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ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 1 March 2022

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

68 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 a Minute's silence to reflect on the situation in Ukraine and the impact on all sides of conflict across the world.

69 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

70 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.

71 MINUTES

The Chair highlighted three items which she believed needed to be clarified or which had been omitted in the minutes which were:

Minute 63 - officers promised to start an allotment strategy advisory board on the lines of the road safety strategy board

Minute 66 – amend the bullet point concerning school crossings to say - Members expressed concern at the proposal to reduce school crossing patrols;

Minute 67 – note that the parking strategy was to be added.

Resolved:

Subject to the three amendments, detailed above, that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee held on 20 January 2022 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

The Chair indicated that she was inclined to amend the order of the items so that the petition could be heard before the questions so that the children presenting the petition could leave the meeting after their presentation. This was agreed by assent.

72 **STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS**

Petition Presented by Pupils of Woodlands Primary School

Good evening everyone. My name is Yasin.

Do you want to help us be healthy and help the environment? Children are taught how to be safe in the world from when we are little. Our families, our teachers, the Council, campaigners and the police all have a hand in educating us. What do we do when some grown-ups who are meant to know better don't always follow the rules or consider their own safety for us children? At our amazing school at Woodlands Primary, we are having great trouble with road safety and our lives are at risk.

We are here to ask you to help us, but not only to feel better but physically be safer. Some of our parents are parking all over the place. They are ignoring yellow lines and zigzags. They are not mindful of our residents. They are ignoring our safety. We have had two children involved in accidents on our road, and countless terrifying near misses. There are residential parking spaces on one side which narrows the road even more. The lack of space makes people behave strangely and everyday cars are facing each other trying to bully their way through, then arguing in front of young children about who is right and wrong. We have a photo of an example of dangerous parking on pavement by drivers, meaning we children have to walk on the road with traffic to get past.

Where our original school was built, we had a one-way system and speed bumps to take care of our past pupils. What about our present pupils and our future selves? Just imagine a child getting knocked down and seriously hurt. This happens. Children die on dangerous roads. What if that's someone we know? Or it could be me or you. There are two schools close to each other, that is hundreds of families. We need your help. Will you protect us? Will you give us our rights to safety? Prevention is better than cure. Don't let me be afraid every day from a real threat. Please help us. One world. One home. One chance. Thank you for listening.

Response: Thank you very much for taking the time to attend. It is very much appreciated. As a mum and as a teacher, safety around schools is something I feel very strongly about indeed. Everybody in the room has sympathy with what you are saying as well.

We really do want to provide all children in Wirral with the opportunity to walk, cycle and scoot to schools safely, without fear of traffic. We have actually got some excellent projects. The road safety team are doing some really good work with a variety of schools. We're trialling different things across the borough. The school has actually been invited to join us already in working on some of these projects and we'd like to extend again that invitation to join us and work with us, alongside a dedicated Active Travel officer, and work with the whole school community to get on board not just those of you who are already aware of the problems, and suffering from the problems, but also the members of your school community who were quite rightly highlighted by the children as causing the problem, because most of the problem is the school run around schools. So you have identified the problem correctly and our team will work with you. We will extend that offer again. We've not heard back from the school, if we hear back we'd be delighted to work with the school. We're particularly keen to work with schools who really want to be on board like this. It is very clear now that we've got families in your school who really do want to do this.

73 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

March Question from Steven Taylor

Good evening Councillors, thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. My name is Steve Taylor, I am a New Brighton resident and an active member of both The New Brighteners and Wirral Wombles.

I have come here today to ask a question of Cllr Grey as chairman of this committee concerning the dilapidated state of the litter bins on the streets of New Brighton. Firstly, I would like to provide some background to the issue in order to provide a little context. I have also provided a number of photos and a spreadsheet (circulated with members prior to the meeting) to give members an insight into the extent of the problem.

As a volunteer litter picker I get to see quite a lot of the bins in and around the area and of late I have become increasingly concerned specifically at the loss and damage to bins on Ian Fraser Walk which is frequented by hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. Over the last 2 years 5 of the 18 bins there have been torn from the sea wall through storm damage, with a further 2 damaged beyond repair. There are several others displaying serious damage and looking extremely susceptible to further storms.

Having witnessed the awful state of the bins on Ian Fraser Walk I decided I would expand my attention to all of the bins throughout the New Brighton Coastal Community Area to see if the problem was more extensive, and so, over the last two weeks I have conducted a survey of ALL of the bins in New Brighton. The results were sobering. Of the 149 bins on our streets, 74 (50%) are in need of replacement. When confining the sample to just the promenade the figures are even more alarming. Of the 79 bins on the prom, 53 (67%) are in need of replacement.

This issue will clearly require a significant investment in order to rectify, however, I am informed that the council have no current plans to replace any

of the bins on Ian Fraser Walk this financial year, and, due to proposed Council budget cuts, the litter bin budget for 2022/23 may be suspended, in which case there is no realistic prospect of replacing any of these damaged bins in the foreseeable future.

So, in light of this situation I would like to ask the following question of Cllr Grey: Do the Council have any plans in place to replace damaged bins in New Brighton, and if not, can special provision be made to commence a programme for renewal before the forthcoming summer season?

Answer: Thank you for your question. You have highlighted a real problem with the bins along the front in New Brighton and I have urged officers to ensure that they are replaced and repaired as appropriate as soon as possible. We are all genuinely very grateful for the work that you do. We're aware of the huge amount of community work that you do and we're very appreciative of the New Brighteners and Wombles. It is vital this is not made more difficult with missing and broken bins.

However, as you know we are operating under extreme budget constraints, and this will mean that new bins cannot be provided this financial year. You will also know that the bespoke bins required for much of New Brighton are much more expensive than the usual bins and that will add to the pressure when they need replacing.

Officers are currently surveying the litter bins within New Brighton, Ian Fraser walk and surrounding areas of the promenade locations and assessing the condition for a renewal/replacement bin scheme. Although there is no intention at this time to install new bins before the new financial year the Council will remove any damaged bins and at a later stage will replace bins where required. Once the area officers have completed a survey of the general litter bin provision in the New Brighton promenade and retail area to ensure that there are both the required numbers of bins available to meet demand, and crucially, that all bins are sited in locations that optimises usage preventing overflowing during peak times. Then the issue of swapping a double bin for a single etc. that can all be looked at in the review. Given the current financial position in which the Council currently operates, it is not a viable solution to simply install more bins, therefore maximisation of the value of the assets becomes critical.

As part of the summer Coastal plan, additional permanent barrow operatives and Coastal crews are deployed to cleanse the New Brighton area during April to September. These hours are extended during the summer time school breaks, weekend working and bank holidays.

In order to provide reassurance to any concerns the eradication of litter bins will be carried out as part of the Councils Litter bin strategy and where footfall demands resources, these will be implemented. However, the bins at Ian Fraser Walk where bespoke in their making and at greater cost than the Authorities standard on street litter bin supplies. Therefore, serious considerations would need to be given to procuring these types of bins at this time. The Council also needs to consider the installation of bins to sea defence walls and floor defence barriers. Any bins placed along this part of New Brighton require appropriate permissions and need to be robust in their

ability to withstand day to day tidal weathers. Any future installations would need to be approved by the Coastal team and we would look to install the right bin for this location. This is not to say the Council will replace all of the bins at this time.

However, I do know also that your local councillors are actively looking for additional funding beyond the Council as well, for provision of bins in New Brighton, so there are lots of people looking to solve this problem, and we'll do it as soon as we can. But thank you again for raising this really important issue.

Supplementary Question

Can the New Brighteners be kept abreast of the review of the bins and the survey that is being carried out, so we know what is going on there. I was certainly extensively involved in the initial installation of bins of Ian Fraser Way. I worked closely with Council officers at the time. There is a design fault with the current ones unfortunately, and I think it is very important to work with the likes of the Biffa operatives who are emptying them, who will be very au fait with the issues that are presented by those bins. And certainly from my own point of view I've got a detailed knowledge of the bins having tried to remove trapped litter within the bins, which is a fault of the design, so if we can be kept up to date please I would appreciate that, thank you.

Answer: Definitely, that sounds like a really good idea, and I am sure that won't be a problem.

Question from Jane Turner

In the aftermath of the December 5th 2013 storm, when a storm surge measured at 1.25m coincided with a 9.15m tide, and a similar event in January 2014, there was 90% support from local residents for action to mitigate future flooding risks. 80% of those respondents expressed a preference for raising the promenade wall. (WBC 2016). The height of that protection has since been designed as 1.1m above the height of the current promenade wall.

Lidar studies of West Kirby and Hoylake show that the RNLI end of the promenade at Hoylake, and the properties inland of it are similar to or even slightly lower than the properties in West Kirby that will be protected by the new scheme, though clearly fewer properties are at risk.

24 hours before Storm Eunice arrived, the National Tidal and Sea Level Facility was predicting a 1.25 to 1.5m storm surge, coinciding with a 9.17m tide, 20cm more base water than the 2013 event. Fortunately for Wirral, the centre of Eunice tracked further north than originally predicted. Hoylake was incredibly lucky, there was a dip in the recorded storm surge that coincided with High tide [See Figure 2]. An hour either side, there would have been 75cm more water, equalling the levels of the 2013 event. There have been 3 more storm surges of greater than 1 metre in the 6 days following Eunice and at some point our luck will run out. We have a 9.9m tide on Mar 5th for example, even a modest storm surge would cause issues.

When deciding to raise the height of the flood protection at West Kirby but not at Hoylake, did officers/the council take the ongoing accretion and formation of soft protection features into account?

Answer: Wirral Council has a strategic approach to the management of flood and coastal erosion risks which aligns with that advocated by Defra and the Environment Agency. The Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) sets out the short, medium and long term policies for coastal defence. At West Kirby and Hoylake these are Hold the Line policies in the short, medium and long term. The Wirral Coastal Strategy, approved at Cabinet in October 2013, identifies management actions to deliver the SMP policies. The timing of management actions is based on the assessment of flood and coastal erosion risk which in turn is informed by the conditions applying at each frontage.

At West Kirby the Strategy identified that there is a significant risk to residential and commercial property from overtopping of the existing defences associated with extreme events (1 in 20 year return period and above) at the present time but that in the future, due to sea level rise, that risk will increase to more frequent events (1 in 5 year return period in 50 years and 1 in 1 year return period in 100 years)

At Hoylake the Flood and Coastal Erosion risk assessment identifies that the moderate (less than 1 in 75 year return period) overtopping risk at present at Hoylake could become significant in 50-100 years time.

Supplementary Question

What would be the risks of removing this developing protection?

Answer: The Council has commissioned an independent Ecology and Geomorphology Study which is part of the evidence base of information for the first stage of consultation on Hoylake Beach Management.

The study can be found here.

<https://haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk/hoylake-beach-information>

Future flood risk under a Do Everything scenario is considered within the Study.

Question from Charlotte Smith

I know you are all very keen advocates of the environment, as am I with my own degree in Environmental Studies. I have studied issues back in the 1980s like the Bidston incinerator, you may be aware of that, and heavy metal pollution in the river Mersey. As such, I was thinking of a proposal to launch a Plant a Memory Tree scheme in Wirral, which may help the council with its own financial woes. The idea is very basic. Apply to the council for a memory tree to be planted. For example, £20 or whatever you want to set. The tree would be planted in memory of loved ones who are no longer with us. I lost my own parents who were very well known in the local community, my mother in 2002 who was headteacher at New Brighton Primary School, and more recently my father, who served with Hoylake Lifeboat in the 1980s, and was a senior lecturer and did a lot of union work as a lecturer and during his time in the merchant navy.

As to the location of the trees a good starting point I would suggest would be in towns and then think of creating a new woodland somewhere on the Wirral, Just think of what a legacy that would leave for future generations, and the environmental benefits that such a woodland would bring.

Answer: Thank you for your question. If you wish to read the agenda for this meeting or stay after public questions, you will see that there is an item on memorial woodland coming up.

The council is currently exploring future tree planting schemes similar to the one you have suggested whereby individuals, groups or businesses will be able to sponsor the planting of an urban tree. We hope to launch such a scheme before the next planting season which commences in November. Over the last four months the council has planted 10 new woodlands, all of which have been planted with the help of Wirral communities. A regular programme of community planting events will continue and through these, we welcome anyone who wants to plant trees in memory of a loved one, the covid memorial woodland proposed in Arrowe Country Park is a great example of how this can work.

The council also has a scheme at the moment that provides a small tree free for those who want to celebrate a life by planting a tree in their own garden. Details of the Tree for Life Scheme can be found on our website.

Question from Beverley Aspinall

If permission is granted to rake the beaches on the Wirral to remove grass, does the Council have sufficient funds available to cover the cost? If not, would they be prepared to allow local residents to pay a contractor to carry out the work on their behalf, subject to all necessary risk assessments etc. being in place? If not, Why not?

Answer: The council is currently consulting on beach management options for Hoylake. Elsewhere at West Kirby, Wallasey and New Brighton an application for assent has been made to Natural England to undertake raking to remove litter. Other beaches in Wirral are not currently actively managed. Yes, the Council does have the resources for beach raking. However, if the intention is to remove a significant area of established grass additional funds would be required. Additional funds for grass removal could be sought from the Council budget, but equally, the Council would be willing to discuss the option of allowing local residents to pay a contractor to carry out the work on its behalf, subject to all necessary risk assessments etc. being in place, for this work should permission be granted.

Question from John Walker

Following a FOI request I found out that the Council allows wildfowling on an area of the Dee marshes off Heswall. For the sum of £2000 / year a private club is allowed to shoot a number of different species of ducks and geese as sport. In 2020/21 156 birds were shot including 36 Pink footed Geese, 59 Wigeon and 35 Pintail. Although this is all legal surely in these times of a climate and biodiversity crisis we should not be facilitating this type of recreation, particularly as there are considerably more Wirral residents who enjoy seeing these birds alive rather than dead.

Will the Council allow this practice to continue?

Answer: Thank you for your question. Personally, I totally agree with you and both the Council Leader and myself have already asked that this unpleasant practice be stopped. I am surprised and very disappointed to find that it is still going on, but there is a 5 year licence and it expires in 2023, which

corresponds with the permissions from Natural England and Natural Resources Wales.

So there is a long standing Assent granted by Natural England (NE) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) permitting the Council to give consent (Licence) Dee Wildfowlers to shoot within the North Wirral Foreshore SSSI and also in what is generically referred to as the Dee Estuary European Marine Site comprising the areas of the Dee Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), and Dee Estuary/Aber Dyfrdwy Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The original Ramsar site was extended circa 2012 to include virtually all the land included in the SSSI due to the reason that the coastal grass land is important as it contributes towards maintaining the international populations of certain key individual waterfowl species and the overall total waterfowl assemblage. There is a list of waterfowl species that are protected within the special protection area. The species that are permitted to be taken under the Council's licence with the Dee Wildfowlers does not include any of the qualifying species as identified at designation.

The current licence (Consent) expires on 31 July 2023 and Officers are aware that NE and NRW are currently reviewing the status of important bird populations on the Dee Estuary and they wish to discuss the findings with Council Officers when this is done. This may require further controls on activities in the Dee Estuary to ensure the conservation objectives of the statutory designations are met.

So a disappointing answer for many reasons and many people I suspect, and you have my absolute sympathy and support in this. So many thanks for asking this question and for drawing attention to such an important matter.

Question from Nick Drew

The public question from Sally Scott to the meeting of this committee on 7 September 2021 resulted in the publishing of a table of councillors who had undertaken Carbon Literacy training, as at October 2021. At that time, only 6 councillors had received the award of being Carbon Literate.

Can an updated version of this table be published to show the latest status (i.e. which councillors have now attended training, submitted their application, and been awarded Carbon Literate status), and to include details on which councillors have pledged to undertake climate-related action within their ward, as part of their Carbon Literacy submission?

Answer: As part of the Council's commitment to becoming net carbon neutral by 2030, the Council has further committed to becoming a carbon literate organisation. In the past 2 years, 200 senior officers and Members have attended the carbon literacy course and the Council is currently applying for bronze status carbon literacy organisation, with the intention of applying for silver status later this year.

The 200 hundred attendees on the Council's bespoke courses have included 30 Council Members and this Committee has been updated on the Members who have attended the course. Carbon literacy courses will continue throughout the year and it is the intention for all Members to have attended the course by the end of the year, as part of the Council's silver carbon literacy status application.

Each person attending the course is required to pledge to undertake climate-related action within their service area or ward as part of the carbon literacy course. The Council is currently working with the training provider to support course attendees to complete their pledges. The pledges are being built into the Council's Environment & Climate Emergency Action Plan. To achieve silver level carbon literacy organisation status the Council is pursuing for the end of the year, over 400 employees/Members must have attended and completed the course with pledges.

In addition to that yes the update will be published in the website.

Question from Derek Holmes

There has been a recently reported oil spill of 500 barrels of oil just off the Wirral coast, which has leaked from the oil fields in the Liverpool Bay Area. Some of this oil has already washed up on the Blackpool coast, and it is reported more is still to hit land.

Can the council confirm that they have a plan in place for incidents like this where oil may wash up on the Wirral coastline, specifically any of the SSSI sites, so that they are allowed to clear up an oil spill without having to wait for permission from Natural England?

Answer: Thank you for your question. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency coordinates the response to oil spills, this response is multi-agency including input from Natural England.

In regards to the oil spill from the Eni pipe which connects the Conwy and Douglas platforms in Liverpool Bay. I can confirm Wirral Council were initially notified of this on Monday afternoon, initially by Eni (the production company) and then by the formal pollution report issued by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA). The Council immediately put its own Coastal Pollution plans into place and had staff on standby to respond to any reports of the oil landing on our coastline. Council officers also attended regular multi agency meetings and some initial modelling was completed by the Coast Guard Pollution team which indicated that the spill would potentially beach in the North side of Liverpool Bay so presenting little risk to Wirral.

Question from Amanda Green

I have noticed over the past few weeks that the Black Pearl is currently under reconstruction at Magazines Promenade in New Brighton, apparently with support from The Buckingham Group, Network Rail and Merseytravel. A quote from their Facebook page says:

"Huge amounts of sand need to be shifted to expose the rocks and secure the structural timbers." Photographs also show heavy plant machinery on the beach helping to move heavy timbers.

My understanding from the map on the Wirral Council website is that this part of the beach is part of the SSSIs, known as Mersey Narrows.

Knowing that the Council is not allowed to carry out any activity on any of the SSSI beaches without permission from Natural England, I would like to ask that if the Council does not currently have permission from Natural England to allow these works to be carried out, will the Council be asking for the suspension of the Black Pearl construction until such permission is granted?

Answer: The council is aware of recent activity on the beach at New Brighton on the area where the driftwood ship was last in position and has viewed a video in circulation showing a construction site vehicle on the beach and materials being moved. As stated in the question, this area of beach, like much of the Wirral coastline, has national protection as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and other protective designations. The video suggested the involvement of a company, The Buckingham Group, and they have been informed of the status of the beach by the council. The council has also informed Natural England of the activity on the beach. The council last refused an approach to rebuild the ship after a storm in 2020. Discussions with the parties known to the council will continue and the statutory bodies will continue to be informed.

Questions from Wayne Verkade (1) and Alan McMahon (2)

1) I believe that we may soon be charged a fee for visiting our local refuse/rubbish collection sites on the Wirral, I know that as this council has dramatically and in my view rashly over spent its budget this may well be considered. This would surely be a false economy as some members of the public would be tempted to fly tip their waste rather than pay a fee and this would be disastrous for both the environment and the Wirral tax payer who would be expected to foot the bill for this fly tipped waste to be disposed of safely? Please clarify the Councils position on charging fees at recycling centres?

2) I hear that we may soon be charged a fee for visiting our local rubbish dumps/recycling centres to get rid of our household waste? I know that the council has run out of money, but isn't this a false economy as people will just fly tip their waste to avoid paying the fee at the dump, and the council tax payers will need to pay for even more fly tipped rubbish to be picked up and disposed of.

Has the council carried out an assessment on the potential increase in fly-tipping and the associated costs thereof?

Answer: Thank you for your questions. Merseyside Recycling & Waste Authority (as the waste disposal authority responsible for the provision of household waste recycling centres in Merseyside), has a statutory duty to provide places for persons resident in their area for them to deposit their household waste free of charge.

MRWA currently has no plans to charge residents in the areas covered by the household waste centres for which it is responsible (including Wirral) to dispose of their household waste. So no charges are planned.

Question from Keith Randles

Regarding decay dead sea birds all over Hoylake beach.

All types of debris which regularly getting washed up upon Hoylake beach is now being retained in the new vegetation growth. My main concern is amongst all of this debris is the large number of decaying dead sea birds, and all in close proximity of peoples dwelling, people walking and some of them with dogs, so, there is a massive public health risk for all concerned and needs to be addressed and future removal plan put in place before vermin get attracted to this food source.

The enclosed 3 photographs (circulates with members prior to the meeting) were taken by 1 concerned Wirral resident over the weekend of the 12th 13th of February and all found between Kings gap slipway to the RNLI station. I do understand this was not an issue in the past when the Barber surf rake was in operation, because as it was a mechanical litter picker it would of dealt with this and other types of debris i.e. plastics wood etc.

There have been comments made about the maintenance on Hoylake beach as only being done to preserve a artificially kept beach, when in fact it was ensuring a essential cleaning service with respect to the public health & their pets too.

I'm now a grandparent and we love to go going to beach, but no more, I would not go anywhere near it now with my grandchildren whilst it's in this current condition and I'm sure most of this committee members present would not either, this is 1 of many consequences that the Wirral public are now having to deal with in all of this process

Question is: Now I have brought this issue to the attention of this committee I would like to know how it will be dealt with now in the future.

Answer: Thank you for your question. The Council currently has a Grounds Maintenance Officer who litter picks on Hoylake and West Kirby beaches weekly, this includes the picking up and disposal of dead birds, smaller dead animals are collected and disposed of through the Councils own waste disposal arrangements. Larger animals that wash up on the beach (e.g. seals, sheep etc.) are removed off the beach and disposed through a specialist disposal company. As well as the weekly litter picks, the Council also respond to public reports and sightings of dead animals and remove them as quickly as possible.

I am advised, on looking at some of the photographs, that some of these are fresh peregrine falcon kills and perfectly natural. In fact, something to celebrate, as it indicates healthy peregrine falcons are in the area. Birds are more likely to die in winter months and it is Important to note that the beach has never been raked in the winter months and permission was never given to do so.

Question from Pam Meredith Jones

I enjoy walking around the Lake at West Kirby and notice that parts of the walkway are starting to need some repairs. Can this Committee confirm that the Lake at West Kirby is going to be fully maintained by the Council, or is this another facility which you are going to stop looking after due to lack of money and which will consequently become unavailable for Wirral residents to use?

Answer: Thank you for your question. The council is aware of the weather, wave and water impacts on the walkway over time and the walkway has been surveyed to check on its condition, particularly the retaining wall internal to the lake. Options for repairs are currently in the early stages of development but are likely not to be stand alone works but rather part of a much bigger scheme of works needed on the lake, including the removal of silt and invasive weed. This work will require a number of authorisations and significant capital funding. In the meantime the walkway continues to be monitored.

Due to a high volume of questions, the Following questions received a written response due to time constraints:

Question from Julie Hunter

Hoylake expanded rapidly in the Victorian Era & today in 2022 much of that infrastructure is still in place & needs remediate, skilled, planned redevelopment.

The drainage system especially causes regular problems with holes opening on roads multiple times, black sludge blowing out onto the beach, road run off flowing regularly onto the beach & drains getting blocked with sand & debris causing backflow into properties.

The Government has been awarding finance & grants to boost 'at risk' heritage & community assets since 2012. The Government Coastal Communities finance awarded for 92 projects between 2018-2019 was £3.8 million.

Has Wirral Borough Council registered an interest & applied to the Coastal Community Team or the Lottery Fund with a proposed project for Hoylake to unlock this Victorian Legacy Barrier. A sustainable drainage scheme could be an important kickstart to regeneration. The Victorian drains are decades passed their sell by date.

Answer: Hoylake is predominantly served with a “combined” sewerage system which takes surface water and foul flows from properties and also highway drainage flows from roads. The sewerage system is owned and operated by United Utilities. At the coast, with the exception of Kings Gap Court, the highway drainage system operates independently of the sewerage system and outfalls directly to the beach. Higher beach levels can cause outfalls to be blocked however water is still able to drain through percolation or is confined to road channels until gullies are cleared of sand.

As beach levels rise the long-term sustainability of the highway drainage system needs consideration and funding has been gained from the Environment Agency to consider future options at Hoylake as part of a wider feasibility study for improving coastal defences at Meols.

Lottery Funding and/ or Coastal Community funding has not as yet been identified to support any changes to drainage infrastructure however an assessment of funding sources will be included in the feasibility study.

Question from Wendy Bennett

At the last Environment Committee meeting on 20th January, 2022, in answer to a question I asked, Councillor Grey stated her intention to seek permission from Natural England to rake West Kirby beach in the Spring. Can you please give me an update on whether you have applied to Natural England for this permission and if so, whether it been granted. If not, when are you expecting a response? If it has been granted, can you advise me what part or parts of West Kirby Beach are included in this permission.

Answer: A Habitat Regulations Assessment for beach management activities, comprising raking to remove litter, at West Kirby, Wallasey and New Brighton beaches has been completed and submitted to Natural England by way of an application for assent to undertake such beach management activities. The

areas covered are the same as previously managed when assent was in place up to the end of March 2021.

Question from Clare Rafferty

I would like to ask why no ward councillors from the Hoylake and Meols are on the environment committee when the beach is such a big part of the committee's agenda?

Answer: Thank you for your question. The beach is just one of a significant number of important matters within the remit of this committee. It is up to the Conservative Group which Councillors they choose to send to this committee and worth noting that were they to send the Hoylake local Councillors here that would not necessarily help your cause since they have failed to win any argument at all and lost every single vote they have had on the beach raking issue. You are probably better represented by the Conservatives you have here.

Question from Joanne Randles

Since the cessation of Hoylake beach maintenance, Hoylake beach sand levels have rapidly accelerated in height and now in most areas it is close to the same level of the public paved area. Please note in enclosed photos the difference levels since Boxing day 2018 RNLI tug-a-war to current.

The consequence of this higher beach level, there has been a noticeable increased volume of wind blown sands appearing all along the North parade, even though the council workforce have been proactive to remove the larger mounds of sand, but all the road drains remain blocked, residents within that close proximity are having to deal with that increased volume of windblown sand upon their properties, paths gardens, drives etc. These residents do need some form of help regarding these recent developments.

My question is: As it is illegal to place back windblown sand directly back on the beach, to alleviate this problem for these Hoylake residents, would it be possible for the council to supply several skips at selected collection points, say, along the parade itself, so these residents can have a facility to dispose of this sand in a proper manner.

Answer: I am informed that the increase in the level of the beach is due to sand being blown in from the East Hoyle sandbank and is independent of beach management. The biggest changes in beach height are outside the area that was managed. We get approximately 24 skip loads a day on average, so when that's on the road not the beach a lot of shovelling is going to be needed. This can of course be reduced by allowing natural vegetation to trap as much sand as possible and hold it there.

Although the Council remove windblown sand from the promenade area and surrounding roads as part of its street cleansing programme of works by Biffa, in order to supply skips for this provision the Council would need to consider the constraints associated with leaving skips on the highway for a period of time and would explore other avenues to assist residents who are affected by the windblown sand.

Questions from Charles Barnes (1), Lou Stothard (2) & Diane Johnson (3)

1) I am pleased to hear this environmental committee is now hopefully acting to protect what is left of the wonderfully important biodiversity/habitats/trees and wildlife here on our glorious Wirral where huge amount of tourists come to enjoy the walks, wildlife, and trees.

Of course your committee must be fully aware of the importance of our wildlife trees and biodiversity as an important part of the ongoing sustenance/ sustainability of our essential healthy existence.

However so many residents, wildlife groups and visitors are astounded at the ongoing unnecessary tree felling and biodiversity destruction on the Wirral, for instance the widening of the Wirral Way whereby trees are continually felled and important hedgerows are destroyed.

I as many local residents call on the committee to act NOW to call a halt to this continual insensitive levelling down of what's left of our lovely green Wirral and its biodiversity (including our life sustaining trees), such as the continual widening of Wirral Way.

2) The Committee are asked to justify the following:

Large-scale destruction caused by the Wirral Way Widening Scheme, indicating failures of strategy, including overspend, lack of probity and the damaging economic consequences. A significant part of the Wirral Way on both sides has been destroyed. Large sections of, at times, eight metre strips of trees and entire wildlife habitats along a 12-mile stretch of embankment are involved, including several thousand trees and stretches of hedgerows.

- a) because the law of unintended consequences means that making access wider brings with it different sets of hazards, such as the climactic consequences, not limited to the areas in question but across the UK and beyond, or the liability of cyclists to travel faster, use the route more often and therefore make accidents of any kind more likely.
- b) Because no meaningful consultation whatsoever has been arranged by WBC.
- c) Because Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are commercially driven and cannot therefore be said to be independent.
- d) Because much of the destruction that has taken place on the WW has been and is illegal- I refer you to several pieces of legislation.... the Town & Country Planning Act 1990, the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), NERC directives and the Aarhus Convention. WBC has been found in breach of each of these; further, it has been spending 1.5m plus per annum on Parks & Countryside's felling programmes
- e) Because WBC has made a commitment to tackle climate breakdown- but is, instead, adding fuel to the fire.
- f) Because the arguments put forward by WBC in the past regarding a 'need to fell', 'need to clear' have no basis in fact and show a profound lack of knowledge of, and disdain for the systems they have a duty, under law, to protect.

g) Because WBC has made a commitment to tackle climate breakdown- but is, instead, adding fuel to the fire.

The value of our natural world, and of biodiversity, underpins the health, social wellbeing and economic stability of districts and nations; Council has to find savings, so will the Committee conclude that this scheme, and spend on felling across the Borough must be abandoned forthwith and the money, as well as Wirral and the wider environment, saved.

3) I am calling for a halt to destruction of trees and habitat on the Wirral Way and for the Council to fully justify its actions to date. This habitat destruction flies in the face of the environmental Climate Emergency.

An estimated minimum of 1,500 to 2,00 trees of varying species and age plus countless mature hedgerow, ground cover, and all associated wildlife on the Wirral Way; according to a Council Officer, there was "no public consultation required".

These actions clearly breach Town & Country Planning Act 1990, the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

In law, Britain is signed to the Aarhus Convention wherein full, open and transparent public participation is required in order to proceed with such works. The 'works' (felling and clearance) have gone beyond the remit proposed. Ambulance accessibility will overhaul the entire nature of the amenity value of the Wirral Way.

The Council has shown failure of strategy and lack of probity

This habitat is ancient peripheral woodland, both by historical definition and by the presence of bio-indicator species These were rich and diverse habitats that have been 'written off'.

Council Officer reported; 'species were lost due to shading'. However, no log has been made of the increase of shady vegetation including legally protected key indicator species which have been falsely recorded as NOT present.

The wet areas are long-established habitats with ecologically important and valuable shade dwelling mosses, ferns, lichens, bryophytes and liverworts, none of which were even noted. These important species have all been portrayed as "shaded out" vegetation, proposing felling and scarifying this entire ecology. 'Grassland management does not enhance biodiversity from canopy habitat and ancient peripheral woodland.

Clearly, an accurate full Environmental Impact Survey was not undertaken.

The Council should have been presented with a full carbon survey. Multiple tonnages of carbon sequestering trees and hedgerows have been ripped out.

How has this vegetation removal been allowed to proceed with no calculations of locked-up carbon whatsoever?

The carbon footprint alone of these actions is immense.

Removal of established trees causes flooding. How does the Council imagine that the felling will prevent the collapse of earth banks? To what extent did the Council exercise their legal obligation to engage on an educational level to complainants of presence of insects near the waterways etc? How do the Council tally these actions up with their own Tree Strategy?

It takes 20-30 years for trees to begin to effectively sequester significant carbon. The total tree-planting programme of Wirral has surely been undone from this devastation.

It is unlawful to allow a number of unqualified Council officers to dictate the removal of Wirral's Heritage with associated vital carbon and established ecosystems.

Why was this work allowed to proceed? A lack of intervention of the works caused the council to knowingly be complicit in such ecological destruction. We ask for an immediate halt to the works before any further damage is done and a change in policy to prevent these devastating occurrences.

Answer: Thank for your question. I am advised that the Wirral Way widening work will improve biodiversity and I have made numerous enquiries about this matter as it does indeed look rather startling at present following the initial works. However, once Spring is here, regrowth will begin in earnest, and it is hoped that wildflowers long missing will return and with them benefits to much needed pollinating insects. Wildflower meadows can draw down significant carbon and should not be underestimated in the fight against climate change as well as the benefits to biodiversity. Trees are incredibly valuable and anyone who knows me will confirm that I care very much about any unnecessary tree felling. The tree team here would be able to vouch that I can be a bit of a pain at times in my efforts to protect as many trees as possible, but it is important to listen to expert advice and we took expert advice on this scheme. Wirral Wildlife and other experts assessed the sites and the plans, and I am confident that the award-winning officers involved in designing and overseeing it, really care and know what they are doing.

There are examples of felling on private land that is not done under expert advice and does not improve biodiversity and I would join you completely in condemning this. Where anyone seeks to fell trees and hedges to clear land prior to making planning applications, I would urge all involved within the council to use all means possible to remove the financial incentives for this and seek full scrutiny of permissions to clear any protected land to ensure no laws have been broken. If they have then I urge that such unlawful felling and clearing of land be treated as the gross criminal offence it is. That is the other end of the spectrum in terms of acceptable behaviour. What council officers are doing at the Wirral Way is to protect and enhance nature, not destroy it, and I hope that in 18 months' time, if not earlier, people will really appreciate the light, space and improved biodiversity at the Wirral Way.

74 **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

There were no questions by Members.

75 **HIGHWAY STRUCTURAL MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME 2022-23**

The Assistant Director for Neighbourhood Safety and Transport introduced this report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services which sought approval to accept funding from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority for the

delivery of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) Highway Structural Maintenance programme for 2022/23 so that supplier engagement and detailed design could commence, enabling the works to be completed in 2022/23. The highways were a £2.48bn asset so needed to be maintained. The new policy moved from two-year to five-year funding, and there was an intention to provide information publicly on when roads would be repaired in the program.

Members queried the details in the report which clarified:

- The ratings of road quality had transferred from an older system and were being reviewed
- There continued to be innovation and research into improved methods and products

Resolved: That

- (1) the Director for Neighbourhood Services be authorised to accept the grant funding allocated to Wirral Council by Liverpool City Region Combined Authority for the 2022/23 City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Combined Authority Transport Plan programme (Highways Structural Maintenance);**
- (2) the proposed programme of works for Carriageway and Footway Improvements for 2022/23 as set out in Appendix A to this report be approved;**
- (3) the Director of Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Chair and Party Spokespersons of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport be authorised to amend the delivery of the programmes having regard for available resources and risk-based prioritisation of locations selected for treatment.**

76 **COMBINED AUTHORITY TRANSPORT PLAN (INTEGRATED TRANSPORT BLOCK) PROGRAMME 2022/23**

The Assistant Director for Neighbourhood Safety and Transport introduced this report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services which sought approval for the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) Combined Authority Transport Plan (CATP) programme for 2022/23 and suggested an indicative programme, primarily on road safety work, for future years (subject to the finalisation of discussions with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority) and to allocate it to priorities and projects as outlined in the report. The programme had been annual in the past but was changed to a five-year funding settlement. A list of works over the five years would be provided addressing the recommendations of the Road Safety Working Group.

Members were supportive of the programme and the intentions.

Resolved: That

- (1) the Director for Neighbourhood Services be authorised to accept the grant funding allocated to Wirral Council by Liverpool City Region Combined Authority for the 2022/23 City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Combined Authority Transport Plan programme;**
- (2) the proposed City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Combined Authority Transport Plan programme for 2022/23 as set out in Appendix A to this report be approved, and**
- (3) the Director for Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Chair and Spokespersons of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee be authorised to amend the programme having regard for available resources and risk-based prioritisation of schemes.**

77 POLLINATORS PILOT WORKSHOP - UPDATE

The Assistant Director for Parks and Environment presented the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services and a verbal update following a workshop which had taken place on 24 February, after the agenda was published. In January 2022 officers from Neighbourhood Services brought a report entitled 'Operation Evaluation – Pollinator Pilot' which focused on providing an operational evaluation of the Pollinator Plan. One of the recommendations agreed by the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee was that a workshop be convened as a part of the development of the Council's Pollinator Plan, to agree future pollinator and cessation sites. The workshop had included two presentations and following it officers would make operational plans for pollinator sites for this year including maintenance reduction and will have Ward meetings with Councillors. The final plan would be subject to public consultation and will be presented in the new Municipal Year.

Members asked for details concerning the widening of the Wirral Way and were reassured that in 18 month the new areas would be much improved for biodiversity.

**Resolved
That the update be noted.**

78 COVID-19 MEMORIAL WOODLAND

The Assistant Chief Executive presented the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services which set out a proposal for a COVID-19 memorial woodland in Arrowe Country Park to mark the loss of 1100 residents to Covid on the Wirral. There is an existing woodland which could be expanded to include this area of quiet reflection with a monument. It should take around five years to become established, during which time appropriate wildflower

planting would provide interest. There was also a scheme for other groups to have their own woodland too based on guidance on design and tree species.

Members were keen that NHS staff also be commemorated for their work, and discussed the possibility of allowing sponsoring, although the high failure rate in saplings may make this difficult.

Resolved

That the proposal for a COVID-19 memorial woodland in Arrowse Country Park be approved.

79 **BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER 3**

The Senior Finance Business Partner presented this report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services which set out the financial monitoring information for the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee as at quarter 3 (Apr – Dec) of 2021-22. The position improved but was limited by unachieved savings and lack of parking income.

Members were concerned at the delay in presenting information at a time of pressures and change.

Resolved: That

- (1) the projected year-end revenue forecast position of £0.460m adverse, as reported at quarter 3 (Apr – Dec) of 2021-22 be noted**
- (2) progress on the achievement of approved savings and the projected year end forecast position at quarter 3 (Apr – Sep) of 2021-22 be noted**
- (3) the reserves allocated to the Committee for future one-off commitments be noted**
- (4) the projected year-end capital forecast position of £7.499m favourable, as reported at quarter 3 (Apr – Dec) of 2021-22 be noted.**

80 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Chair introduced the proposed work programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year and proposed an additional recommendation concerning the that proposed revision to the terms of reference.

Resolved – That

- (1) the proposed Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year be noted;**
- (2) this Committee endorses the recommendations made by Constitution and Standards Committee that officers take into account the views of the Chairs of each Committee in**

recommending revised Terms of Reference. This is to enable the experience of those most directly involved to inform decision making early on in the process and avoid potential disruption later in the process.