

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Monday, 23 October 2023

Present: Councillor EA Grey (Chair)

Councillors	S Foulkes	M Booth
	A Ainsworth	G Davies
	G Jenkinson	Jason Walsh
	P Jobson	A Brame
	V Wilson	E Lamb

40 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.

41 APOLOGIES

Councillor Naomi Graham sent apologies. Councillor Ed Lamb was in attendance as substitute.

42 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.

43 MINUTES

The Head of Legal Services advised Members that due to the volume of public questions received at the September meeting of this committee, written responses were provided outside of the meeting, and it was agreed that these responses would be included in the minutes.

Unfortunately, due to an administrative error, one question and response was not included. In order to correct this, it was proposed that this be included in the minutes of this meeting.

Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2023 be approved as a correct record with the above correction.

44 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

44.1 Public Questions

The following questions were received from members of the public.

Jim Cadwallader asked a question regarding what steps the Council were taking to reuse older assets, such as train tracks, in an effort to reduce the carbon footprint.

The Chair responded that the current railway structure is inaccessible and not fit for purpose. This is covered in the Birkenhead 2040 Framework in the creation of Dock Branch Park, which will see such assets transformed into an appealing natural and practical park space.

Barbara Gleave asked a question regarding reducing the speed limits on minor roads and country lanes to 40mph, in order to promote safety for cyclists.

The Chair responded that a Road Safety Strategy had been adopted by the Liverpool City Region. Recommendations identified by the strategy include a review of existing speed limits on all A, B and C roads. Vulnerable road users are part of the review.

Anne Adern asked a question regarding the publicity approach to making the public aware of quieter electric vehicles.

The Chair responded that this topic would be included on all road safety interventions that would be delivered and national campaigns would be supported where possible.

Jane Turner asked a question regarding the possibility of Council officers investigating options to improve pedestrian and disabled access, in co-operation with Natural England, to the tidal area of Hoylake Beach. Also requesting for this to be considered before a final beach management plan is implemented.

The Chair informed that the Council has a duty under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to conserve and enhance diverse geological features, therefore anything that may cause damage to such features would be an offence. Natural England had advised that a Habitat Regulations Assessment must precede any work as well as an Equalities Impact Assessment. The Committee have also requested two further options be explored following the 2022 consultation. The Council will also continue to monitor changes at Hoylake following the implementation of the Beach Management Plan and will consider the provision of such boardwalks if necessary.

Rosemary Chandler asked a question regarding what percentage of waste is recycled in Wirral and what can be done to improve this statistic.

The Chair responded that the rate of recycling in 2022/23 was 31.2%. The Environment Act 2021 includes a mandate for recycling kerbside waste. The Resources and Waste Strategy 2018 also includes targets for recycling collections. An upcoming DERFA consultation is likely to inform the basis of regulation and guidance for recycling collection. Wirral has also partnered with the Liverpool City Region districts in the Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority Strategic Waste Partnership. This partnership has detailed an action plan which works toward the Zero Waste Strategy. This work will take some years to implement, but in the meantime work is going toward behaviour change and education campaigns.

Don Naylor asked a question regarding areas of sewage slicks and environmental hazards in water, specifically the River Dee in Chester, and if it would be possible for the Council to sign post residents to online alerts in order to spotlight hazards to health.

The Chair responded that the Environment Agency monitors water quality within four areas (Meols, Moreton, Wallasey and West Kirby). Wirral Council is signed up to receive daily notifications from the agency regarding the risk forecast, said information is also available to members of the public via the agency's website. If a beach is at risk of closing for bathing then physical notification is displayed on notice boards.

Tim Brunsden asked a question regarding the opportunity to cycle and walk within New Brighton, and the wider area, making areas currently inaccessible for pedestrians more accessible to all.

The Chair responded that there are ambitions within the emerging Local Plan and the Birkenhead 2040 to prioritise walking and cycle routes. The council is currently working closely with National Highways to flag issues and seek further funding for improvements. Furthermore, plans for active travel improvements for local communities will be consulted on in Spring.

Marie Watson submitted a question regarding waterlogging in parts of Hoylake Beach, and, if subject to Natural England approval, would the Council consider trials such as cutting a small herringbone drain into the area to assist with drainage.

The Chair responded that due to the beaches proximity to the sea, it is prone to become wet following tidal action and being at sea level. The Council has a duty under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to conserve and enhance diverse geological features, therefore anything that may cause damage to such features would be an offence. Natural England had advised that a

Habitat Regulations Assessment must precede any work as well as a marine licence from the Marine Management Organisation.

Julien Priest asked a question regarding road safety and pedestrian crossings, and if the Council was planning to put out more zebra crossings and if not, why this cannot be done.

The Chair responded with an overview of the current pedestrian crossing measures already situated within Hoylake, which include Pelican, Puffin and School Crossing Patrols. Due to financial constraints it is not possible to resolve all of the road calming concerns received from members of the public. A casualty analysis is undertaken annually to advise a targeted approach for reducing road casualties. Overall the work of members and officers will advise the next Combined Authority Transport Plan.

Charlotte Smith asked a question regarding an update on the Hoylake Beach Management Plan and possible consultation.

The Chair responded informing the questioner that the Committee passed a resolution in November 2022 which required the development of two further options for beach management. Any further development work must involve Natural England and Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service. Work may commence when agreement has been reached between all above parties.

Catherine Evans asked a question on behalf of Together Declaration. The question regarded an open invitation to the Members of the committee to attend a public forum hosted by Together Declaration regarding low traffic neighbourhoods, 20mph schemes amongst other subjects.

The Chair clarified that the questioner was a candidate for the Freedom Alliance at the election and was also the Leader of the party. The chair also clarified that there were no plans for a blanket 20mph and confirmed that she welcomed consultation with the wider business community noting that outcomes would be reviewed once the schemes had been implemented.

Niamh McGarry-Gribbon asked a question regarding the discrepancies between figures resulting in injuries from collisions that have been previously published.

The Chair responded that the Committee had previously approved the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Combined Authority Transport Plan for 23/24. Each scheme within this report gave a number of personal recorded injuries, which totalled to 214 over a five-year period. The figure given at the previous Committee meeting related to different data from a six-year period, which totalled 617 (27 of which were fatalities). The figure of 214 is lower because it only includes those relevant to the scheme areas as opposed to the entire borough.

Correction from Minutes for 20 September Committee

Keith Randals asked the below question

On 26th of December 2018 the RNLI/HSC held their very last Tug-a-War charity event upon Hoylake beach.

I have attached a YouTube link for all committee members to view.

<https://youtu.be/4HP1kyqyVJQ?si=SnQYbVTvWtaDYPaA>

From the aerial footage within that clip, it clearly shows an unvegetated and well-maintained beach.

In the 1st 6 months of 2019, grasses were suddenly starting to appear all over Hoylake beach, which was unusual as in preceding years the councils beach management operations had been working so well to prevent this happening.

My Question is

How many times was Hoylake beach raked and wind-blown sand removed from sea wall from 1st April to 1st September in 2019?

Answer

Thank you for your question. The Council schedule, at that time, was to rake Hoylake Beach up to 3 times per week between April and September. However, due to the dynamic nature of the beach and its use this schedule could vary on occasions. For instance, in the summer during periods of high visitor use, we would rake more frequently than this. At other times due to high tides when the beach is covered or partially covered it would not be possible to stick rigidly to this schedule or rake the entire area. As you may be aware Hoylake Beach was raked up until 23rd July 2019, when the beach rake broke and funds for a new rake had to be secured. It should be noted though, that at that time raking was not the primary method of controlling vegetation growth on Hoylake Beach, this was achieved with Glyphosate which ceased to be used later than year.

44.2 Statements and petitions

Katy Davies presented a petition in relation to 20mph speed limits on China Farm Lane.

Gail Jenkinson presented a petition in relation to the ceasing of a school bus service from West Kirby Grammar School to Thingwall and Irby.

44.3 Questions by Members

There were no questions by Members.

45 **BIODIVERSITY & NET GAIN STRATEGY**

The Assistant Director of Parks and Environment introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services to the Committee. The report explained that the Biodiversity & Net Gain Strategy had been developed as a proactive response to the growing environmental challenges, emphasising the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity within Wirral and its neighbouring regions. The strategy outlined a set of priorities and objectives aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity, ensuring its long-term survival, and fostering wider environmental benefits. It encouraged the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, including local communities, businesses, and wildlife organisations, in achieving the outlined objectives.

Members thanked officers for the report and extended thanks to community and voluntary groups who work with officers on Biodiversity. Queries were raised about the biodiversity action plan, management plans and enforcement action as well as monitoring of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Members queried and were informed of the biodiversity working group which will work on the action plan as well as work being undertaken on SSSIs. Also queried was the reach of the consultation with Members noting that many people were contacted as part of the consultation but chose not to respond. Members considered the possibility of developers degrading possible sites and were informed that any available data is used to investigate this. Members asked for clarification on SSRI site status to come back to committee and asked that Elected Members be part of the working group. Also requested was a tab of the Members Portal for re-wilding requests.

Resolved – That the Biodiversity & Net Gain Strategy be approved.

46 **WINTER SERVICE PLAN**

The Assistant Director of Highways and Infrastructure introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services to the Committee. The purpose of the report was to notify the Committee that the Highway Winter Service Operational Plan, detailing the manner in which the Council's highway winter service operations will be carried out during the winter period 2023/24 had been approved, and to provide details of the plan.

Members discussed the disappearance of gritting bins and particular routes not being gritted, despite requests. Officers responded to state that requests could be taken for grit bin locations, but they would review requests using more evidence and risk-based positions. Members were also informed that there was a limit to what is logistically possible, but suggestions would be considered. Also discussed was the variances of British Weather and differences in routes between standard and mini gritters. Members also

requested that the grit bin location map be reinstated on the website and were informed this would be possible, but that the location of bins was under review. Also discussed was active travel routes and the environmental impact of gritting salt.

Resolved – That officers be thanked for their work and the contents of the report be noted.

47 **WEED TREATMENT PROVISION**

The Assistant Director of Parks and Environment introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services to the Committee. The report proposed a new weed control contract for a two-year period, commencing in March 2024 until March 2026, following the end of the previous contract. This was to allow time for an alternative approach to weed control to be considered, budget approved and for implementation.

Members discussed the safety and environmental impact of the various options including Nomix Duel with Members being assured that this product was safe. Also discussed were issues raised in wards such as areas not being treated and areas such as grass verges and front gardens being sprayed which had caused damage. Members were informed that weather played a part in weed treatment and that issues of damage should be reported to officers who will review it with the contractor. The Chair proposed to Members that given the strength of feeling a working group be formed to consider options further.

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

Resolved – That,

(1) An open competitive tender process be commenced to secure the future supplier of the weed control service, for the period March 2024 to March 2026;

(2) the Director of Neighbourhood Services be authorised to award the contract to the highest scoring tender within approved budget and in accordance with the Most Economically Advantageous Tender ‘MEAT’ criteria.

(3) a working group be established comprising of one Member from each political group, officers and relevant stakeholders to investigate the options for the future of the service in more detail.

48 **CARBON LITERACY**

The Climate Emergency Manager introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhoods Services to the Committee. The report supported the Wirral Plan 2021-2026 sustainable environment priority by ensuring council officers

were knowledgeable and aware of the impacts Climate Emergency had on a local and global scale. It then challenged officers to commit to change on a personal and professional level using knowledge and skills developed through their training.

Members discussed the benefits of taking the course, and making the pledge stating that there were topics discussed during the training which had stuck with them. Also noted was the request from the Climate Emergency Team that Committee report writers were given training and possible legal challenge towards the council if Climate Emergency targets were not met. Members thanked Lucy Northey, the Climate Emergency Manager for her work on the carbon literacy programme and the report.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

49 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Legal Services presented the report and advised Members that the Committee in co-operation with the other Policy and Service Committees, is responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which are within the remit of the Committee.

Members noted slippage of work programme items such as Active Travel Strategy and asked for assurance that it would be coming to committee in 2024.

Also discussed was an item on flood risk and Members involvement in regards to the Bio-diversity action plan and requested updates on the allotment task and finish, land availability for tree planting and re-wilding and sale of assets which can be utilised for this.

Resolved – That the work programme be noted with the above additions.