

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 1 DECEMBER 2021**

**COUNCILLORS**

**PRESENT** (Chair) Susan Erbil, Margaret Greer, Lee David-Sanders, Birsen Demirel, Mahmut Aksanoglu, James Hockney, Derek Levy and Hass Yusuf

**ABSENT** Elif Erbil

**STATUTORY CO-OPTees:** *1 vacancy (Church of England diocese representative), vacancy (other faiths/denominations representative), Mr Tony Murphy (Catholic diocese representative), Alicia Meniru & 1 vacancy (Parent Governor representative) - Italics Denotes absence*

**OFFICERS:** Sarah Cary (Executive Director Place), Sue McDaid (Head of Regulatory Services), Peter Robinson (Environment), Tony Theodoulou (Executive Director People), Angela Bent (Head of Practice Improvement), Sharon Burgess (Head of Service - Safeguarding Adults, Complaints and Quality Assurance), Bharat Ayer (Development Manager), Claire Johnson (Head of Governance and Scrutiny) and Clare Bryant (Governance Manager) Jane Creer (Secretary)

**Also Attending:** Councillor Nesil Caliskan (Leader of the Council)  
Councillor Mahtab Uddin (Cabinet Member for Children's Services)  
Chris Ferrary (on behalf of Lead Petitioner)  
Mustafa Berk-Ak (Enfield Deputy Young Mayor)

**1**

**WELCOME & APOLOGIES**

Councillor Susan Erbil (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the process to be followed in respect of receiving a petition.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Elif Erbil, who was substituted by Councillor Hass Yusuf. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Mahmut Aksanoglu.

**2**

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest in respect of any items on the agenda.

**3**

**PETITION ON FIRS FARM CREMATORIUM/BURIAL SITE**

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RECEIVED a petition from members of the community which asked the Council to: remove from the Local Plan the proposal to build a crematorium / burial ground in Firs Farm.

NOTED the report of the Director of Law and Governance, confirming that the petition was compliant and had sufficient numbers of signatures to trigger a debate at Overview and Scrutiny Committee, having 2,259 verified signatures.

NOTED

1. The statement of Chris Ferrary (on behalf of the Lead Petitioner Toni Guiver and the Friends of Firs Farm).
  - a. Firs Farm was an important community resource. The site was valuable for flood prevention and for biodiversity. It was an environmental and social resource.
  - b. This proposal would undermine the work to improve the wetlands, and the ongoing campaigns for further improvement. The Friends of Firs Farm had worked with the Council on schemes which had received significant financial investment and a recent planning permission grant for a community hub on site. This investment of time and money would be wasted.
  - c. The proposal was not consistent with planning policies at a local or national level, including the London Plan. There would not be environmental gain. The special circumstances to justify development on Metropolitan Open Land would not be met. The proposal would be at odds with the draft Local Plan and the Council's vision and strategies. The need for a crematorium had not been demonstrated, or that Firs Farm was a suitable place.
  - d. The proposal would have a significant effect on a local Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). The boundaries would encroach into the SINC and compromise its status. There would be adverse effects from traffic and subsequent air pollution, and additional impacts on wildlife and biodiversity, and on residents' enjoyment of local spaces.
  
2. The response of Councillor Nesil Caliskan, Leader of the Council, and Sarah Cary, Executive Director Place.
  - a. Councillor Caliskan thanked the petitioners for the clear statement, and wanted to take the opportunity to hopefully provide reassurance to residents.
  - b. The site identified as part of the draft Local Plan did not include the wetlands, which were recognised as playing an important environmental role. Therefore, the commitments around the wetlands area, and the investments and planning permission, were not undermined. The Council would reiterate those commitments.
  - c. The draft Local Plan was at the draft stage and, following the planning policy requirements, it must identify sites to deliver a number of different things, including adequate after-life provision in the borough. At this stage of Local Plan development it was not expected that all the

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sites identified would be appropriate sites. It was accepted that residents would want to feed back that some sites would not be appropriate, but the Council had to follow the legal process for consultation and the responses were being carefully considered by officers.

- d. The next iteration of the Local Plan would be released in Summer 2022. The likelihood was that some sites would be eliminated. The Local Plan was also subject to approval by the National Inspector, and anything which was not in line with National Planning Policy or the London Plan would not be approved, so it was not in the Council's interest to include plans which were outside the policies.
  - e. It was confirmed that no plans for a crematorium on the Firs Farm site featured in any of the Council's corporate plans, but it was acknowledged that the site was a proposed site in the draft Local Plan out for consultation, and feedback was being heard and was welcomed.
  - f. Sarah Cary, Executive Director Place, advised that a lot more work would be needed should a specific proposal be brought forward, and that there was no such proposal at this time.
  - g. Sue McDaid, Head of Regulatory Services, was asked to expand on what a modern crematorium could be: a facility around the size of one football pitch, in a woodland setting, often incorporated into a landscape with recreational use. It was confirmed that Firs Farm was Metropolitan Open Land and that any proposal for the site would have to make a special consideration case and very detailed plans would be needed for any planning application. At the moment, the draft Local Plan looked at potential sites that could be consulted on; and this petition helped with that consultation process. Officers had been asked to regard this petition as part of the feedback on the draft Local Plan.
3. Questions, comments and debate from Committee Members:
- a. Councillor Levy asked about the recent approval to proceed with the development of a burial ground at Sloemans Farm which may considerably negate the potential proposal for the Firs Farm site. He also commented that though it had been made clear the wetlands were outside the consideration site that many residents regarded Firs Farm as whole. In response, the Leader emphasised the consultation period of the draft Local Plan, and that it was reasonable to assume the Plan would look different in the next iteration. Remarks around Firs Farm were acknowledged but it was important to differentiate the wetlands and that it was not part of the potential site. Reassurance was also reiterated in respect of Council support for the community hub. National Planning Policy required sites to be identified in the Local Plan that would meet after-life provision and that consultation had to be gone through. The petitioners had made their views clear and the consultation period would allow that feedback to be assessed.
  - b. Councillor Hockney raised the Greater London Parks and Open Spaces Act 1967 which empowered London boroughs to facilitate recreation in open spaces and a recent legal case in respect of Wandsworth Council and the finding that grant of a lease on premises

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on open space land was not lawful. Officers confirmed that Councillors had already asked for this to be looked into, and legal comments had been requested. It was agreed this was an area for further investigation.

- c. In response to Councillor Hockney's query how the proposal could align with the Enfield Blue and Green Strategy, the Leader confirmed there was no plan from the administration which would bring the negative environmental impacts listed and no such proposal would be included in the Local Plan as it would not meet local or national policies. It was important to emphasise publicly that there was no specific plan. The Council was meeting legal obligations in identifying potential sites for after-life provision in the draft Local Plan and respecting the consultation period, and the public had the right to express their views. The feedback on the importance of open spaces to residents was acknowledged, and that after-life provision was also important.
  - d. Councillor Yusuf praised the Friends of Firs Farm organisation and valued the feedback on the draft Local Plan. He noted the legal requirements around development of a Local Plan, and other appropriate checks and balances on any plans.
  - e. Councillor Greer asked for confirmation in respect of the wetlands and Council commitments. The Leader confirmed that even if this site was included in the next iteration of the Local Plan it did not include the wetlands. The investment agreed to by the Council was not affected.
  - f. Councillor Levy asked for clarification from the Lead Petitioner on their request at this point, and it was advised that in the next iteration of the Local Plan they did not wish to see this proposal for Firs Farm included. Any statement to this effect which could be made now would be welcomed. Currently they were facing difficulties in volunteering and fund-raising while people thought efforts might be wasted. Also, no work had been done to assess the hydrology of the whole of Firs Farm and potential affects on the viability of the wetland. The Leader advised that work to assess suitability had not been done to the extent required and that this should give some comfort to petitioners. It was also hoped the financial investment and grant of planning permission for the community hub had gone some way to give reassurance to the public, and the Council would do more if they could.
4. The Chair summed up the debate, and the Committee was asked to determine the option to be followed after considering the petition.
  5. AGREED unanimously by the Committee the following recommendations:
    - 1) That the petition is included and considered in the consultation on the draft Local Plan.
    - 2) That the legal case raised by Councillors is considered by officers.
    - 3) That the need for after-life provision was noted and understood, but it was of critical importance to protect recreation grounds within that.

## **SAFEGUARDING REPORTS**

RECEIVED the reports of Angela Bent, Head of Practice Improvement, Sharon Burgess, Head of Strategic Safeguarding Adults, Partnerships, QA and DoLS, and Bharat Ayer, Safeguarding Service Manager (Adults and Children's Partnerships).

NOTED

1. The introduction by Angela Bent, providing an overview of Children's Social Care activities in 2020/21 and of the processes in place to scrutinise this work.
2. The Self Evaluation Framework (SEF) report was presented annually at Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
3. The update on the Safeguarding Children's Partnership was introduced by Bharat Ayer and Councillor Mahtab Uddin, Cabinet Member for Children's Services. The layers of scrutiny and assurance were clarified.
4. In response to the Chair's queries, the work of the domestic abuse team was highlighted, to safeguard children as well as victims. In respect of looked-after children during Covid-19 lockdowns, it was advised that there had been increased levels of contact and ensuring educational needs were met. It was confirmed that the social work apprenticeship programme had started, with the first cohort in September 2021.
5. In response to Councillor David-Sanders queries, the support given to newly qualified social workers during the pandemic was confirmed.
6. In response to Councillor Demirel's queries, the work done with care leavers and support towards employment and training was clarified.
7. In response to Councillor Aksanoglu's queries in respect of audits, the plans put in place to improve practice were set out, and the building of staff resilience during the pandemic, and future workforce recruitment provision.
8. In response to Councillor Levy's queries, the regular interaction between the executive officers and executive Members was confirmed, including shadow Cabinet Members. The Cabinet portfolio holder was invited to observe risk management panel meetings. Councillor Uddin confirmed the open communication and exchange of information.
9. In response to Councillor Greer's queries, the continued delivery of care and services during lockdowns was described. The diversity of the workforce was confirmed, and potential for overseas recruitment. The joint working in respect of youth offending was clarified.
10. Officers welcomed the political oversight on safeguarding and the Chair thanked them for the helpful reports and attendance at this meeting.

**5**

## **WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22**

NOTED the updated Overview and Scrutiny work programme 2021/22.

**6**

## **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

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NOTED the future meeting dates and that the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be the Budget Meeting on Wednesday 12 January 2022.