

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COMMUNITY, ASSETS AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

held on 7th September 2020

PRESENT Councillor Mrs J.E. MacBean (Chairman - presiding)

Councillor	Q. Chaudhry	Councillor	P.J. Hudson
"	Miss E.A. Culverhouse	"	R.C. McCulloch
"	A.W. Franks	"	N.T. Southworth

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor A.K. Bacon

Officers: Mr W. Richards, Town Clerk; K. Graves, Policy and Projects Officer; Ms M. McGwynn, Administration Manager; Mr D. Cooper, Elgiva Manager and Mr D. Essex, Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Manager

8. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

It was noted that, as agreed, all previously stated Declarations of Interests remained unchanged from the first meeting of the administrative year, either noted on the Register of Interests or reported subsequently.

9. **MINUTES**

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Community, Assets and Environment Committee held on 1st June 2020, be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

10. **ENVIRONMENTAL ECO-AUDIT REPORT AND DISCUSSION**

The Chairman, Councillor Mrs MacBean, opened the discussion and commended to the Committee the previously circulated Environmental Audit of Council facilities by the commissioned company. She also highlighted the supplementary appendices produced by officers on an Action Plan for progression. She reminded Members that the report followed the Council declaring a Climate Emergency last year and was a product of the Council's commitment to improving the environment. She added that the report's production and circulation had taken longer than originally planned due to COVID-19 which she noted had been a concern for some people, but clearly this had not been the intention of the Council.

Before discussing the report in detail, she asked whether Members had any general observations on the audit as a whole. Both Councillor Miss Culverhouse and Councillor Southworth praised the document in its thoroughness and clarity and the latter added it did show the need for further scoping in terms of financial implications. Councillor Fayyaz welcomed the green initiatives but suggested that the 'Communi-Tree' project seek involvement from all Members across the wards.

The Chairman then raised the proposal for the Council to nominate and agree 'Green Champions' for the Council. It was proposed and agreed that both the Chairman of this Committee and the Town Mayor be appointed in this role. A query was raised as to whether Sustainable Chesham could also appoint such a representative for the town. While the Council had already stated its wish to work with Sustainable Chesham, it was agreed this needed further consideration in terms of role and accountability.

The Action Plan developed by officers, based on the recommendations of the Audit, was then discussed. The Chairman pointed out the Action Plan had been broken into different categories reflecting ease and speed of implications set against longer term, more expensive projects. She opined that much could be done in the short-term but there were still considerable scoping works needed to be undertaken, particularly on potential costs.

Members next considered the top ten priorities listed in the Audit and various issues were discussed. It was reported that some tasks, such as a change to recycled paper and changes of timing switches, had already been undertaken and quotes actively sought for other potential changes such as signing up to a 100% green electricity tariff. It was noted that liaison with the local community on achieving Zero Carbon Chesham had been delayed due to the COVID-19 virus but this should proceed. Councillor Bacon opined that heating the open-air pool clearly put significant additional pressures on the aim to reduce the Council's carbon emissions and suggested that the question of heating through the current gas boiler would need to be reconsidered at some point.

Councillor Mrs MacBean then proposed that, while the Committee did not usually allow for public questions, the matter was of such importance, there be a question and answer session. This was agreed and the following questions and answers were received:

- **Q.** Would the Council be liaising with Housing Associations directly to ensure these green measures were implemented?
- **A.** The Council's environmental proposals in respect to housing should be prominent in its emerging Neighbourhood Plan. In the meantime, it was proposed to liaise with many different bodies to ensure best practice.
- **Q.** How and when was the Council proposing to undertake community engagement with the public on the Audit?
- **A.** As well as using respected organisations such as Sustainable Chesham and Chesham Youth Council to help disseminate the Audit and its recommendations, it was planned to undertake a much wider public consultation in the next month, including articles in 'YourChesham' magazine and use of the Council's own, updated web site and social media outlets. Moreover, the emerging Neighbourhood Plan would require considerable consultation and this would include many environmental

aspects. It is also proposed to work with the many local environmental groups, with whom the Council has a good working relationship. The Council, as well as reacting to proposals, has a fine record in leading on new initiatives and its environmental policy has been held up as an example of good practice.

- **Q.** Will the Council be actively promoting this through schools and young persons' groups?
- **A.** The intention is to get the matter out to as many different individuals and organisations as possible. There would be a capacity issue in visiting schools individually but hopefully school governors can be engaged to circulate the information, along with the Youth Council.

- **Q.** Is the Council going to lobby the unitary authority to take more effective action and why has the Council set a date for 2030 rather than aiming to become carbon neutral before then?
- **A.** Members for Chesham have a comparatively larger representation on the new unitary authority than the old District Council so it is intended to put pressure on Buckinghamshire Council to deliver on environmental targets locally through its elected councillors. 2030 is aspirational but it is certainly proposed to implement many if not all measures before then.

- **Q.** In light of the audit, is it planned to halt proposed major capital works at the Elgiva and Gym and Swim Centre?
- **A.** No, as the schemes were still in design stage and opportunities to include significant environmental enhancements within the proposals were being currently examined.

- **Q.** Had Members undertaken the Eco and Environmental workshop offered by 3 Acorns?
- **A.** Not as yet as it was felt to be more beneficial to have training in person rather than a virtual training session on this important topic.

There being no further questions or observations, the Chairman thanked everyone for their participation and assured the Committee and members of the public present, that this Committee would be reviewing and updating progress regularly.

It was

RESOLVED

1. That the Chairman of this Committee and the Town Mayor be appointed as Green Champions.
2. That the Action Plan be adopted and updated at this Committee following further scoping of the priorities.

11. **COMMUNITY ENERGY SWITCH**

The Committee considered the whether the Council should help promote the Chesham Community Energy Switch campaign, the aim of which is to encourage as many Chesham residents as possible to switch to a green energy tariff.

While Councillor Franks raised concerns on the regrettable collapse of some of the smaller energy companies, it was emphasised that the Council was only being asked by Sustainable Chesham to promote the Chesham Community Energy Switch and not recommend any individual companies.

Members agreed such a proposal accorded with the Council's Environmental Policy and it was

RESOLVED

that the Committee agrees to assist with the promotion of the Chesham Community Energy Switch.

12. **CODMORE FIELD MANAGEMENT PLAN**

A proposed new management plan for Codmore Field was considered by Members. The aim of the plan is to alter the management of three areas of the field to increase floral diversity and tree cover, which will improve the site ecology, create areas of interest for visitors to the field and reduce the amount of carbon generated by the management of the site. It was reported that the areas have been carefully selected to ensure that the change in management does not negatively impact on the sporting uses of the field.

Councillor McCulloch added further suggestions in respect to public access and the question of bracken which was noted by officers to be considered in the final iteration of the plan. The plan was broadly welcomed by the Committee and it was

RESOLVED

that the Codmore Field Management Plan be adopted, subject to the points raised at the meeting being considered and referred to if appropriate.

Note: Councillor McCulloch left the meeting at 8.20pm

13. **BERKHAMPSTEAD FIELD COMMUNITY MEADOW UPDATE**

The Policy and Projects Officer gave an update on Berkhamstead Field Wildflower area and proposed revisions to the management plan. It was noted that, to assist the establishment of the slow worms on site, officers were altering the management regime to reduce any possible disturbance. This includes refraining from cutting the hedge at the top of the field and leaving large parts of the wildflower section of the field entirely uncut this year. The arisings from the cut section will be left heaped in the top two corners of the field in the hedgerow area, creating another type of habitat. It was also

noted that an Information Board for the site was being developed to be paid for by local developers.

Having been assured the accommodation of slow worms would not materially affect the current natural habitat of the site, Members welcomed the plan. Councillor Mrs MacBean added that the Council's excellent wildflower area initiatives across town were probably due a review. She also opined that the information board should have some sort of uniformity with other Council information boards, which was noted by officers.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Report be noted.

14. **THE RIVER MEADOW AT THE PILE OF STONES EXHIBITION**

Members were reminded that, in December of last year, the Council received a presentation from Mr Matt Writtle on proposals for a photographic exhibition documenting the River Chess and its relationship with the community. The Council had welcomed the project and had resolved to support it by allowing temporary photographic exhibits on council land and by writing a letter of support for the project to assist with an Arts Council grant application.

Officers were pleased to announce that the Arts Council grant application was successful and the exhibition will launch on the 3rd October 2020. The Elgiva will act as a central location to host the launch day and exhibit photos. On the launch day, Mr Writtle will be leading a guided walk through Chesham along the route of the Chess, with photographs on display along the route. Mr Writtle is currently finalising the locations of the photographs, but the majority of these will be located on council sites, including Lowndes Park and Meades Water Gardens. The outdoor exhibition will culminate on The Moor, where the majority of the photographic boards will be located.

Members expressed satisfaction with the news that the project could proceed and it was agreed the Council should promote it as widely as possible.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Report be noted.

15. **CYCLING GROUP UPDATE**

The Committee received a report from the 'Zone 9 Cycling Group' – a sub-group of Sustainable Chesham – in respect to improving cycling opportunities across town.

A brief discussion ensued on cycling in Chesham. Councillor Bacon stated that the former Buckinghamshire County Council Cycling Officer, a few years ago, had developed a plan

to turn current footpaths into 'joint usage' to allow cycling off road and opined this proposal may be worth revisiting. Councillor Miss Culverhouse suggested that further bike racks would be advantageous. The Chairman stated that she believed further scoping of cycling options was required though she, and the Committee, expressed support for the aims and objective of the Zone 9 Cycling Group.

It was

RESOLVED

that the update be noted and the Council officially supports the aims of the Zone 9 Cycling Group and offers assistance to the group where appropriate.

16. **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

It was moved by the Chairman and

RESOLVED

that the public and the press be excluded from the following item in accordance with the Public Bodies (Access to Meetings) Act 1960, as matters which are considered to be confidential are about to be discussed.

17. **UPDATE ON SERVICES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The Committee received an update from the Service Heads as well as a full report on operations during the current pandemic.

The Elgiva Manager advised that, inevitably, performances and occupancy remained low as most touring companies and acts had cancelled. However, cinema showings were continuing and bookings for various local dance and music groups had been secured. Certain touring companies and bands had also been booked for Autumn which was encouraging. With a reduced operation, the Manager was looking at a possible restructure to cover the pandemic period to reduce wages. His proposed staffing structure and implications thereof were agreed in principle by the Committee. The Committee also agreed to his request to uplift booking fees and the price of cinema and satellite tickets.

The Gym and Swim Manager reported that the situation was largely positive at the Centre even with social distancing and reduced numbers at sessions. One issue that would need further consideration as the weather became colder would be the changing facilities as they currently remained closed. A brief discussion ensued as to whether they could be safely reopened and to what extent. The Chairman added that flooding in Moor Road had been an issue of concern but she was hopeful this would be addressed shortly.

The Administration Manager stated that, unfortunately, many of the Town Hall hirers were in the older persons category and therefore many cancellations had been received.

However, some groups, like slimming classes, were returning and provisional bookings for 2021 were looking robust.

The Clerk also reminded Members that the Finance Committee Members were receiving a regular financial update electronically.

Officers were commended on their efforts and it was

RESOLVED

that the Report be noted and the recommendations from the Elgiva Manager be agreed.

Note: Councillor Chaudhry left the meeting at 9.20pm

18. **LEGAL ACCESS TO AND BEHIND MOOR HARDSTANDING**

The Committee discussed the question of access across Common land managed by the Council for the owner of the area behind the Moor Hardstanding.

Having noted the owner's request and the legal advice received by the Council, it was

RESOLVED

that the matter of granting a Right of Easement be given further consideration by the Clerk, in liaison with the Chairman of this Committee and the Planning Committee and following further legal advice and the matter be brought back to this Committee.

19. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 9.30pm.

CHAIRMAN