ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Monday, 1 February 2021

Present:	Councillor	EA Grey (Chair)	
	Councillors	C Cooke	I Williams
		B Berry	A Wright
		H Cameron	A Brame (In place of A Corkhill)
		T Cox	T Cottier (In place of T Norbury)
		S Foulkes	G Wood (In place of C Muspratt)

23 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and any other relevant interest and to state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Steve Foulkes declared a personal interest in item 26 (Liverpool City region Digital Connectivity Dig Once Policy) as he sat on the Transport Committee to the Metro Mayor and City Region which was previously referred to as Merseytravel.

24 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee held on 3 December 2020 be approved and adopted as a correct record subject to:

(1) In the supplement to the questions (Minute 15) the first repeat of question 5 be replaced by question 4 and the full wording of the question given as supplemental question 6.

(2) In Minute 19 an amendment to the Hoylake beach resolution for clarity by inclusion of an '&' between 'identified' and 'in consultation with'

(3) in Minute 22 an amendment for clarity to replace 'and the deletion of allotments 'with 'and the deletion of further allotment working group meetings.

25 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

6 Questions were received, all for the Chair

Question 1

From Gillian Homeri.

“Is the Environment Committee able and willing to write to George Eustace asking him to reinstate the ban on neonicotinoids?

Are they aware and concerned that neonicotinoids are toxic to bees and this lifting of the ban will undermine the hard work Wirral Borough Council and others are doing to protect pollinators.

Globally the number of bee species has already fallen by 25% since 1990. We cannot allow this to continue.

I would also like to know if neonicotinoids (should the ban not be reinstated) are likely to be used by famers on the Wirral.”

Answer 1

I am happy to write to George Eustace and can say so. Rest of committee agreed to sign letter.

Question 2

From Louise Stothard from 'For Trees Wirral'

“When will Wirral Borough Council stop felling trees, we’ve lost over 6,000 trees?”

Answer 2

Wirral Council will only fell trees when it is a last resort and is absolutely necessary to protect public achieve and maintain public safety.

Clearly trees are not permanent landscape features so have a finite safe life expectancy when growing in our parks or adjacent to the highway, so we will always have a small proportion of trees which have reached the end of their life cycle and which are just not safe to be left standing.

In less occupied areas we do allow trees to collapse slowly and naturally over time but as I’m sure you can appreciate this natural destabilisation isn’t something we can accommodate next to the highway or a footpath.

Our trees are inspected by fully qualified and highly experienced arboricultural inspectors. This service was outsourced to a private contractor but we have just hired two full time arboricultural inspectors to internalise the service. It is worth noting that the tree inspection company is absolutely independent from the tree maintenance company who carry out the works. Every member of this team is a fully qualified and experienced arboriculturalist.

We are confident that this natural loss is being successfully mitigated through our significant tree planting programme. We have moved beyond just maintaining continuity of tree cover as we seek to deliver the goal of the tree strategy to double tree cover over the next ten years. Approximately 21,000 new trees have / will be planted this current planting season (November to March) which delivers a healthy replanting ratio. We are currently recruiting a dedicated landscape manager who will be tasked with delivering the goals of the tree strategy and seeking funding for future tree planting and habitat creation projects across the borough.

It has been observed from our tree inventory that a great majority of our trees are mature, therefore substantial new tree planting will add resilience to our tree population. We do value the cultural and ecological value of very old

veteran trees and to ensure that we can maintain these trees for longer in confidence there has been significant financial investment in state of the art sonic decay detection apparatus. There are approximately 170 trees which the inspectors have noted basal and stem decay, however rather than just felling these trees without further investigation, these trees will be tested with the decay detection equipment to provide the clearest assessment of their structural integrity to allow a fully informed decision to be made on the management interventions required. If not dangerous, they will not be felled. Wirral Council recognises the value of its tree population and has grown the tree management team over a short period of time to seven members of staff to ensure that trees are maintained correctly and safely, are given full consideration during the planning process, and are re-planted in abundance across the borough.

Question 3

From John Rodgers

“Recently I enquired about whether or not Wirral Borough Council had a policy or provision to discourage motorists waiting in parked cars with the engine running.

I was prompted to this as each and every day that I walk my dog I see at least one parked car with its engine idling whilst the occupant is engrossed by their telephone.

As I only see about 30 cars throughout my daily journey these are presumably the tip of an iceberg that isn’t melting away.

Can a question be raised concerning enforcement or raising public awareness of existing laws?

Is Wirral Borough Council taking the minimisation of avoidable environmental pollution as a serious matter?”

Answer 3

Thank you for raising your concerns about engine idling.

As part of Wirral Councils plan to tackle avoidable pollution across the Borough, our Environmental Health Officers have been working with our Highways and Infrastructure team to address issues of idling by educating drivers, where we have had complaints or observed engine idling during our routine enforcement activities. Wirral Council takes all complaints by residents very seriously and Officers are working tirelessly to address problems of this nature.

There are limitations to the current legislation which has made enforcement of the Anti-idling regulations difficult, in order to serve an FPN the driver must firstly be approached be asked to switch the engine off first, if they switch off their engine a notice cannot be served. It is only if they refuse to turn it off that we can then serve notice. In addition, the regulations provided circumstances where vehicles are permitted to be stationary with their engine running (e,g. running the engine to detect a defect) and the guidance to the regulations states that enforcement personnel must consider mitigating circumstances.

In addition to these limitations, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has put strain on many aspects of our work and the priorities to protect public health; With this in mind, we are in the process of planning new targeted education for drivers surrounding the topic, informing them of the dangers to their own health as well as the impact on Air Quality in their communities, which will raise public awareness of the matter. This will be set out in a positional statement in the coming weeks.
I would encourage you to contact our Environmental Health Team (environmentalhealth@wirral.ov.uk), if you do have concerns about specific areas so that we can include them on the enforcement routes, this helps us to build a picture of where the idling is taking place so that we can target these areas specifically.

Question 4
From Ryan Haughey
"I am a resident of port sunlight village, in March 2020 the council installed a temporary lamppost outside my house on central road. The temporary lamppost does not conform to the conservational rules of the village and the light is a stark white light which differs from the other lampposts on the street. When will this modern lamppost be replaced with a traditional lamppost that conforms to the conversation rules of the village?"
Answer 4
Thank you for your question about a lighting column in Port Sunlight.
Any recently erected lighting column is not temporary has been erected because of concerns over the structural condition of the previous column and risk to public safety. Where column replacements are carried out we will frequently also replace the lantern with a modern LED one.
Cllr Grey explained that the Council's funding had been cut by hundreds of millions of pounds in the last ten years and that, unfortunately, this impacted on what we can do.
The funding for the LED replacement programme was approved by the Council only on a strict financial and safety-related business case, and unfortunately there is no budget available for heritage columns or luminaries. However, we would be happy to work with relevant Community Groups, elected Members and, in this case, the Village Trust, to explore what opportunities exist to secure supplementary funding and whether heritage features may be incorporated into our lighting infrastructure. Meanwhile, the LED replacement programme will continue as planned.

Question 5
From Kelly Newall
"Over 9000 residents are concerned about the safety of Spital Cross Roads including the phasing of the lights and the very poor condition of the road surface and I am asking this committee to make urgent improvements to prevent any further accidents."
Answer 5
Thank you for raising your concerns about Spital Cross Roads.

Cllr Grey said that a full written response can be provided and reassured Ms Newall that her concerns were very much taken on board and that Cllr Grey has set up a road safety working group which is currently looking at road safety across the borough and will consider these concerns very seriously as they make recommendations to this committee.

Question 6

From Carmel & Peter Sibbald.

"Will the members of the Committee establish a review of road traffic management in Port Sunlight village with the purpose of establishing whether:

- Port Sunlight village would be a suitable candidate for 20mph zoning
- gateway road signage could be improved
- effective traffic calming measures could be introduced to reduce speeding & anti-social driving
- CCTV could be installed on an existing street lighting column to monitor the roundabout
- there could be changes to road surfaces, for example strips of granite setts"

Answer 6

Road safety across the borough is currently being reviewed, including 20mph zones, under a cross party Working Group which will report back to this Committee.

26 **STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS**

Denise Roberts presented a petition with 80 signatures for lighting to be installed in Rake Park to discourage anti-social behaviour after dark following several issues of vandalism.

Kelly Newell presented a petition with 9,200 signatures to improve safety at Spital Cross Roads junction following the injury of her son who was knocked down there.

The Chair thanked the presenters and both of the petitions would be passed on for consideration and response.

27 **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

Councillor Jo Bird expressed disappointment in the lack of responses to public questions and petitions on road safety but the Chair reminded her that the road safety working group was meeting to consider all road safety issues.

28 **LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY DIG ONCE POLICY**

Liverpool City Region (LCR) Combined Authority were building a 200+ km underground fibre network running through all six local authorities and delivered through a Combined Authority (CA) Joint Venture partnership with a

private company. The purpose was to create a new telecommunications network infrastructure to provide ultrafast broadband connectivity across the region. The initial network will consist of four ducts which will run through all 6 Local Authority Areas and would connect LCR to external national and international networks. An initial route has been proposed for Wirral which took in our major regeneration areas. In time it was planned that the network would be expanded to other parts of Wirral. The plan was to build the initial network in 3 years starting from mid-2021. As part of the build Wirral Council had been asked to sign up to a “Dig Once” policy, to install ducting at the same time that we undertake road, cycling and walking schemes. This approach can reduce the cost of deployment by as much as 50%, minimises disruption to road and public transport users and helps avoid any future embargos in specific locations across LCR. The CA team have secured £6.39m from LCRCA’s Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) for Dig Once. The CA team will assess each “Dig Once” opportunity and decide if the particular scheme met their criteria. If it did, they would fund the authority to put ducting in the ground as part of the project delivery. Once the work was completed ownership of the ducts and fibre network will revert to LCRCA.

Project Officer John Williams described the proposed network and its expected benefits.

Members praised the scheme which appeared to be a positive move which would help the Council reach a number of goals including digital connectivity and environmental protection. The need for a digital network had been highlighted during lockdown as people and children did their work from home.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the Dig Once Collaboration Agreement and the Inter Authority Agreement be approved and

(2) the Director of Law and Governance be authorised to arrange the execution of the documents on behalf of the Council in accordance with the Council’s Constitution.

29 **ACCEPTANCE OF TENDER AND AWARD OF CONTRACT - ARBORICULTURAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT**

The report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services recommended acceptance of a tender from Man Coed VM Ltd and award of a term service contract for the Wirral Arboricultural Services Contract (Corporate Tree Maintenance Contract). The contract was to run from April 2021 until March 2026 with a conditional extension option of 2 further years.

Simon Fox, Assistant Director of Infrastructure and Highways, clarified that the report was about the procurement exercise not how the Council managed its trees, which was covered by the tree strategy. The Council had trained, qualified, specialist arboricultural officers to deliver the strategy and make

decisions about which trees were felled or pollarded and what happened to deadwood, but the Council needed a specialist contractor to enable it to deliver the strategy and keep residents safe. There had been a rigorous analysis of the tenders submitted, by senior Council officers including from Legal, Procurement and Finance professions.

Members were clear that the Council had a duty of care to residents and wished to keep a watching brief on the delivery of the contract. Members questioned the pricing of the bid but were reassured that prices quoted were in line with expectations and had not concerned officers. Members also asked if community groups could be involved in tree planting and it was confirmed that the Council had secured funding and welcomed suggestions.

Councillor Steve Foulkes proposed an additional resolution:
3. committee welcomes all member workshops will take place on this matter. furthermore to reassure the public, this committee should receive regular reports on this contracts performance.
This was seconded by Councillor Gill Wood, then clarified slightly before being agreed.

RESOLVED - That

(1) the tender for the Wirral Arboricultural Services Contract Apr 2021- Mar 2026 submitted by Man Coed VM Ltd to Wirral Council on 8 January 2021 be accepted;

(2) the award of the contract to Man Coed VM Ltd be approved, subject to contract and subject to the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) standstill period;

(3) Committee welcomes all member workshops will take place on this matter (the performance of the contract). Furthermore to reassure the public, this Committee should receive regular reports on this contracts performance.

30 **ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE BUDGET CONSULTATION REPORT**

The report of the Director of Resources formed part of the Council's formal budget setting process, as set out in the Constitution and in accordance with the legal requirements to set a balanced and sustainable budget for 2021/22. Policy and Resources Committee had to recommend a 2021/22 balanced Budget proposal to the Council for its meeting in March 2021. It was good practice for service committees to consider and feedback on Budget proposals.

On Friday, 18th December 2020 the Policy and Resources Committee approved the 'Draft Revenue Budget 2021/22 - Proposals for Consultation' to begin public consultation on 21 December 21 to 22 January. The consultation was primarily conducted through the council's specialist "Have Your Say"

online portal but included many other methods including an online questionnaire; an ideas board for residents to post their ‘ideas’ and suggestions about the council budget; paper copies of the survey, including an easy read version; ‘Virtual’ Public Events for residents, young people and council staff; Council staff Facebook page; directly to the project team, Councillors, MPs and Senior Officers; and a specific email inbox. Results included 2,715 completed questionnaires, 236 “ideas” added to the Ideas Board and 74 questions. There was a relatively even spread of responses from the four Wirral constituencies. Full details of the responses were circulated to Members. Most comments were categorised predominantly into three themes: Children’s Services including The Hive, arts and culture (in particular noting retention of the Williamson Art Gallery) and refuse collection.

It was explained that this year the budget consultation process was truncated because of the shorter period of meetings caused by the pandemic, and the budget was under considerable pressure due to various effects linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. The final settlement figures from Government had not been received but the Committee were being asked their views on the options offered although Members had a duty to the whole of borough to set a balanced budget on 2 March.

Budget proposals were:
Options Review of the Neighbourhood Services Directorate
Additional and increased parking charges: Whole scale car parking review
Stopping School Crossing Patrols
Reduction in grass cutting and maintenance of roadside verges and all Parks and Open Spaces
Amenity space and grass verge maintenance cessation
Closure of Public Conveniences
3 weekly collection of general rubbish
Contract Efficiency Savings with BIFFA
Income generated from establishing targeted and discretionary environmental enforcement.

Members expressed the opinion that they did not want to see many of the options but were forced by the temporary budget situation. They were heartened that the feedback from the consultation showed that the public endorsed the Committee’s initial recommendations, including a rejection of both cuts to school crossing patrols and closure of public toilets and that there were positive suggestions such as rewilding that should allow for longer term benefits which were endorsed by the public. They discussed the application and consequences of rewilding in certain areas and acknowledged again that there was potential to reduce expenditure and assist biodiversity by appropriate reductions in grass cutting and maintenance. It was recognised that features such as flower meadows could not be created without cost. It was agreed that there would need to be consultation between officers,

members and local residents about the appropriate treatment of specific small open spaces. It was also suggested that income generating options made at the workshops could be explored in the future utilising experience of officers.

RESOLVED: That the Committee endorses the feedback from the budget workshops and recommends that the comments made during this meeting be considered by Policy and Resources Committee as part of the budget consultation.

31 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee, in co-operation with the other Policy and Service Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme.

The Chair commented that we could add in for a future meeting the report of the Environment and Climate Emergency Working Group.

RESOLVED –
That the proposed Environment, Climate Emergency, and Transport Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year be noted, subject to the addition at a future meeting of the report from the Environment and Climate Emergency Working Group.

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