

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 20 October 2021

Present: Councillor EA Grey (Chair)

Councillors H Collinson M Collins
S Foulkes S Mountney
C O'Hagan L Rowlands
I Williams C Cooke
B Berry A Brame

29 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed attendees and viewers to the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was webcast and retained on the Council's website for two years.

The Chair led the Committee Members in standing for a minute's silence in memory of Councillor Andy Corkhill, Alderman Gerry Ellis and MP David Amess who had all passed away recently.

The Chair spoke about Councillor Andy Corkhill and his genuine commitment to environmental and active travel matters.

30 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

31 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. There were no declarations of interests.

32 MINUTES

The Chair noted that there had been a commitment in an answer at the last meeting to publish the names of Members who had undertaken carbon literacy training. This will be added and the minutes republished.

Resolved (by assent) –

That, subject to the addition of the names of Members who had undertaken Carbon Literacy training, the minutes of the meeting of the

Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee held on 7 September 2021 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

33 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

Question 1 – Julien Priest

The Save Hoylake Beach Group, recently rebranded as Hoylake Beach Community, are campaigning on the basis that simple raking without the use of weedkiller will give them the 'golden sands' they expect.

In a previous one of these meetings a Hoylake and Meols Ward Councillor expressed their view that neglecting the beach for a number of years until such time as the new Beach Management Plan has been approved by Natural England will result in the beach vegetation situation being irreversible.

At that same meeting a Council Officer responded to said Councillor with the view that removal of the vegetation from the beach would require bulldozing.

The public facebook group 'Hoylake Beach - The Evidence' references studies on the control of Spartina that show mechanical removal leads to a 42.8% increase in plant density in subsequent growing seasons because this grass propagates via underground rhizomes [roots] and any activity which fragments and redistributes those rhizomes, such as raking, will increase the rate at which the grass can spread when compared to doing nothing.

The public facebook group 'Hoylake Beach - The Evidence' also references scientific papers that explain how one effective treatment for controlling the vegetation is complete removal of the substrate [sand] containing these rhizomes [roots] which extend 30-40 cm underground.

To eradicate vegetation from the beach scientific evidence points to a requirement for bulldozing the foreshore and wholesale removal of huge amounts of sand to a significant depth, not simply raking the surface of the beach.

My question:

- Are the current studies fully assessing what would be required to remove and eradicate vegetation from Hoylake beach?

And an assurance:

- Will the full impact of what is required, both environmental and financial, be explained in the public consultation so that those who expect to see "golden sands" with no vegetation fully understand exactly what they are asking for?

Answer: [Cllr Elizabeth Grey] The ecological and Geomorphological study is looking at the evolution of the foreshore based on historic changes and an improved understanding of the ecological communities. Predictions of future change based on climate change and management options will also be considered, however the study is not considering eradication of vegetation from Hoylake beach. We can and should include financial implications of each option in the public consultation, as well as explaining environmental implications. Thank you for your question.

Supplementary Question 1 – Julien Priest

The recently tabled motion calling for the Director of Neighbourhoods to engage with Natural England regards the continued spread of spartina grasses appears to be merely aiming to score political points and spread misinformation, fear and divisiveness in the community.

Item 47 resolution (iii) of the 16 March 2021 meeting of this committee agreed to consult with a Coastal Advisory Group of experts who were to offer impartial APOLITICAL advice on current and future windblown sand and beach management.

Can the committee give an assurance that this dialogue with an expert apolitical advisory group is under way and if not, why not, and if not yet taking place, when will this important dialogue begin?

Answer: [Cllr Elizabeth Grey] Officers were required by the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee to consult with the Coastal Advisory Group on the specification for movement of sand from the sea wall at Hoylake ahead of undertaking a HRA and applying for assent. The Coastal Advisory Group were emailed on the 4th August 2021. One response was received by the deadline of 23rd August. I can only assume that the group of specialists were expecting to meet with officers, and I admit that this is what I expected as Chair of the Committee, rather than just an email. If email is not the most appropriate or expected form of consultation, then I am sure we can arrange a meeting even if its virtual, to follow through with the requirements of this Committee when we voted to request officers to consult with the Coastal Advisory Group. I would expect that this meeting takes place before the end of the calendar year and discusses best practice for the management of wind-blown sand.

Question 2 – Keith Randles

(Partially read out by Chair in Mr. Randles Absence)

With community safety being within this committee's re-mit, please will someone visit the RNLI station in Hoylake and review the metal railing area that borders a public footpath which is being buried by sand?

There is now large volume of sand built up on the left-hand side of the station, which is now being heralded as the development of a sand dune. In reality, sand is being blown into this corner of the beach and the railing and the footpath are now completely hidden, only the tips of the railing now show.

This represents a very real health and safety issue, as in a major trip hazard and this was also a disabled access point too.

I have reported this twice before to Wirral Borough council with some matter of urgency, via 2 emails.

1st email was sent on the 14th April 2021 to Neil Thomas and Elizabeth Grey, with these same attached photographs.

"Not sure if you are aware but there is a footpath on the perimeter of the RNLI station which is blocked totally with a huge sand drift/dune that is blocking wheelchair and general public access to this area and needs immediate attention"

On the 15th of April had a reply from Elizabeth Grey regarding the above, "Thanks for your email and photos. I will share these with officers"
2nd email sent 25th June via Andrew Gardner, which was forwarded to Martin Jones.

"Dear Councillor Gardner, just an enquiry, who is responsible for this public footpath on the Old Hoylake baths site, which is now part of the RNLI station now, if you could find out for that would be very much appreciated. It's only a matter of time before someone has a serious accident due its height, as it is a trip hazard.

I did make Councillor Grey aware of this blocked footpath in April & to date did not receive any further updates from her regarding it.

As it is not part of the SSSI I feel it can & should be cleared for not only general public's safety but also disable access too, which I referred to Councillor Grey at the time of our email exchange.

The last photo is of Anglesey council workers clearing such a build-up of sand at Trearddur bay, they seem to recognize the dangers of these hazards"

To-date Martin Jones has not responded to my enquiry regarding this matter.

My question is:

Now that I have brought this potentially dangerous situation to this committee's attention (a blocked drain...), can you assure me that this matter will be given some serious consideration and have it investigated, and hopefully have it addressed soon before someone gets hurt?

Answer: [Cllr Elizabeth Grey] Thank you for your question regarding the wind-blown sand on the footpath at the perimeter of the RNLI station at Hoylake. The Council will undertake a risk assessment, and depending upon the outcome of the risk assessment any appropriate actions will be undertaken.

Question 3 – June Turner [00:11:58 –00:13:58]

(Partially read out by Chair in Dr. Turner's absence)

Between 1690 and 1739, the silting up and eventual sanding over of an offshore channel created a direct sand transport route between a sandbank in the Mersey and Formby. In a single stormy night, so much sand came ashore that the church had to be moved inland and the streets and agricultural lands were entirely covered.

Between 1918 and 1938, the north channel of the Ribble silted up and sanded over, providing a direct sand transport link between the town and an offshore sandbank and the beach level rose by around 7m. Despite building a sand shield, the cost of keeping the promenade open and access to Blackpool was eventually more than the town could afford. The problem was solved by actively planting Marram grass in loose sand, seeding the dune which now lie between the promenade and beach.

The parallels with Hoylake are inescapable. The Hoyle Lake channel has silted up, and in the last few years, finally sanded over. Hoylake is now exposed to the East Hoylake bank. A single storm is now capable of closing the promenade

In 2000 Jemmett and Smith prepared a report for the council, which concluded that the existing approach to managing wind blown sand (in 2000) was unsustainable, that costs would continue to spiral upwards and that the changes were the result of the natural evolution of Liverpool Bay. It also highlighted an issue of poor understanding and lack of acceptance of coastal habitat change by the local community, specifically referring to the misconception that Hoylake would “end up as another Parkgate”. The report proposed the deliberate encouragement of a band of embryo dunes to interrupt the wind-blown sand pathway from the East Hoyle Bank to the promenade and test public acceptance to the trial.

A similar trial has been carried out in Swansea, where a single storm in 2016 required a £20,000 clean-up operation. Using sand cleared from against the sea wall, chestnut paling fences and, local school children as manpower, Swansea Council in conjunction with Natural Resources Wales created test dunes. In 2018 Storm Ali against required another massive clean-up operation, but crucially, the part of the promenade behind the new dunes was unaffected.

My question

- How much is the council spending on average to deal with windblown sand now, and how much more do you anticipate needing to spend in the future?

And an assurance

- Given that the Jemmett report in 2020 has proven to be accurate in predicting the situation that we are in now, with respect to beach levels and habitat changes, will all parties represented at council undertake not to kick the can down the road again?

Answer: [Cllr Elizabeth Grey] Responsibility for dealing with the removal of wind-blown sand from all areas of Wirral coast falls to various service areas within the Council.

- Parks and Countryside manage the removal of wind-blown sand from areas which do not form part of the adopted highway. Since April 2019, approximately £8,000 per year has been spent on managing wind-blown sand and in future years this is predicted to rise to £10,000 per annum.
- Waste and Recycling remove accumulations of wind-blown sand from the adopted highway, [but] it's not possible to identify exact spend as planned removal activities are built into the existing contract with Biffa. However, since April 2019 approximately £2,800 per annum has been spent on reactive works in addition to the planned works undertaken through the contracts. A figure of £30,000 per annum is estimated for future activities.
- Highways remove sand from highways drainage systems on planned and reactive basis. The approximate spend per annum is £6,000, so in total this is £46,000 per year removing wind-blown sand.

The Council is undertaking public engagement and consultation on the development of beach management options for Hoylake. The Council is also undertaking an ecology and geomorphology study, which will consider likely future evolution of the beach under a range of management options. The preferred management option will be informed by these studies, but also by the framework set out by the discretionary advice received from Natural England and those set out by the habitat regulations.

34 **STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS**

No statements or petitions had been received.

35 **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

There were no questions by Members.

36 **STREET LIGHTING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME, PROGRESS REPORT**

The Assistant Director: Highways and Infrastructure presented the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services which provided an update for Members on progress of the Council's current programme to improve and upgrade its street lighting stock, as well as on potential future proposals for street lighting. The contract for upgrading street lighting was to end in December 2021.

Members asked questions about the progress of the work and established that:

- By the end of the contract all streetlights, other than where they would be covered by alternative projects such as redevelopment, would have been replaced.
- Replacement of concrete columns would be enabled with a report to the Capital Assets Group.
- Reports of LED lighting affecting insects would be monitored.
- Electric vehicle charging via lampposts would be trialled for 12 months then evaluated. Grant funding had been obtained to cover much of the costs of installation of charging units.
- LED lights provided a 60% energy saving compared to sodium lighting.

Resolved:

That the contents of this report be noted and the team be congratulated for the successful delivery and output of the project.

37 **LOVE WIRRAL STRATEGY**

The Assistant Director for Parks and Environment presented the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services which provided recommendations for the Council's Love Wirral Strategy (attached as Appendix 1 to the report), which

set out the Council's approach to further develop on the successes of the Loving our Environment strategy, engaging with Wirral's communities and visitors to protect, respect and enjoy Wirral's parks, beaches, towns and local areas. The Love Wirral Strategy focussed on set stages to tackle areas where littering, dog fouling, trade waste and graffiti and fly posting were prevalent to bring about positive behaviour change. Stages included identifying locations, auditing infrastructure, communication campaign, engagement with the community and enforcement, as a last resort.

Members noted how blessed Wirral was with volunteer groups who collected litter and looked after locations across the borough. They also noted how there was only a minority of people who caused the problems that required actions to alleviate.

Councillor Allan Brame suggested an amendment to record the Committee's thanks to the volunteer groups for the work they undertook.

This was seconded by Councillor Liz Grey.

Resolved – That

- (1) the Love Wirral Strategy be approved.**
- (2) regular progress updates on the delivery of the strategy be received.**
- (3) the Committee expresses its appreciate and thanks to the voluntary groups including the Wirral Wombles and New Brighteners who work hard to remove litter and maintain the cleanliness attractiveness of the Wirral.**

This minute was subsequently amended at the meeting on 15 November 2021 and the resolution now reads:

Resolved – That

- (1) the Love Wirral Strategy be approved.**
- (2) regular progress updates on the delivery of the strategy be received.**
- (3) the Committee expresses its appreciation and thanks to the voluntary groups including the Wirral Wombles and New Brighteners who work hard to remove litter and maintain the cleanliness and attractiveness of the Wirral.**

38 THE WIRRAL PLAN 2021-2026 DRAFT DELIVERY PLANS

The Director of Neighbourhood Services presented the report of the Chief Executive which presented The Wirral Plan 2021-26 Draft Delivery Plans. The Plans were approved at Council on 6 September 2021, together with the recommendation that engagement and discussion with relevant Committees

would take place to further shape the underpinning delivery plans and work programmes required to implement the Wirral Plan.

Members asked questions about details of the report and were reassured that the numbers of trees planted was net of disease and failure.

**Resolved –
That the draft Delivery Plan be noted.**

39 **ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Assistant Director for Highways and Infrastructure introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services which provided a performance update on areas which the Committee was responsible for. The aim was to bring quarterly reports subsequently.

Members questioned some of the terms used for clarification and praised progress shown.

**Resolved –
That the content of the performance report be noted.**

40 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Members considered the proposed work programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

**Resolved:
That the proposed Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport
Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal
year be noted.**