

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 22 May 2019 commencing at 10.00 am at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT

Cllr Robert Bird	Cllr Sajid Patel
Cllr Dr John Cordwell	Cllr Eva Ward
Cllr Kevin Cromwell	Cllr Suzanne Williams
Cllr Stephen Hirst	

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllrs Keith Rippington and Ray Theodoulou.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2019 were approved and signed by the Chair subject to three minor typos on page 3.

ACTION: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

4. MOTION 828: MAKING GLOUCESTERSHIRE'S COUNTRYSIDE SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE

- 4.1 As the original proposer of the motion at full Council on 28 November 2018, the Chair invited Cllr Colin Hay to introduce this item and explain the background behind the motion.
- 4.2 The Committee heard that the equestrian industry in Gloucestershire is fit and well, this motion was not an attempt to revive an industry that wasn't working properly but rather to promote and improve this important sector for the County.
- 4.3 Gloucestershire is well known for its equine facilities in terms of; racing, the Hartpury University and riding for the disabled. It also benefits from an exceptional countryside which has significant economic and cultural benefits. There are however, improvements that can be done to solidify the County as a choice for country pursuits, especially for equine.

- 4.4 Members acknowledged that these improvements could include; making safer crossing points, improved gate access, better signage and safer walking/bridle paths that run alongside roads.
- 4.5 Promoting Gloucestershire in this way could see benefits both nationally and internationally, badging it as the safest place to walk and ride in the Country.
- 4.6 Cllr Loraine Patrick, as the seconder of the motion, informed the Committee that the equine industry in the County is huge. However, users experience missing safe links between bridle ways and gates are not suitably installed. The industry contributes a huge amount financially and better care is needed to allow it to flourish.
- 4.7 The Chair next invited Kath Haworth, Lead Commissioner for this area, to present the responding report.
- 4.8 The Committee were informed that the Public Rights of Way (PROW) network in Gloucestershire is over three and a half thousand kilometres, slightly more than the highways network. Keeping this network safe and accessible is part of the normal duties for the Council (especially points 1-3 in the motion).
- 4.9 Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) currently do a 10% inspection of the wider network to identify safety issues each year, meaning every 10 years the whole network will have been covered. Members were reassured however, that the Council is not working in a vacuum. It works closely with parishes, land owners and groups such as the AONB and horse riding associations to help keep track of any issues on the network throughout the year.
- 4.10 Officers advised that some members choose to use their Highways Local or Growing Our Communities funding to improve areas of PROW within their divisions.
- 4.11 It was also highlighted that bridle ways can be used by cyclist so this could be another key marketing tool for tourism in Gloucestershire.
- 4.12 On opening up to questions and feedback from the Committee, a member asked if these sorts of works could be funded by the Community Match Funding packages available from GCC. It was advised that as long as the works required were on the highway network, this would be a viable funding

route for local areas. GCC would offer a 50/50 split with local town/parish/district councils to fund the works.

- 4.13 On questioning, officers advised the Committee that the department do receive a good amount of feedback and reports from the public throughout the year, although these only tend to be regarding the well used paths and areas. The reason for the 10% a year strategy as mentioned above is to make sure officers are reaching those less popular areas so these aren't neglected.
- 4.14 Members noted however, that a lot of the work carried out by the PROW tend to be negotiating and enforcing (where legally able) when the rights and responsibility for an area of the network falls to another landowner. They may face issues of restricted accessibility, padlocked or inappropriate gates installed for example.
- 4.15 Members discussed various ideas for taking this project of improvement works forward:
- The Committee highlighted their unease with requesting all members to use their Highways Local/Growing Our Communities funding. It was appreciate that each member will have different strains within their divisions, and may not even have bridle/walk paths to maintain.
 - There was a discussion about a bridle trail that runs from Great Barrington to Forthampton near Tewkesbury, called the Sabrina Way, which could be used as a starting point for identifying improvements and branching other routes off.
 - The creation of a leaflet locating all the bridle/cycle/walk ways which could be included in tourism booklets.
 - Working with specialised local groups who are keen to promote the equine industry and can help identify key improvements needed for horse riders when out on the network.
- 4.16 It became clear to the Committee that one of the main drivers for these improvement works would be economic growth, a lot of responsibility for which has been shifted from GCC to the GFirst LEP. Officers advised that the LEP have a capital projects programme, and currently bids were being produced for the 2019/20 submission for funding opportunities in the future.
- 4.17 It also became clear that currently officers were lacking the key data to be able to quantify a business case and produce bid for funds to do the extra works required. It was highlighted that for external organisations in the County such issues would be more mainstream and they would be aware of such data e.g. equine groups.

- 4.18 Cllr Hay and Cllr Patrick as proposer and seconder of the motion therefore agreed to liaise with external organisations involved in this industry to produce a list for GCC officers of areas they have identified need improving. This will then enable officers to gauge the work/funding needed and produce a business case for improvement to PROW from an economic growth perspective and to form part of GCC's submissions to the 2019/20 LEP funding opportunities.
- 4.19 The Committee will receive an update on progress at their next meeting in July.

5. BIODIVERSITY TASK GROUP UPDATE

- 5.1 The Chair invited Cllr Rachel Smith, as chair of the Biodiversity Task Group, to present the report. Members were reminded that a motion at full Council in June 2018 had been unanimously agreed to set up a task group to look at protecting and encouraging biodiversity in Gloucestershire.
- 5.2 Members heard the purpose behind the motion was to shift the base line from preserving what biodiversity the County has left, to working hard to regenerate and recapture what has been lost.
- 5.3 The Committee were informed the cross-party working group agreed its main focus would be on verge management (grass cutting) within the County, and agreed to hold a public workshop in January 2019. This event had been well attended by local parishes, district councils and ecological groups and was structured by three main questions: where are we now, where do we want to get to and how do we get there. This workshop then formed the basis of the task group's report and recommendations.
- 5.4 Cllr Smith summarised the recommendations, highlighting in particular the 'cut and collect' business case and engagement with local council's going forward. It was explained that a lot of the recommendations hinged on the need to reduce the fertility of soil which has become too nutrient rich.
- 5.5 An agreement was made between Cllr Moor, as the Cabinet Member responsible, Cllr Smith and the Committee that Cabinet would feedback on the recommendations in September.
- 5.6 Several members highlighted the need for effective communication if the recommendations were going to be successful. This would need to continue throughout the year, especially when wildflowers are reseeded.
- 5.7 One member informed the Committee of a successful project in their local division which allowed biodiversity to play a part in enforcing a parking issue. A patch of grass had been being used for parking and causing safety issues – it is now covered in wildflowers and has been really welcomed by the community.

- 5.8 Cabinet Member for Highways and Flood congratulated the group for all the good work done and reinforced the need for effective communication to the public.
- 5.9 Officers reinforced that things were not going to change overnight but it was important to begin taking steps. They also highlighted the positive financial impact for the Council especially when trying to manage major highways carriageways.

6. DIRECTOR'S REPORT, COMMUNITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

- 6.1 Colin Chick, Strategic Adviser (Communities & Infrastructure), updated the Committee on current issues. In particular, members noted that:
- The new highways contract is going very well.
 - Unfortunately the Chepstow Bypass bid for funding to the Western Gateway Sub-national Board submission was rejected as it did not meet the objectives. It will stay on the list and the Council can bid again if another funding route isn't found.
 - Under 3.6 the report should state 2020 not 2019.
 - In relation to the Local Transport Plan (LTP) – GCC and all district councils are in agreement that a co-ordinated approach on land allocations is the best way forward. The developing LTP will look forward to 2041, identifying long term aspirations through connections and transport schemes.
 - To highlight that the changes at Arle Court have been well received by the community.
- 6.2 Looking next at the submitted quarter 3 and 4 performance scorecards for the department, it was highlighted that almost all of the performance indicators were achieved or overachieved. This was despite numerous major projects such as junction 10 on top of the department's usual workload.
- 6.3 It was referenced that for completeness of the quartered reports, the Fire and Rescue Service had been included but this would not happen going forward due to the Committee's remit change following the scrutiny review.
- 6.4 On questioning of the Director's report, a member asked why they had heard Javelin Park would begin taking waste in around 3 weeks time via the media. Members were informed that there have been set up delays which keep altering the timeline. Both of the previous 20 days notices to GCC have been cancelled and there is doubt around the current one. To avoid confusion, officers are liaising with the districts constantly to make sure everyone is as up to date on progress as possible.

- 6.5 A local member to the area raised concern regarding the displaced traffic from GCHQ due to the changes at Arle Court. Officers reassured that as one of the largest employers in the county, they're working closely with GCHQ on a travel plan refresh to try and improve numbers on walking, cycling and public transport use.
- 6.6 Members noted that currently, the Joint Waste Committee are in discussions about the future shape of the partnership. All are in agreement that there needs to be something that co-ordinates waste management on a county basis, and this was welcomed by members of the Committee also.
- 6.7 A member questioned the impact of the forthcoming decision on third party recycling credits. It was advised that as part of the department's savings, waste needed to carry a percentage of those savings and this is one option (not yet definite). The issue is that some organisations who claim the credits are branches of major national charities. Officers are currently trying to find a way of identifying smaller charities that benefit more from these credits.
- 6.8 Cllr Patel raised a concern regarding repeated requests for parking enforcement action and it was advised this concern would be passed on to the parking team to look into.

ACTION: PHILLIP WILLIAMS

- 6.9 There was a discussion about concerns over long queues at recycling centres across the county. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning advised they are actively looking to improve overall access at these sites.
- 6.10 A point was noted that due to the future change in materials being used e.g. the reduction of single use plastics, there will need to be a review of how recycle is weighed and calculated.
- 6.11 There was a discussion about the progress on critical improvements to junction 9 following Tewkesbury being awarded the 'Garden Town' initiative from Homes England meaning around 10,000 extra houses are due in the area. The Committee were assured that officers are making every effort to resolve this issue but as there is no infrastructure funding attached to the initiative, there are no specific funding streams currently available.
- 6.12 The Committee were reassured that officers are using every possible national/local funding streams:
- Junction 9 will be on GCC's funding submission to the GFirst LEP for 2019/20 project pipeline.
 - The project ended up ranking 1st within a bid for the western gateway allowance but the budget was too high for that particular stream.

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

- It was also noted that the success of the junction 10 bid will give weight to the junction 9 case going forward.

7. WORK PLAN

- 7.1 Members decided for the next meeting on 17 July, it would be a one item agenda on developing the revised Climate Change Strategy.
- 7.2 The September agenda would be:
 - The long-term review of local transport plan
 - Cabinet feedback on the Biodiversity Task Group report
- 7.3 In November they would look at the increase in costs of re-tendering public transport services.
- 7.4 Officers agreed to revisit at the July meeting to arrange a visit for the Committee to Javelin Park.

CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 13:00.