

Questions for Environment Committee 3 December 2020

Question 1

Will the members of the committee continue to back the unanimous declaration of a climate emergency by reflecting that emergency in all decisions, including those regarding Hoylake Beach which necessitate the development of sand dunes to combat the rising sea levels which threaten to flood parts of the Wirral?

Answer 1

Yes we will.

Supplementary question 1

Will this be made obvious to contractors as there was recent raking on Hoylake Beach.

Supplementary Answer 1

Yes.

Question 2

I would like to ask the Committee if the relevant Councillors could be informed in advance of any work scheduled for Hoylake beach and Hilbre Island. I suggest at least one week's notice be given unless there is an environmental incident which makes the attendance of contractors vital for public safety. However in such an emergency the chair of the committee should be informed immediately in any case.

I would also ask them if any such planned work could be posted on the Council website also one week in advance. This is partly to avoid wasting police time. Concerned members of the public who monitor the beach recently called them out to attend what they (reasonably) believed to be a wildlife crime taking place.

Answer 2

I'm happy to define 'relevant Councillors' as local Ward Councillors and members of this Committee and yes, that strikes me as a really good idea that advance warning could be given of any works where possible and put on the Council website.

Question 3

Raised an extensive question about poor management of street lighting repairs in Liscard and the safety risks this poses. Mr Jiang asked why the work has been so slow and when it is likely to be completed, highlighting that forty lights are out and one stretch of road has no lights.

Answer 3

All the council's streetlights on main roads were replaced with more reliable and energy-efficient LED lanterns in 2016. The council's remaining 28,000 street lights on all its other roads are currently being replaced with LED and this work will be completed by autumn 2021. There is a location-based schedule of work on this replacement programme set by our supplier SSE, based on most efficient use of their resources and value for money for the council. Meanwhile we have significantly improved the on-line process by which customers can report routine street lighting faults. Where available resource allows, we aim to attend to priority repairs within 15 working days. The majority are repaired during the first attendance, but if supply faults or replacement equipment is identified this can take a lot longer to resolve. There are currently about 5% of our street lights not working at any one time, which is similar to the national average, but we aim to improve this once the LED programme is concluded.

Supplementary question 3

Why is there inconsistency with other areas being replaced when Liscard has been without so many lights for over a year?

Supplementary Answer 3

We are addressing the new street lighting policy which should work towards addressing any problems we may have.

Question 4

What internal scrutiny and performance management system is there to be in place monitoring the council officer responsible for Hoylake foreshore under the soon to be enacted restructure of the department for Parks, Allotments and Countryside? Particularly in light of the likely changes to the way that Hoylake foreshore is to be managed/protected in future and the previous disruptive politicisation of beach management.

Answer 4

Following the restructure the appointed managers will be subjected to the Corporate Human Resources policies and any concerns about performance or failure to comply with standard Corporate response times can be logged through the Corporate Complaint System all complaints will be investigated and all complainants will be responded to in line with Corporate complaints policy.

With regard to the historical issues raised I can advise that the current Local Leader wasn't involved in the 2010 beach management agreement, which expired in 2015 but they did request for it to be taken down from the Council website as GDPR concerns had been raised. However, it is our understanding that it remains posted on the Hoylake Village Life website.

The HRA for the renewed sandyacht licence was submitted to Natural England on 25th November at Wirral Council's expense (£3500 fee to contractor plus officer time). Natural England have previously permitted the licence, however it remains to be seen what their comments will be this time around.

A full account of how information was assembled to inform the new HRA, who was consulted and timescales, is available if necessary – I have been advised by Officers that frequent consultation with the new secretary took place by telephone and email. The new secretary has been kept informed at each and every step throughout the process. Timescales have been aimed at recommencement of sandyachting in spring 2021.

Question 5

Will the council review the recommendations of the important Jemmett report of 2000 and publish into the public domain an update to that in the light of findings of the new geomorphological survey?

Answer 5:

Wirral Council will be appointing an independent, competent, suitably qualified expert(s) to undertake the required Ecological and Geomorphological Studies and they will be instructed on a specification based on the formal guidance report as provided by Natural England in 2020.

Officers will be basing future recommendations to Members based on the very latest information provided by Natural England and the appointed experts. There are no plans to use any information from other non-Council appointed source. If further information is required then the required experts will be appointed to provide the latest information and data as Officers deem required.

Question 6

Will the council review the recommendations of the important Jemmett report of 2000 and publish into the public domain an update to that in the light of findings of the new geomorphological survey?

Answer 6

I don't see that that would be a problem if it is already in the public domain. It is perfectly reasonable for us to do that. That can be published alongside the current geomorphological survey that we get commissioned.

Wirral Council will be appointing an independent, competent, suitably qualified expert(s) to undertake the required Ecological and Geomorphological Studies and they will be instructed on a specification based on the formal guidance report as provided by Natural England in 2020.

Officers will be basing future recommendations to Members based on the very latest information provided by Natural England and the appointed experts. There are no plans to use any information from other non-Council appointed source. If further information is required then the required experts will be appointed to provide the latest information and data as Officers deem required.

Supplementary question 6

Will the Council consider alternative and more affordable solutions to discharge surface water from the road?

Supplementary Answer 6

I will ask Neil Thomas to report back to me about if we can do that.

(Additional information from Neil Thomas: The Council, in line with its Coastal Strategy, is looking to reinforce coastal defences at Meols Parade. The first stage to developing a business case to secure grant aid funding for this is to develop a feasibility study which will look at identifying all possible benefits the scheme could realise. The Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Appraisal Guidance encourages risk management authorities to consider additional, wider benefits when developing schemes in order to take a joined-up approach with flood risk management activities and other initiatives nearby. The drainage issues nearby at Hoylake present such an opportunity for inclusion within the Meols Parade scheme and as such the business case for the feasibility study will include for their consideration as they may bring additional, measurable, flood risk and possible water quality benefits to the scheme. There is no guarantee however that the business case for the feasibility study or the scheme itself will be supported and funding secured.

This is not a short term proposal however with the current Environment Agency Investment Programme identifying indicative funding in 2027/28.)