officer, to replant trees which had been accidentally felled in the construction of the enclosure, and said trees had now been planted. Officers explained that there was an agreement with Capel Manor, who were responsible for managing the welfare of the animals and bore some of the cost, in return for using the project as a marketing tool. It was described that income could be generated through guided tours of the site, and the Council were looking at working with the college on this to help cover some of their costs. Money generated through other projects such as landscape recovery were also said to help partially cover the long-term costs of the scheme. Officers agreed to come back to Members with the true

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revenue cost of the project. Officers said that there were no plans to introduce more beavers at that site which had a 5-year licence running until 2027 for up to 8 beavers. If 8 was exceeded, work would be done with the Beaver Trust to relocate surplus beavers; and they could look at swapping some beavers for genetic diversity.

In response to Members questions regarding woodland costs, officers advised that a revenue/income was received from the Forestry Commission per hectare per year for the first 10 years, and that after this point the woodlands would require less management. It was said that income generation as part of the landscape recovery project would help contribute to their maintenance. Officers described one of the pieces of work for the new Head of Rural Transformation, a post which the Environment Agency had agreed funding for to 2025, was a road map/ robust plan detailing financial models and sources of funding for potential projects. The timeframe for this piece of work was said to be a year, with the importance of projects being self-sustaining, through means such as recreation and tourism highlighted, and officers' aspiration for a mosaic of land uses and habitats was described.

In response to Members queries relating to conservation grazing, officers advised that the project at Forty Hall was a licensed partnership with Capel Manor College, which the college managed for landscape benefits; but the Council would be exploring commercial opportunities for grazing in rural areas. A risk analysis was said to have been undertaken, with entering into a contractual arrangement and using the college's expertise to manage the cattle, proving the safer/ better option. Officers said that they were currently in the process of taking the learning from the Forty Hall project and assessing the performance against the costs and expectations, and this would guide the future steps for such/similar projects, such as at Trent Park.

In response to Members enquiries regarding land management, officers advised that there was a variety of schemes e.g., food production, and funding streams available to them, and they were in the process of understanding what the best long-term approach was at different locations. They expressed that some of the funding available came with certain criteria and commitments which needed to be fully understood and weighed up against alternatives, for instance conducting feasibility studies and baselining the quality of soil.

A member of the public asked about tree planting, watering, and maintenance; the potential for introducing herds of cattle; and increasing food production. Officers advised that they would follow up on these points.

5. CATTLE GRAZING

This item was considered alongside item 4.

6. PARK MANAGEMENT & BIODIVERSITY

Marcus Harvey and Cheryl Headon introduced and highlighted the key aspects of the report; including but not limited to: public toilet facilities, café leases/marketing, parks, grass cutting and verge maintenance, tennis improvements, the service restructure and a change in method, Countryside Stewardship, introduction of digital technologies, and transparency.

In response to Members questions relating to grass cutting, officers advised that during the rain they would not cut the grass, due to the weight of the machinery and the additional mess created from cuttings, but that where this was the case, officers would be redeployed to maintain green spaces in other ways. Officers added that the Countryside Act limited what shrubbery they could cut during nesting season, but that if there were health and safety concerns or public enquiries, officers would investigate the site and could take a decision, if necessary, to cut it back. They explained that their learning had allowed for problem areas to be identified and highlighted as priorities which were being targeted prior to the nesting season. Being displaced from Trent Park last year provided a challenge in accessing the Western corridor, and now that they were back at the depot, the team were in a better position. Members highlighted that the green at Old Forge Road was never cut as it was not included in the Council's original list; officers agreed to ensure this was programmed into the new system.

In response to Members queries regarding public toilets, officers advised that closing the toilets an hour before parks closed may be counterproductive and it would be looked at with corporate health and safety colleagues, but there were lone worker issues given the risk at later hours with anti-social behaviour. They added that refurbishments had been undertaken at 3 locations; colleagues had been at Oakwood Park the day before the meeting regarding the broken window, and Bury Lodge Gardens toilets had been escalated to the Property Director/ Facilities Management team. Toilets were said to be closed when it was beyond the finances available to fix them, and or had continued/repetitious anti-social behaviour problems. Officers would come back to Members with the East-West split of public toilet facilities in the borough.

In response to Members enquiries relating to digital technologies, officers advised that this technology would allow for service performance to be fed into the website, and allow them to scrutinise it which would help to make the service more efficient. Officers expressed that they would be starting workshops with the supplier shortly, and that once this had started, they would welcome councillors' involvement in understanding the technology. They added that technology had been acquired which would help track usage and visits to open spaces across the borough. This insight would allow for conversations with public health colleagues which could feed into workshops and class programmes to target the social and physical wellbeing of young people in the borough, in a similar to schemes like Active Through Football.

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In response to Members questions regarding tennis facilities, officers advised that they had put signage at the courts for 3 weeks in the run up to the courts being closed and the booking system being introduced, which provided instructions on how to use the app, and further drop-in sessions were offered. They added that the booking system was a condition of the LTA funding, as a means to get the courts in better condition, and they had received little negative feedback with regards to this. Coaching was said to be available to all residents, with parks targeted based on the outcome of active wellbeing and health data of young people in particular, to encourage them to get involved. Marketing for tennis improvements would go out via schools and social media.

In response to Members queries relating to parks, officers advised that the grass at Aldersbrook Park would be cut; the nettles coming through the fence line, the artificial grass giving off electric shocks, and the frequency of grass cutting in dog area were highlighted, and officers would look into fencing around the slide. Decision makers were said to be in each depot now, so work programmes should be tighter. Officers would look into maintenance issues at Bury Lodge Gardens, which was said to be being serviced by a mobile team of 2-3 people, in the absence of the park keeper.

In response to Members enquiries regarding cafes, officers advised that they were about to go to market with cafes at Enfield Town Playing Fields, Central Pavilion, Pymmes Park, and Jubilee Park, some which could also provide public toilet facilities. They added that there was a new Property Director and that he and Cheryl Headon were in discussion as to how the approach to maintenance issues at buildings in parks could be addressed/improved.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

Members noted the Environment & Climate Action Scrutiny Panel Work Programme for 2023/24.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Members noted the dates of future meetings as set out in the agenda.

The Chair thanked Members and officers for their time and contributions, and the meeting ended at 21:07.