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HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 5 December 2023

Attendance:

Councillors
Cramoysan (Chairperson)

Tippett-Cooper
Bolton
Greenberg

Morris
Warwick
Wise

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillors Learney (Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency), Lee, Power and Wallace.

Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillors Porter (Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan) and Tod (Leader and Cabinet Member for Asset Management)

[Full Video Recording](#)

1. **APOLOGIES AND DEPUTY MEMBERS**

There were no apologies for absence given at this meeting.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Warwick declared a personal (but non prejudicial) interest concerning agenda items that may be related to her role as a County Councillor.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairperson announced that two additional meetings of the Health and Environment Policy Committee had been arranged on the following dates to consider the matters as set out below:

- (i) Monday, 22 January 2024 at 6.30pm in Walton Suite, Guildhall
 - Future of Waste and Recycling (Presentation)
- (ii) Wednesday, 31 January 2024 at 6.30pm in Walton Suite, Guildhall

- Hampshire Together: Modernising our Hospitals and Health Services (Presentation from the NHS Hampshire Hospitals Foundation Trust (HHFT))

4. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 21 September 2023 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Councillors Lee and Power addressed the committee in relation to items 6 (Water Quality) and 7 (Ecological Sites) and Tim Jackson (on behalf of WinACC) and Councillor Wallace addressed the committee in relation to item 8 (CNAP report: Renewable Energy) and their comments are summarised under the relevant minutes below.

6. **WATER QUALITY UPDATE - REPRESENTATIVES FROM HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT WILDLIFE TRUST IN ATTENDANCE (VERBAL UPDATE)**

Councillor Lee addressed the Committee on this item.

In summary, Councillor Lee made reference to the following points which were responded to accordingly by the Ms Somers and relevant officers:

- Rivers struggling to meet the appropriate standards and statuses.
- Suggested there was a triple challenge: climate, nature and pollution crises and an overarching approach should be considered.
- Local reassurance sought on the state of the River Meon in comparison with the gold standard at the River Itchen and River Test.
- Improved methods to register, recruit and train volunteers and conservation groups to enable them to act and support the Trust.
- Non-compliance and off grid sewage system plans to generate action.
- That consideration be given to Southern Water and other statutory organisations attending future meetings of the committee as a follow up to their previous attendance in March 2023.

Councillor Power addressed the Committee on this item.

In summary, Councillor Power made reference to the following points which were responded to accordingly by Ms Somers and relevant officers:

- The Watercress and Winterbournes Project was very successful for training volunteers.
- Outstanding action to publish conclusions: given the emerging threats and opportunities regarding water quality currently, it was suggested that consideration be given to an annual review on actions taken and results achieved to form a part of the council's annual report.

- A report on biodiversity
- Commitment to publicise and celebrate work being done locally in neighbouring parishes.
- Queried the current status of the SSSI's – oil spill in Cheriton, emerging threats and opportunities.

The Chairperson stated that where matters had not been addressed and suggestions of an annual review had been raised, these points would be explored further, taking into consideration the resource implications for officers, and a response would be provided in due course after the meeting.

The Chairperson welcomed Sienna Somers from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust to the meeting who provided an update on water quality and water pollution issues, an overview of the current state of the River Itchen, protection for chalk streams, monitoring work being undertaken by other trusts and organisations, community programmes and measures the trust were adopting to improve the position.

The committee were informed of opportunities and actions the council were encouraged to consider going forward, these included:

- (i) A strategic approach: the development of an overarching strategy;
- (ii) Recognising the strong links with local planning;
- (iii) Making the best use of biodiversity net gain;
- (iv) The enhancement of policies surrounding chalk streams to be embedded within the new local plan process; and
- (v) An improved understanding of the council's plans and processes to drive forward supporting communities into taking action.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and comment on the following matters which were responded to by Ms Somers and relevant officers.

- (a) The expectations of a strategic approach – wide ranging, restoring natural function, erosion, looking at natural assets, key targets and clear links etc. An example of a 'gold standard' would be provided from the Trust.
- (b) Solent kelp bed regeneration project update.
- (c) Contamination of our water from nitrates, agricultural use and oestrogen content, its impact on wildlife and the monitoring and testing controls in place.
- (d) List of sites in ecological decline, the nature of the decline and the likely cause.
- (e) Biggest immediate threat to the rivers – low flows by abstraction in head waters and the lack of salmon was a key indicator of this.
- (f) The classification of the River Meon and flooding action groups to report concerns.
- (g) Nutrient neutrality carbon credits.
- (h) How can residents help preserve rivers in the district? Signposting to chalk stream champions, citizens science programme.
- (i) The worst contributors to pollution – evidence suggests farming and waste water treatment. Full statistics can be provided by the Trust.

- (j) Creating improved planning protections around water with changes to legislation to ensure pre-existing infrastructure was in place for supply and treatment prior to planning taking place at a regional planning level.
- (k) Thoughts around how chalk streams in the local environment sit within the local plan review process to seek best practice and improved targets for biodiversity net gain.

At the conclusion of debate, the committee thanked Sienna Somers for attending the meeting to provide an informative update and welcomed further information from the Trust regarding local authorities that were carrying out a strategic approach to a high standard as an example to follow.

RESOLVED:

That the update be received, and the comments raised by the committee, as summarised above, be noted.

7. **ECOLOGICAL SITES (HEP036)**

Councillor Lee addressed the Committee on this item.

In summary, Councillor Lee made reference to the following points which were responded to accordingly by the Cabinet Member and relevant officers:

- Thanked the Natural Environment and Recreation Team for the proposals within the report and stated that time was of the essence to get the process correct, particularly for biodiversity net gain and local nature recovery.
- Suggested the need for important new thinking for the combined nature and climate declarations could benefit from a change in title for the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency to also reflect the nature emergency.
- Proposed the need to be clear on terminology in respect to natural capital – eco system services.
- Pleased to see nature-based solution included within the presentation and the new local plan, but considered the meaning of this needed to be defined.
- Stated that this way of thinking would be more coherent with the South Downs National Park (SDNP).
- Requested that the Pilot Road Verge Project to be extended district-wide.
- Following Defra advice, it was acknowledged that there was a need to ban the use of unnecessary pesticides within towns and cities and Councillor Lee proposed that chemical land management be reviewed in urban Winchester, in liaison with Hampshire County Council (HCC).
- Requested a registry of groups to determine what part they could play in the proposed nature improvement plan going forward, which he fully supported.

Councillor Power addressed the Committee on this item.

In summary, Councillor Power made reference to the following points which were responded to accordingly by the Cabinet Member and relevant officers:

- Disappointed that the report was city centric and did not take account of other land in the council's ownership.
- Requested that Bramdean Common and other sites of significance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors, nutrient mitigation and carbon sequestration and asked that a review of these sites be included in the work programme of the committee going forward to investigate their contribution to environmental facilities and their potential for supporting the aims of the council.
- Wildflower verges – these are largely supported and welcomed the work of the council liaising with contractors on this.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency introduced the item which provided an update on the land managed by the council and what action is being taken to promote biodiversity and achieve other benefits. The committee were reminded that the city was an unparished area and therefore this land came under the management of the city council directly. It was noted that with changes such as the new biodiversity net gain, planning regulations and the need to update the biodiversity action plan, this was a good time to review how the council managed its land, recognising the limited resources available to the council and the review of savings to budgets.

The Service Lead: Sustainability and Natural Environment gave a presentation which detailed examples of the type of ecological sites, the management, monitoring and maintenance measures currently in place, Environment Act 2021 and the introduction of a Nature Improvement Plan and how this could be delivered going forward.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and comment on the following matters which were responded to by the Cabinet Member, the Corporate Head of Economy and Community and the Service Lead: Sustainability and Natural Environment.

- (a) Improvements, enhancements and opportunities to make the maximum ecological use from council owned land.
- (b) Collaborative working practices with the South Downs National Park Authority.
- (c) Resourcing for the planning process.
- (d) Future policies and land management.
- (e) Biodiversity Technical Advice Note – habitat banking and achieving greater gains.
- (f) List of sites – criteria and city council role to define management approach regarding biodiversity and maintaining and monitoring standards.
- (g) The use of pesticides – details are under the contract managed by IdVerde
- (h) Biodiversity Net Gain legislation and resourcing concerns to fulfil this.

At the conclusion of debate, the committee thanked officers for an informative presentation.

RESOLVED:

That the report and presentation be received, and the comments raised by the committee, as summarised above, be noted.

8. **CNAP REPORT: RENEWABLE ENERGY (HEP040)**

Tim Jackson (speaking on behalf of WinACC) addressed the committee on this item.

In summary, Tim Jackson made reference to the following points:

- WinACC welcomed report, but considered the growth target would not meet self-sufficiency for renewable energy in the district unless it was increased further.
- Welcomed mention of the need for additional land allocation and stated that there was every opportunity to create renewable energy, equal to the total annual demand of the Winchester district.
- He stated that an increase in demand was far more foreseeable with the increase in heat pumps rolled out in homes and electric cars on the roads.
- He suggested there needed to be a ninefold increase in solar panels to enable Winchester to become self-sufficient.
- Utility scale solar panels were the cheapest form of energy which did not require public subsidy but did require a favourable planning framework, including storage and grid capacity.
- Domestic rooftops should be encouraged.
- Vital the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan was explicit on a figure for land use to accommodate utility scale solar linked to self-sufficiency as a lack of ambition would be reflected in the Local Plan.
- In conclusion, he stated that WinACC commended the aims of the plan and looked forward to the finalised version of the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan, reflecting the vision of a district largely self sufficient in meeting its demand for electricity, an increased target for new installed renewable energy capacity and a clear figure of the land area required to achieve sufficiency to inform the Local Plan.

Councillor Wallace addressed the Committee on this item.

In summary, Councillor Wallace made reference to the following points:

- Report does a good job of capturing the state of renewable energy across the district, but also highlighted a lack of real progress.
- Queried if there was sufficient resource available to run the renewable energy programme.
- Questioned the programme which he suggested needed more focus and queried the lack of installation of solar panels on council housing stock and council assets.
- Queried the progress on power purchase agreements (PPA's) and expanding this model to other users; domestic schemes – the GIS tool to assist rooftop and ground solar promised in response to the council question in September; challenges for energy audits of businesses; the resources to assist in achieving the objectives of the large-scale renewable

energy plan; and the resources to support producing the local area energy plan.

- In conclusion, he stated that practical steps and action was now required in order to drive renewable energy forward.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency introduced the report and outlined that one of the key pathways to carbon neutrality in the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan (CNAP) was increasing the use of renewable energy in the district with actions including increasing large scale solar PV and domestic solar PV, as well as renewable energy purchase and transport decarbonisation. The report set out the council's current and planned work on renewable energy generation and the outcome of consultation carried out earlier this year. The report was about carbon as a whole; not just renewable energy, and a balanced approach on how the council used its resources to achieve the best outcomes needed to be taken. It was noted that the council were looking at projects on buildings it currently leased in relation to the installation of solar PV, however there were legal requirements to follow, such as landlord authority etc.

The Corporate Head of Economy and Community stated that the council was working across a number of opportunities in a range of strands to understand how this could happen, to learn, support and work with partners to share best practice and increase the take up of renewable energy. However, it was recognised that reducing demand was paramount in the first instance.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and comment on the following matters which were responded to by the Cabinet Member, the Corporate Head of Economy and Community and the Sustainability Manager:

- (a) The slow progression of the retrofit programme – the need to focus efforts on direct benefit to residents to improve insulation in homes at the same time as getting to net zero.
- (b) Income from electricity generation.
- (c) Solar schemes/investments.
- (d) Biodiversity: emerging brownfield or rooftop policies for the use of solar panels.
- (e) Rate of growth - the amount of solar power generation being hosted within the district.
- (f) Wind generation.

At the conclusion of debate, the Chair thanked those in attendance and thanked officers for the update on renewable energy.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be received, and the comments raised by the committee, as summarised above, be noted.

9. **TO NOTE THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2023/24**

RESOLVED:

That the work programme for 2023/24 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 9.25 pm

Chairperson