



**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT CAPITAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT THE BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOM - TOWN HALL ON 4 NOVEMBER 2010**

Present: Councillors D Day (Chairman), Arculus (Vice-Chairman), J Goodwin, D Morley, J A Fox and N Sandford

Officers Present: Mike Heath, Commercial Services Director
David Denson, Head of Operations
James Cooper, Trees and Landscape Management Officer
Frazer Chapman, Senior Recreation Officer
Claire Boyd, Lawyer - Contracts and Procurement
Louise Tyers, Scrutiny Manager

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors North and Rush and Councillor Goodwin was in attendance as substitute.

An apology for absence was also received from Councillor S Dalton, Cabinet Member for Environment Capital.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

The following declarations of interest were made:

Item 6 – Tree and Woodland Strategy

Councillor Sandford declared a personal interest as he was employed by the Woodland Trust.

Item 7 – Play Facilities, Playing Fields and Open Spaces

Councillor JA Fox declared a personal interest as she was a member of the Friends of Cuckoo Hollow.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 September 2010

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2010 were approved as a correct record.

4. Call In of any Cabinet, Cabinet Member or Key Officer Decisions

There were no requests for call-in to consider.

5. Response to Recommendations Made by the Committee

The Committee considered the responses made by the Executive to recommendations made in relation to:

- Norwood Lane and Paston Travellers Site
- Biodiversity Strategy
- Launch of Home of Environment Capital

ACTION AGREED

To note the responses to the recommendations made.

6. Tree and Woodland Strategy

The report introduced an updated Tree and Woodland Strategy which would provide direction for the care of Peterborough's trees and woodlands. It updated the 1998 Strategy and included changes that had taken place over the last twelve years, including the influence of the Biodiversity Strategy.

The draft Strategy included a number of key issues including a proposal to move away from response based reactive works to a programme of inspections which would be followed by tree works based upon those findings. A right tree in the right place framework was being developed which included options to eventually reduce overcrowding within residential areas. This would be followed by a programme of replacing existing, inappropriate space demanding trees with smaller alternatives.

Councillor Sam Dalton, Cabinet Member for Environment Capital, requested that a statement be read out on her behalf in support of the Strategy.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- A working group had been established in 2005/06 to revise the Strategy and a draft had been developed however the report made no mention of this group or its work. *The Strategy had been modified to bring it up to date and was based on the original Strategy. Since 2005/06 the responsibility for this work had transferred to a different department and unfortunately information had disappeared during the transfer so City Services had to start from scratch as supporting documents had gone missing. Reference to the working group could be included in the report when it went up to Cabinet.*
- Why had it taken so long to update the Strategy? *The Tree Team had other priorities including a massive backlog of work. There had also been a need to ensure that the Strategy tied in with a number of other strategies.*
- Did officers expect the Strategy to deliver an increase in the number of trees as some members believed that there would be a continual reduction in numbers? *Officers would be looking to consolidate and nurture what the city already had. There was a new push for a Forest for Peterborough led by PECT and we would be concentrating on areas rather than the numbers of trees. It was quality against quantity.*
- Subtle changes had been made to the document compared to the work in 2005/06 which fundamentally changed the thrust of the document.
- The Strategy did not mention expansion of woodland. It also did not mention low carbon transition plans, woodland creation or Professor Reid's report on flooding.
- Some members strongly believed that Peterborough had wonderful trees along with a good team looking after them.
- The original Strategy said that street trees would only be removed if there were sound arboricultural reasons to do so but this draft now said that they would be removed if there arboricultural and social reasons. *There were issues with street trees which left the Council vulnerable to claims for compensation. We were trying to move forward but there was only a finite budget available.*
- Councillor Arculus advised that he had received complaints from some of his constituents saying that the Council was in breach of S154 of the Highways Act by not clearing overhanging branches on the highway. Was there a policy in place to ensure that this obligation was met? *City Services had a policy of working outside of the bird nesting season to get low hanging branches in order. Operatives tried to cut back sympathetically but that could not always be guaranteed.*

- How many fully qualified arboriculturists did the Council employ? *It was believed that there were two fully qualified arboriculturists across the Council, however a number of other staff had a lot of knowledge. City Services also had access to a consultant arboriculturist for advice if needed.*
- The 1998 Strategy had been adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document but due to changes it was not now. Did Officers plan to include this Strategy in the Local Development Framework to give it strength during the planning process? *City Services would liaise with Strategic Planning to encourage them to include it.*

Councillor Sandford proposed that a separate meeting involving interested members should be held to enable them to compare the 2006 version of the Strategy with the current draft and to ensure that new initiatives were included.

ACTION AGREED

- (i) To hold an informal meeting of interested members to compare the 2006 version of the Strategy with the current draft.
- (ii) That the draft Tree and Woodland Strategy be considered further at our next meeting.

7. Play Facilities, Playing Fields and Open Spaces

The report provided an update on the play area improvement programme and playing field provision with the Council's green open spaces.

In 2003 Peterborough was found to have an oversupply of play facilities in comparison with other similar authorities however only 5% of the play facilities met National Playing Fields Association (NPFSA) minimum standards. As a result of this Members agreed that the Council would consolidate its play area provision to create high quality neighbourhood facilities which provided safe but stimulating play opportunities for children.

The play area improvement programme was identified as a corporate priority and funding for these schemes was provided through a number of sources, including Section 106 developer contributions, Big Lottery Fund, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Playbuilder initiative and the Council's capital resources. Since 2007 the play area improvement programme had delivered 57 new and refurbished play areas.

In June 2010 funding for the DCSF Playbuilder programme was withdrawn by the coalition government whilst they carried out a review of the various grants that had been made and in October 2010 confirmation was received that two-thirds of the withdrawn Playbuilder funding would be re-allocated. Peterborough would receive £274,043.75 for this financial year but no further funding would be awarded and the programme would end in March 2011. However, this allocation would enable a further four play improvement projects to be developed and completed.

A comprehensive audit of the Council's green space play assets had been undertaken and the data was currently being analysed. This would provide new and up-to-date information about the condition of the play areas and would help to update the Play Strategy. The audit would also enable improved processes for managing and maintaining play areas which fell within the Authority's responsibility.

In 2006 an open space report was prepared, however much of the data contained within the report had now become out of date as the city and surrounding areas had grown. These were important issues which would be addressed by working with Planning to ensure that well designed, welcoming, safe and useable open space was delivered as an essential component of new developments. In recent years work had taken place to ensure that developer obligations concerning the design and creation of Public Open Space to support

new developments met the Council's requirements. The Recreation Team provided guidance to Planning officers and developers to ensure that open space facilities were developed which fulfilled the Council's planning policies and developers obligations. Officers had also recently advised Planning about the open space element of their new S106 policy document.

The Open Space report also provided data on allotment provision and need. Since the report was delivered the profile of allotments and community food growing had been raised. The Council currently had 1,800 plots along with a short waiting list. Allotment provision was currently being reviewed along with opportunities for informal allotment sites and community food growing initiatives. A complete review of the allotment letting and management process was underway and scheduled for completion by April 2011.

One of the objectives of the open spaces report was to manage open spaces in a way which included all key stakeholders, and strengthened community 'ownership' of open spaces. The Recreation Team were working with the Neighbourhood Managers to develop and implement devolved management of two sites at Cuckoos Hollow and Holywell Ponds.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- How did officers decide which areas needed play facilities as Werrington North struggled to get play equipment? *Officers used the 2007 Play Strategy along with their knowledge of the play facilities. An audit of assets was being put together and this would enable officers to develop a programme for the next few years.*
- What did devolved management mean in relation to Cuckoos Hollow? *Devolved management was about community involvement in the management of sites. Cuckoos Hollow would be used as a template for future devolved management.*
- With the funding for Neighbourhood Councils being stopped what role would the Council's now have in managing open spaces. *The Director advised that he believed that the Councils would still have a role in the management of play areas.*
- Even though the funding for Neighbourhood Councils would be brought to an end next year, this year's allocation was still available. Next year the Councils would be allocated Planning Obligation Implementation Strategy (POIS) money which would hopefully mean more money for the Councils. *Officers would be meeting with the Neighbourhoods Team to talk about POIS and S106 monies.*
- Some Members felt that cutting the funding to Neighbourhood Councils was short sighted as these were the sort of decisions the Councils should be making.
- Councillor Arculus advised that in the past a residents association had asked the Council if they could install their own swing at the play site in Regency Way and were told they would have to pay for the asset and its management. *The Director advised that he could not see a problem if the swing was to be placed in an existing facility as long as it met the required standards. A new site may be more difficult as there would be higher costs. Officers would be happy to work the residents association.*
- Councillor Sandford advised that the MUGA at the Walton Recreation Ground should have had illuminations and six months ago City Services gave an assurance that they would be working however a constituent had advised that they were still not working. *The Director advised that the lights were functioning and users had to push a button to switch them. They were currently not working as the switch had been vandalised and needed to be repaired.*
- A draft Open Spaces Strategy was being developed in 2006, what had happened since then as the Full Council had been told that the Strategy would be one of the key strategies of the Home of Environment Capital Strategy? When a Strategy was developed would it be part of the Local Development Framework? *In 2006 work on the Strategy was brought into City Services and the Strategy was being developed and the Team had already undertaken a lot of work. Officers had commented on the Strategic Planning Policy which would be used to ensure provision of well designed open space.*

- There was currently not much open space in Peterborough and using the Forum for the Future Index Peterborough was 16 out of 20 cities for the provision of open space. Development of the Strategy should be taken forward as quickly as possible.
- What work was being done to ensure provision was uniform across all wards? *Allocation was done according to need and the audit would show where and what condition equipment was in. We needed to look at what we had and where it was and then we could base provision on need.*
- Central Park was being ruined by local youths hanging around, could the play areas be reserved for the people who wanted to use them for their proper purpose? *No smoking signs had been put up in the younger children's play area and we had received no complaints. We would ask the PSCOs to walk through the park.*

RECOMMENDATION

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Culture, Recreation and Strategic Commissioning is recommended that the Executive proceed as quickly as possible to develop an Open Space Strategy and that it forms part of the Council's Local Development Framework.

ACTION AGREED

- (i) To support the play area improvement programme and the current plan for play improvement works.
- (ii) To support the 'Engaging the Community in Play' initiative.
- (iii) To support the continued development and improvement of PCC green space and recreation facilities for use by the community.
- (iv) To support engagement with Planning to secure well designed and welcoming public open space to sustain new developments.
- (v) To support the investigation and progression of devolved management regimes, by the community, for both Cuckoos Hollow and Holywell Ponds.
- (vi) To support the continuing review of public open space provision, management and maintenance, including allotments, play and playing pitches and updating the documents and action plans pertaining to these services.
- (vii) To support linking the open space policy to other policy areas, for example, Planning, Health, Transport and Biodiversity.

8. Review of the Impact of the Charge for Bulky Waste Collection

The report provided an update on the charged bulky waste collection service and the effects it had had on the service to the public, the service budget and on the general environment.

The Council had withdrawn its free bulky waste collection service following a decision taken by Members in February 2010, and a new chargeable service had been introduced on 1 April 2010. The new scheme allowed residents to have an unlimited amount of items collected for a one off price of £23.50.

The numbers of requested bulky collections had fallen sharply since the introduction of the new chargeable service, as shown in the tables below:

Bulky collections (Non electrical)

Month	2008	2009	2010
January	754	709	605
February	816	684	802
March	831	1039	1065
April	1300	1144	393*

weight of fly-tipped material which has gone down from 534 tonnes to 206 tonnes in the first six months of this year.

Observations and questions were asked around the following areas:

- Now that manufacturers of white goods offered to take away old appliances had that had an impact on the number of collections? *That had had an affect along with people not replacing appliances as often due to the current economic downturn.*
- Did the charge of £23.50 cover the full costs of the provision of the service? *The service was covered by the charge and officers believed it had been set at a reasonable balance,*
- Had there been any incidents of a number of people in a street getting together to save paying individual charges? *Officers had not seen any evidence that that was happening.*
- Councillor Fox advised that she had been told that at the Household Waste Facility a group had refused to pay the charge for trade waste. What happened in those cases? *If traders did not have a permit they were turned away. The operators had not raised any particular issues at the Dogsthorpe site.*
- Had anyone been prosecuted for dumping waste at recycling points? *People were prosecuted and enforcement was undertaken by the Neighbourhoods Team. We did take people to court but the fines and publicity was not as good as we would hope.*
- On the Council's website there was advice to householders on how to dispose of small quantities of asbestos, was this something we should be encouraging people to handle? *We were obliged to provide a facility to dispose of asbestos and had to find a way of dealing with requests. We had agreed to provide householders with two sacks along with a detailed note on how to handle the asbestos. Each of the bags was able to be tracked and was then stored in the asbestos facility at the Depot. We could collect the asbestos for a charge but that was not a cheap option.*

ACTION AGREED

- (i) To note the impact of the charge for bulky waste collections.
- (ii) To not receive any further reports on this issue unless the policy changes.

9. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The latest version of the Forward Plan, showing details of the key decisions that the Leader of the Council believed the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would be making over the next four months, was received.

ACTION AGREED

To note the latest version of the Forward Plan.

10. Work Programme

We considered the Work Programme for 2010/11.

It was agreed to add the following items to the programme:

- Tree and Woodland Strategy (January 2011)
- Review of the Bus Service Review (January 2011)

ACTION AGREED

To confirm the work programme for 2010/11.

11. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 20 January 2011 at 7pm.

CHAIRMAN
7.00 - 8.39 pm