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## ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 3 December 2020

Present: Councillor EA Grey (Chair)

Councillors	C Cooke	S Foulkes
	B Berry	C Muspratt
	H Cameron	T Norbury
	A Corkhill	I Williams
	T Cox	A Wright

### 11 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### 12 APOLOGIES

The Chair announced that no apologies had been received.

A membership query was raised which would be taken up as a potential issue for Standards Committee.

### 13 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.

No declarations of interest were made.

### 14 MINUTES

**Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 October, 2020, be approved and adopted as a correct record subject to an amendment to the proposed work programme from parking charges which is already covered in the work programme to the problem of litter as an additional item.**

### 15 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

The Chair reported that no questions from Members had been submitted. However, five questions from the public had been submitted and the Chair invited each individual to ask their question. The questions, answers and any supplementaries are details in the attached document.

## 16 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS

A statement was made by Mr Paul Brownbill regarding Hoylake Beach.

Mr Brownbill noted that as a Wirral resident he felt the management of the beach was not just an issue for Hoylake and Meols but was important to all Wirral residents who used it. He stated his support for the recent policy with regards to allowing nature on the beach and asked that it be noted that the beach was very popular with families and appreciated by many for its natural beauty.

The Chair noted Mr Brownbill's statement.

## 17 NETWORK MANAGEMENT PLAN

Simon Fox, Assistant Director for Highways and Infrastructure, introduced a report from the Director of Neighbourhood Services on the Network Management Plan (NMP) and sought approval to appoint a statutory Traffic Manager. The NMP outlined the Council's approach to the network management duty placed upon it by the Traffic Management Act 2004. The plan reflected updates to the local network arrangements, changes in national and local priorities as well as legislative changes.

The Chair thanked Simon Fox and all the officers involved for the report and commended the references to sustainability and air quality.

Members acknowledged it was a comprehensive report and commended officers for achieving level 3 funding based on how well the Local Authority looks after the Network as part of the devolved City Region. Members asked that reference to electric vehicle charging points, bike hire schemes, car sharing schemes, and provisions for pedestrians be added which Simon Fox agreed could be considered and built into the plan. It was requested that 'may' be changed to 'will' in point 10 regarding the Environment and Climate implications which it was agreed would be the case for future reports as well. Concerns were raised about potential congestion and pollution from freight routes following Brexit and it was agreed that this would be investigated further. It was asked that hyperlinks be inserted when reference to other documents and it was agreed these would be added to the final version.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Steve Foulkes, it was -

### **Resolved – That**

- (1) the report be noted and the Council's approach to its Network Management duty be endorsed;**

- (2) the draft Wirral Network Management Plan (NMP) be approved and the Director of Neighbourhood Services be authorised to finalise any further minor changes in consultation with the Chair and Spokespersons of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee;**
- (3) it be noted that the post of Senior Network Manager, Highways & Infrastructure, performs the role of Traffic Manager for Wirral Council under the Traffic Management Act, 2004.**

18 **HIGHWAYS INFRASTRUCTURE ASSET MANAGEMENT POLICY, STRATEGY AND STREET LIGHTING POLICY**

Simon Fox, Assistant Director for Highways and Infrastructure, introduced a report from the Director of Neighbourhood Services to approve and adopt the 2020 Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy (HIAMP), 2020 Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy (HIAMS) and 2020-2025 Street Lighting Policy.

The HIAMP and HIAMS represented no change in direction from those approved by the Cabinet Member in February 2020 but were reviewed and updated to align more closely with the Wirral Plan 2025, specifically the themes for 'Safe and Pleasant Communities' and 'Sustainable Environment'. The 2020-2025 Street Lighting Policy outlined the positive effect street lighting had on the ambiance of a place and its reputation, and the role it plays in reducing crime and fear of crime. The Policy stated that lighting equipment provided should be suitable for fulfilling the lighting needs in each specific area, illuminating it in the most effective manner.

Members queried the luminosity of the streetlights, when the full LED replacement would be completed, whether areas with older residents could be prioritised, and whether the streetlight map displayed all the streetlights accurately. Simon Fox confirmed a Public Consultation was being carried out to understand residents attitudes with regards to luminosity and backlighting and stated that the contractual finish date for the LED project was Autumn 2021 but additional works may result in a legitimate extension to early 2022. It was noted that streetlights across the whole borough were being replaced and that the contractor had been given the ability to determine where resources were best placed to ensure value for money, but that demographics were always considered and could be looked at again. It was agreed that specific cases where the new streetlight map may not locate all the streetlights could be investigated and that Councillors would be liaised with regarding any planned changes to columns.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Chris Cooke, it was -

**Resolved: That**

- (1) the report be noted and the authority's approach to the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management be endorsed.**
- (2) the draft Wirral 2020 HIAMP, 2020 HIAMS and 2020-2025 Street Lighting Policy be approved and the Director of Neighbourhood Services be authorised to make any further amendments that the Director considers will correct errors and omissions or will otherwise aid in the operation of the policy in consultation with the Chair and Spokespersons of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee.**

19 **HOYLAKE BEACH MANAGEMENT**

Colin Clayton, Assistant Director for Parks and the Environment, introduced a report from the Director of Neighbourhood Services on the management of Hoylake beach. The future management of Hoylake beach aligned with both the Sustainable Environment and Safe and Pleasant Communities themes of the Wirral Plan 2025.

The report set out the progress in delivering the recommendations of the Executive Member Decision of 13 March 2020 to determine a long-term management strategy for Hoylake beach and provided an update on the decision to cease mechanical raking. In line with the guidance from Natural England Officers had established that a scientific evidence base of the beach ecology and geomorphological changes was needed in order that the future options for the beach could be developed. Based on the draft specification it was estimated that this would cost in the region of £30,000 from existing budgets including the Climate Emergency fund.

Members asked officers to outline the objectives of the scientific study, to which it was clarified that the objectives of the ecological and geomorphological studies were to define the extent and variety of vegetation growth on Hoylake foreshore, as well as how it will respond to sediment changed in order to model how the foreshore would evolve. It was confirmed that the studies would look at both the short and longer term so current drainage could be assessed as well as the future of the beach.

The cost of the studies was discussed and the issue of value for money raised, with Members recommending accredited academics be approached for the contract and querying whether it would be appropriate to use Climate Emergency Funding. Colin Clayton confirmed that academic institutions would be welcomed to bid for the contract through the formal bidding process as long as they met the procurement requirements.

The Committee debated the parameters of a public consultation given the legal limits which would be applied by Natural England and agreed an independent and transparent process consulting all stakeholders was needed. It was agreed that given the public interest in the topic, officers would work with the Chair and spokes to identify all groups which should be consulted.

An amendment to the recommendations was then moved by Councillor Christina Muspratt, seconded by Councillor Steve Foulkes, that –

- (1) Note the progress in developing a specification for an ecological and geomorphological survey and, subject to a suitable budget being identified in consultation with the E, CE & T Committee, to agree to the procurement of independent studies as a scientific evidence base upon which to develop future management options for Hoylake beach.
- (2) Agree that the Director of Neighbourhoods produces a Communications Strategy for the development of the beach management plan for Hoylake in consultation with a politically proportionate Working Group.
- (3) Approve the submission of an extension request for assent to NE for the continuation of non-vegetation management activities at Hoylake beach which were not subject to cessation as a result of the Cabinet Member decision of 13 March 2020, subject to clear specification of these activities and agreement with the Committee, and that all such activities be publicised and local councillors and this committee be notified at least a week in advance of any such planned activities.

The amendment was put and won (10:1).

#### **Resolved – That**

- (1) the progress in developing a specification for an ecological and geomorphological survey be noted and, subject to a suitable budget being identified in consultation with the Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport Committee, to agree to the procurement of independent studies as a scientific evidence base upon which to develop future management options for Hoylake beach.**
- (2) the Director of Neighbourhoods produce a Communications Strategy for the development of the beach management plan for Hoylake in consultation with a politically proportionate Working Group.**
- (3) the submission be approved of an extension request for assent to Natural England for the continuation of non-vegetation management activities at Hoylake beach which were not subject to cessation as a result of the Cabinet Member decision of 13 March 2020, subject to clear specification of these activities and agreement with the Committee, and that all such activities be**

**publicised and local councillors and this committee be notified at least a week in advance of any such planned activities.**

20 **UPDATE ON THE EXERCISE TO TRIAL ALTERNATIVES TO GLYPHOSATE IN THE USE OF WEED CONTROL**

Colin Clayton, Assistant Director for Parks and the Environment, introduced a report from the Director of Neighbourhood Services on an update of the position regarding the exercise to trial alternative methods of weed control. The Council has historically used glyphosate, under licence, for weed control across the authority and was under licence until 2022 with the delivery of weed control operations undertaken by the Council's contractor Man Coed.

In response to the recommendations of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 28th November 2019, officers had conducted a series of exercises to trial alternative methods of weed control with the report providing the findings identified for each method. The Committee was also updated on the delivery of the weed control programme, which was subject to delay caused by service cessation during the initial Covid-19 lock down. The exercise had so far demonstrated that alternative weed control methods were less effective, and the machinery required was more expensive. It was concluded that alternatives would continue to be sought and the Committee updated, but that glyphosate was the only practical method in the short to medium term in certain areas.

The Committee debated the matter at some length given that other countries had banned glyphosate and other councils were also struggling to find a workable alternative. It was suggested that international case studies be considered and community involvement with clearing weeds was proposed, however Colin Clayton explained upscaling community involvement like that trialled at New Brighton would be difficult and required significant training. Members agreed that glyphosate would have to be phased out while working to find an effective alternative.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Steve Foulkes, it was –

**Resolved – That**

- (1) the contents of this report and outcome to date of the exercise to trial glyphosate alternatives for weed control be noted.**
- (2) glyphosate will not be used for weed control operations across the Parks and Countryside estate (with the limited exceptions set out in this report).**
- (3) the exercise to trial alternative methods of weed control will continue during the next 12 months with Committee updated further following this.**

## **CAR PARKING CHARGES - WORKING GROUP**

The Chair introduced and presented the report from the Working Group on Car Parking Charges which was then considered by Members.

The report was brought to the Policy and Resources Committee on the 7th October 2020 by the Director of Neighbourhood Services. This report 'car parking charges options' informed Members of considerations for the reintroduction of the current car parking charges in Wirral in 2020/21 and alternative options for parking charges in 2021/22 and beyond. The group considered the request made by the Policy and Resource Committee to consider the options attached in appendix 1 of the report. After much debate, Members considered options 4 and 6 (to re-introduce parking charges immediately at all locations and respectively and to re-introduce charges at long-stay and on-street and County parks but not 'shoppers' car parks) acceptable with some caveats. They wished to submit these to the Policy and Resource Committee for consideration.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Christina Muspratt, it was –

### **Resolved (7:4) – That**

**(1) the findings of the Working Group attached as appendix 1 of this report be noted and the recommendations be agreed:**

- **Members support the upcoming transport strategy and recommend that any future transport strategy consults with Members, businesses, communities to ensure that it is environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable.**
- **The panel also recommends that a comprehensive review and survey is undertaken in Wirral as to the local impact of car parking charges on footfall and spend in retail areas and the high street.**
- **Members considered the request made by the Policy and Resource committee to consider the options attached in appendix 1 of this report. After much debate, Members considered the following options were acceptable and wish to submit them to the Policy and Resource Committee for consideration.**

**Option 4 (re-introduce parking charges immediately at all locations)**

**Members understood that there would be no reintroduction of car parking charges until early 2021. They acknowledge the need to support local retailers during the second lockdown and in the run up to Christmas. Five of the six working group Members wished to put**

forward Option 4 to be considered alongside any subsequent reviews or studies.

Two of the five Members requested an additional caveat that Country Parks remain free until after lockdown due to the perceived health and wellbeing implications. Concerns were raised that introducing car parking charges in Country Parks would limit their accessibility to low-income car owners, especially during COVID-19 when more people are facing financial pressures. One Member also raised the point that charging for parking in country parks did not reduce visitor number and that the income generated would help with repairs and maintenance of the parks.

Option 6 (re-introduce charges at long-stay and on-street and County parks but not 'shoppers' car parks) One Member of the working group also wished to put forward option 6 for consideration. This Member was satisfied with this option in its entirety, however other working group members again raised concerns about reintroduction of car parking charges in Country Parks, for the reasons stated above and because of the environmental impact.

(2) this report be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee for their consideration.

## 22 ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair presented the Work Programme for review.

Members asked that allotments be removed as they had been thoroughly considered by a previous Working Group; that Hoylake Beach Management be addressed at the next meeting which the Chair agreed could be discussed at the agenda setting meeting; and that a Road Safety Working Group be established.

**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 additional requests and the deletion of allotments.**

## 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 25<sup>th</sup> 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.)

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