

Minutes of a meeting of the **Environmental Excellence Panel** held by video link on **Thursday 26 November 2020** at **6pm** when there were present:

Cllr J Leggett – Chairman

Cllr D J Britcher

Cllr K S Kelly

Cllr S M Prutton

Cllr A D Crotch

Cllr K E Lawrence

Cllr J M Ward

Cllr J F Fisher

Cllr G K Nurden

Cllr N Brennan, Cllr S Lawn and Cllr T Mancini-Boyle were also present for all or part of the meeting.

In attendance were the Assistant Director Regulatory, the Assistant Director Community Service, the Infrastructure Delivery Officer, the Community Safety and Intervention Lead, the Environmental Protection Manager, the National Management Trainee and the Democratic Services Officers (DM & LA).

### **49 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies were received.

### **50 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **51 PROGRESS REPORT ON ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY DELIVERY PLANNING**

Members considered the report of the Infrastructure Delivery Officer who, with the aid of a presentation, updated the Panel on the progress with the Environmental Strategy delivery work and invited Members to give their feedback on some readily deliverable projects.

In presenting the report, the Infrastructure Delivery Officer made reference to the Government's recent announcement of its 10 point plan for the Green Industrial Revolution which outlined the ambitions of the Government and a briefing note was currently being prepared on this to share with Members.

The Infrastructure Delivery Officer drew attention to the five readily deliverable projects identified in the Action Plan following a detailed

evaluation and priority assessment, these being: tree planning and biodiversity, electric charging points, single use plastic free council and beyond green energy supplier and procurement strategy with further details of each project detailed in the report. Scoping work to fully define the projects and assess budget implications and resources for delivery was now taking place together with the development of a timeline and phasing plan for each project. With the exception of the tree planting project, the phasing plan for the four projects would be divided into two main tranches: phase one to deliver actions that the Council could itself implement and Phase two looking at how the Council could support others (businesses, community groups, partners and town/parish councils) to become greener. The Infrastructure Delivery Officer highlighted potential actions which could be taken in each of the phases for the four projects. She also shared a timeline for roll out of top five priorities with the initial stages in phase one underway and with phase 2 projected to get underway by 2023.

With regard to the tree planting scheme, this was a very ambitious project and potentially resource intensive. Two options for the formulation of the necessary budget had been drafted and Members' views were sought on these options. Utilising the budget assessment in option 1 would provide an estimated budget figure within 1-2 months whereas the more detailed feasibility study to assess full cost implications would take 3-6 months to establish a budget; this was also dependent on the appointment of the recently approved member of staff to help with implementation of the Strategy.

Members' views were also being sought on the driving forces informing the choices underpinning the ambition to plant 130,000 trees – one tree per resident and if these related to Carbon capture / carbon sink, biodiversity enhancement or environmental action / community engagement or other drivers. This information would help influence the mechanisms for delivery for example the species and mix of trees planted and the planting options and locations.

The Infrastructure Delivery Officer then went on to outline what had been achieved to date on delivery of the Environmental Strategy despite the impact of COVID. These included 500 trees planted at woodlands in Rackheath, successful funding from the Infrastructure Investment Fund for biodiversity work along the Bure Valley Railway, conservation grazing of heathland and wildlife sites at the new country park in Horsford / Felthorpe, funding of 1,219 trees to be planted by tree wardens and 15 large standard trees planted on public open spaces.

With regard to the need for strong communication and outreach of delivery of the Environmental Strategy, the Infrastructure Delivery Officer outlined a number of potential options including a goal thermometer on the website, the hosting of planting events and bio blitz activities at the country park, staff volunteer days, work with local schools / businesses to get involved in

planting / funding tree schemes and strengthening links with community groups and environmental organisations to promote collective goals.

Officers would now be focusing on the recruitment of the Environmental Coordinator, securing funding to facilitate the resource delivery of the five main objectives and continuing to develop relationships with stakeholders. Members were invited to comment on the budget options for the tree planting scheme, the drivers informing the choices underpinning the ambition to plant 130,000 trees and guidance on the five priorities identified.

Discussion then took place and members thanked officers for the presentation and the work undertaken to date. They welcomed the proposals and the five priorities identified. With regard to the budget options, it was felt that having regard to the timescales involved, there would be merit in seeking a fully explored and evaluated budget mindful of the need to ensure that the Council continued to secure value for its residents in addition to fulfilling its ambitions for the environment. They felt that there was insufficient information available at this time to comment in detail on the proposals or express preferences but in general they felt there was merit in an approach which incorporated all three driving forces: carbon capture / carbon sink, biodiversity enhancement and environmental action / community engagement perhaps in equal thirds, as all had value. Mindful of the diverse nature of the district it was felt this called for a flexible approach to identifying the right trees in the right location, including heritage trees if possible. They supported a wide range of approaches to delivering the projects including working with town/parish councils many of whom may already own woodlands or land suitable for planting, and with developers, in particular, management companies to help secure ongoing management, although it might be more difficult to secure the cooperation of developers in more rural areas with small scale developments. They acknowledged the need to liaise with the County Council who was also embarking on an ambitious tree planting proposal and establish how this was being rolled out. There was a need to monitor tree loss and ensure provision was made for ongoing management. Community engagement was felt to be an essential element of the proposals and an option to look at schemes whereby residents could collect, plant and maintain a donated tree could be explored.

Officers undertook to work up some more detailed proposals incorporating the preferences referred to above, including all three elements of the potential driving forces: carbon capture / carbon sink, biodiversity enhancement and environmental action / community engagement (perhaps one-third each).

### **RESOLVED**

to note the report and, subject to the views detailed above, officers be requested to develop options for progressing the projects and the costings involved for report back to the Panel.

### 52 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The current work programme was noted as follows:

28 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recycling Initiatives</li><li>• Waste Contract Procurement</li><li>• MRF Contract Update (date tbc)</li></ul>
25 March 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Waste Contract Procurement</li></ul>

It was noted that an all Member briefing on progress on the Waste Contract Procurement would be held in December.

### 53 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

#### RESOLVED

to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the remaining business because otherwise, information which was exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, would be disclosed to them.

### 54 EXEMPT MINUTES

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2020 as updated with the amendments agreed at the meeting on 8 October (set out in the agenda) were noted.

*The meeting closed at 7.15pm.*