

**Minutes of the Environment and Sustainability Committee
18 January 2022**

Present:

Councillor I.J. Beardsmore (Chairman)

Councillors:

M.M. Attewell	M. Gibson	S.C. Mooney
J.T.F. Doran	K.M. Grant	R.J. Noble
T. Fidler	N. Islam	J.R. Sexton
N.J. Gething	V.J. Leighton	

Substitutions: None

Apologies: Councillors O. Rybinski and V. Siva

In Attendance: Councillors C. Bateson, M. Beecher and R.W. Sider BEM

1/22 Minutes

The minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 3 November 2021 and the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

2/22 Disclosures of Interest

There were none.

3/22 Questions from members of the Public

There were none.

4/22 Ward Issues

There were none.

5/22 Briefing on Surrey 2050 Place Ambition from Surrey County Council officers

Sue Janota, Spatial Planning and Policy Manager from Surrey County Council, gave a presentation to the Committee setting out the history, background detail, and involvement of representatives from county, borough and district authorities, and business leaders in forming this initiative to provide a strong coherent voice on a number of areas to promote good sustainable economic growth, improve business opportunities and bid for large infrastructure projects across the county.

This had led to the setting up of a Place Ambition Task Group to take the work forward. As part of the work, strategic priorities were agreed and eight strategic opportunity areas identified as areas to support long term prosperity. The Strategic Opportunity Area (SOA) most relevant to Spelthorne was the Longcross – Staines – Heathrow Corridor.

Following Covid-19 it was decided to review and refresh the strategy to reflect post-pandemic challenges and prepare an implementation framework. The updated version identified four strategic priorities:

- Improve connectivity both within Surrey and between strategically important hubs
- Enhance the place offer of Surrey's towns
- Maximise the potential of our Strategic Opportunity Areas
- Invest in natural capital and deliver nature recovery

A detailed implementation framework had been prepared setting out how it was proposed to deliver the priorities. A consultation was open until Friday 4 March and responses were welcomed from all. Following that the task group would reconvene, consider the results and what adjustments should be made before the District and Borough authorities were asked to endorse the proposals.

Work on this strategy had been taking place for some time and work was well underway in other areas of the county. Surprise and concern was expressed by Spelthorne councillors that they had not been informed of this initiative before. The Group Head for Regeneration and Growth explained that under the Council's previous Strong Leader and Cabinet governance arrangements, updates and briefings would have been provided to the Leader and relevant Cabinet portfolio holder at that time but could not recall that the issue had been brought to Cabinet during that time. The strategy had evolved over a number of years, however the leadership and direction of the Council had significantly changed over that period so it was considered appropriate that it was brought to the Committee for consideration. The Group Head for Regeneration and Growth acknowledged the concern of members and apologised that they had not been informed previously.

In response to a request from a Committee member, the Group Head for Regeneration and Growth offered to provide details of the relevant past meetings held about this matter and who had attended on behalf of Spelthorne Borough Council. The information has been attached to the minutes of this meeting.

A communications message was to be published to notify councillors and residents of the consultation and encourage responses to the proposals.

Reassurance was sought that the strategy was relevant to other areas in Spelthorne and not just Staines. Members were advised that Staines had been identified in relation to the Strategic Opportunity Area relating to Heathrow, and that strategic priority two covered all other areas.

Concern was expressed at the lack of detail for an improved rail connection to Staines and that further connectivity elements needed to be drawn out. The natural river divide emphasised the need to consider cross border areas and improved connectivity to Spelthorne and should be reflected in the strategic priority areas. Transport issues raised included the view that a heavy rail scheme would have a negative impact on Staines and a light railway scheme was considered a better option. The Committee was advised that work continued through the Heathrow Strategic Planning Group to find a solution to the railway connection. It was understood that the government was giving thought to what was required and how to progress this and that both heavy and light rail options were under consideration.

Questions were asked about whether any increase in bus transport would be targeted at the identified SOAs or if it would be aimed at bolstering other areas in Surrey or a mixture of both. A similar question was raised regarding proposed government cuts to rail funding and if this would impinge on the plans to develop the rail network and where might those cuts be applied. Sue Janota advised that she was unable to answer at this time and would need to refer back before responding.

It was also suggested that the introduction of cycling routes and footpaths would have a significant impact on connectivity and deserved further detail in the documents.

Staines Bridge and the roundabouts leading to it was also raised as a significant issue that needed to be addressed as it created a bottleneck prohibiting movement of traffic in and out of Staines.

In response to a question about how progress on the strategic priorities could be checked and monitored, the Committee was advised that a dashboard was being worked on and any comments on this aspect were welcomed through the consultation. It was suggested that monitoring should adopt a more holistic approach and not simply rely on statistics.

Sue Janota advised that the question of how information would be disseminated to key players was still to be considered. The Group Head for

Regeneration and Growth suggested that updates could be provided to the Committee on how matters were progressing if they wished.

One Committee member considered that a greater emphasis on environmental issues was required and it should be a common theme running throughout the report.

A further comment was that the disruption caused by Covid had not been fully explored and the future impact assessed. A question was raised as to where funding was expected to come from, particularly in view of the government's levelling up policy and the general exodus from the south. It was acknowledged that when originally set up, it was envisaged that government funding would be available and there would be some still available in terms of transport, however it was agreed that the pandemic would have impacted on funding plans.

It was suggested that the framework was amended to clarify where responsibility and ownership lay for various matters as it was unclear at present.

On more local issues, the Committee was advised that, as the Place Ambition was regarded as being at a more strategic level, the results of the local borough survey on the Staines Development Framework had not been shared with them, but it was agreed to do so.

Whilst acknowledging that the Place Ambition was a collaborative vision, not necessarily that of each individual area, one member spoke of the importance of good design as increasingly developments of unimaginative design were being proposed. Sue Janota advised that the Surrey Development Forum had been set up to promote good design and a number of initiatives were running. Members were advised to speak to the borough's strategic planning team about work on design codes and expectations. The Group Head for Regeneration and Growth thought that it was important for Spelthorne to focus first on agreeing the Local Plan and Staines Development Framework and design work would follow on from that.

Councillors and residents were encouraged to respond to the consultation and it was agreed that a response should be sent on behalf of the Committee also.

The Committee **resolved** to note the presentation and delegated authority to the Group Head of Regeneration and Growth, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Environmental and Sustainability Committee and the joint Chairs of the Climate Change Working Group, to respond to the Place Ambition consultation on behalf of the Committee.

The Chair thanked Sue Janota for the presentation and answering the Committee's questions.

6/22 Capital Bids 2022/23 (part of annual budget process)

The Chief Accountant presented the three capital bids for 2022/23 to the Committee for their consideration.

In response to questions from the Committee the Group Head of Neighbourhood Services provided the following information:

New Wheelie Bins

The Council had a duty to replace any bins that had been crushed, broken or stolen. Bins were also required for new developments in the borough, although a charge was made for these.

The bins were high quality and therefore more expensive than some available but were considered a good choice as they had a long lifespan. They were bought in bulk through the Council's procurement framework.

Food Waste Vehicle:

A replacement food waste collection vehicle was required to replace one written off following a traffic accident. The loss adjusters had recently advised that the value of that vehicle had been assessed as £40,000. The Committee was advised that the capital bid had to be submitted as £80,000, the cost of the replacement vehicle for accounting purposes.

River Ash Boardwalk

The Committee was advised that when the Bronzefield site was built, funds were allocated specifically to the Bronzefield Reserves for environmental enhancements to the area and could not be used for any other purpose. It was proposed that a boardwalk was installed for the part of the circular path alongside the river in that area that was subject to high levels of flooding to make it accessible to residents all year round.

The Committee **resolved** that the three capital bids as presented should be rated green (to commence in 2022/23) for recommendation to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

7/22 Revenue Growth and Savings Bids 2022/23 (part of annual budget process)

The Chief Accountant presented the Revenue growth and savings bids to the Committee for their consideration.

A number of questions were asked about the growth and savings bids. One Committee member requested that the wording of the growth bid for councillor training was reworded.

The Committee **resolved** to agree all the growth and savings bids as proposed for recommendation to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

8/22 Committee Review of Fees and Charges for Service Areas 2022/23 (part of annual budget process)

The Chief Accountant presented his report to the Committee.

The Committee **resolved** to agree the Fees and Charges as proposed for recommendation to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

9/22 Verbal update on request for site investigation of land to rear of Thames Side

Claire Lucas, Principal Air Pollution Officer, gave a verbal update on further investigative work undertaken to ascertain if there was sufficient evidence to request a site investigation of the land and which body had jurisdiction for this.

The Committee was advised that:

- The Freedom of Information request (FOI) submitted to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) was considered too broad and they had suggested a more refined approach. A further request had been made for a five year period based on the BBC article and other information available and the MOD response was awaited.
- Officers had spent a significant amount of time reviewing data received in relation to the site permit to the north of the M3 and requested follow up information.
- A request had been made to Esso requesting any relevant data they may have for that area in relation to the pipeline site investigation works carried out for the Southampton to London pipeline. They were not subject to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and it was hoped they may respond on a voluntary basis, however no response has been received to date.
- The Environmental Health team had looked into the possibility of monitoring techniques for flooding events for ground gases but concluded this was not possible as there were so many variables to consider, including types of gases, the configuration of premises and how the premises were ventilated.
- Legal advice was expected later this month.

A report was to be prepared for the next Committee meeting in March 2022.

The Committee **resolved** to note the verbal update.

10/22 Bonfires and Anti-Bonfire Campaign

The Committee considered a report setting out the action taken to promote awareness of the hazards posed by bonfires both to people's health and the environment. As it was not possible to ban bonfires, a campaign to discourage residents and businesses from having bonfires was launched using the following approaches:

- An article in the borough Bulletin which explained the risks of bonfires, suggested alternative means of properly disposing of waste, and provided information on how to report bonfires
- A social media campaign using strong graphics to promote the anti-bonfire message
- A revision of the Council's bonfire and smoke webpage to give a stronger anti-bonfire message.

The Senior Environmental Health Manager advised that the number of complaints had increased significantly over the Covid period and it would be necessary to see whether these continued at the same level or reduced. It was agreed to share any meaningful statistics obtained with the Committee.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

None.

Resolved:

To note the anti-bonfire campaign currently running.

Reason for decision:

The anti-bonfire campaign has a direct positive impact on climate change since a reduction in bonfires will directly lead to a reduction in carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere.

11/22 Bidding Process for Green Initiatives Fund

The Committee considered a report setting out a proposed bidding process for projects requesting funds from the Green Initiatives Fund. The process had been based upon a similar approach for grants funding applications.

The Committee was advised that some adjustments may be required once the bidding process was underway as bids were likely to be submitted for internal and external projects.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

Not to put a bidding process in place which could result in funding for projects which do not fully deliver on the Council's climate change objectives.

Resolved:

To note and agree the proposed bidding process for projects requesting funds from the Green Initiatives Fund.

Reasons for Decision:

The Green Initiatives Fund will support projects aiming to reduce the impact of climate change in the Borough. A fair means of assessing individual projects proposed by the Council or outside organisations is required to ensure appropriate use of the funding.

12/22 Adverse Weather Plan and Community Sandbag Distribution Centre Plan Sign-Off

The Committee considered a report which set out the Council's Adverse Weather Plan and Community Sandbag Distribution Policy, following the review and updating of both documents. The report highlighted key updates to both plans which included clarity on roles and responsibilities

It was agreed that the Group Head for Commissioning and Transformation would contact those members who had suggested that some amendments or clarification may be necessary to the policy to address these.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

None

Resolved:

To note the report and associated Adverse Weather Plan and Community Sandbag Distribution Policy.

Reason for Decision:

To ensure the Council has up to date plans to respond to adverse weather with clarity on roles and responsibilities.

13/22 Recovery Action Plan - E&S

It was **resolved** to note the Recovery Action Plan items relevant to this Committee.

14/22 Updates from Task and Finish and/or Working Groups

The Committee **resolved** to note the updates provided from the task and working groups.

15/22 Forward Plan

The Committee **resolved** to note the forward plan.

16/22 Urgent business

There was none.