

**MINUTES OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING
HELD AT 7.00PM, ON
WEDNESDAY 4 JANUARY 2023
BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH**

Committee Members Present: Councillors N Day (Chair), C Wiggin (Vice-Chair), N Bi, C Burbage, G Casey, M Farooq, JA Fox, D Jones, M Perkins, L Sharp and Independent Co-opted Members Stuart Dawks and Dr Esther Norton

Also in attendance: Councillor JR Fox as representative for the Group Leader of Peterborough First and Miriam Sellick Youth Council Representative.

Officers Present: Charlotte Palmer, Head of Service for Environment, Highways and Transport
Hannah Swinburne, Principal Climate Change Officer
Ellie Cooper, Climate Change School Engagement Officer
Jim Newton, Assistant Director Planning
Darren Sharpe, Natural and Historic Environment Manager
Charlotte Cameron, Democratic Services Officer

Also Present: Cllr Sandford, as an invited speaker for Agenda Item 6 Trees and Woodland: Ash Dieback Action Plan.
Cllr Simons, Cabinet Member for Waste, Street Scene and the Environment

33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Jones and Councillor Bi was in attendance as substitute.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Sabir, Parish Councillor Michael Samways and Independent Co-opted Member Matthew Barber.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

There were no declarations of interest or whipping declarations.

35. MINUTES OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9 NOVEMBER 2022

The minutes of the Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9 November 2022 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

36. CALL IN OF ANY CABINET, CABINET MEMBER OR KEY OFFICER DECISIONS

No call ins were received.

37. PETERBOROUGH SCHOOL CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRAMME

The Climate Change and Environment Committee received a report in relation to the Peterborough School Climate Change Programme.

The purpose of the report was to present the work of the Peterborough School Climate Change Programme and seek acknowledgement and feedback by the Scrutiny Committee to enable the work to be developed further.

The Climate Change School Engagement Officer accompanied by the Principal Climate Change Officer introduced the report and highlighted key points including:

This programme hoped to encourage a whole school understanding of what carbon reduction projects there were. Schools would be supported to create carbon reduction action plans that would include student led projects. The programme would be available to both maintained and academy schools and could be amended to best suit the needs of each school.

The Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members thanked Officers for their work and praised the report.
- Members queried whether the age of a school would impact their carbon emission audit. Members were advised that older schools would have older technology like light switch banks and not automatic lights in comparison to newer build schools. However, Officers identified that common themes focussed on behavioural changes linked to leaving lighting on and recycling.
- The Principal Climate Change Officer advised that all schools would be invited to work with the team and would encourage more schools to come forward.
- Members noted the levels of engagement and queried how this could be increased. Members were advised the programme had been launched in October 2022 and the level of engagement with schools was at an expected level. There would be an expected increase as the school year progressed.
- Officers advised that programme details would be shared with schools and communications had been targeted to ensure the best engagement.
- Members questioned whether there would be a quantifiable carbon footprint for each school to identify how to meet their carbon targets. Members were advised that the programme included a pre-populated carbon footprint calculator which schools could use to track their data, based on the 2021 Greenhouse Gas Conversion Factors. This would be updated yearly and would be the main tool to track the progress the schools had made.
- The Youth Councillor queried how the audit tool would be connected to wider programmes such as the Peterborough Environment City Trust (PECT) Blueprint scheme. Members were advised that conversations on next steps after schools had completed their audit had been had with PECT.
- Members questioned if there would be capital investment for retrofitting. The Principal Climate Change Officer advised that the Council had been successful in receiving funding for a heat decarbonisation plan for maintained schools but funds to complete the work would be needed.
- Members asked if lessons learnt would be shared between all schools, even if a school had not signed up to the programme. Members were advised that the team had been looking into a website that shared this sort of information. There were also plans to introduce a termly newsletter which would highlight schools and their progress.

- Members asked how long it would take a school to start their programme and were advised that if the right level of engagement had been received, it would take three to four weeks.
- Members asked if there had been engagement with school governors and how Councillors could support the engagement work. The Officer highlighted that work with governors would help engagement with the senior leadership team and Councillors can advise schools in their ward of the programme and let the Officers know of any contacts within those schools.
- Members were concerned about how the project had been presented as a piece of additional work for teachers and the effect this would have on the success of the project. The Principal Climate Change Officer clarified that the audit would not judge schools but help them to identify their carbon emissions and produce a decarbonisation plan.
- Members were also advised that this was not done to schools and was a tool schools could sign up to if they wished and that PECT had had successful engagements with similar projects.
- Members followed up and queried how the programme would fit in given that schools pre-plan their terms and curriculums. The Schools Climate Change Officer advised that schools had utilised existing eco-clubs and the programme had been run as extra-curricular to work it into an already planned curriculum.
- Members were advised that conversations were ongoing with PECT regarding their reward scheme to ensure synergy across the platforms.
- The Youth Councillor queried how much power the schools had to change their carbon emissions and whether there needed to be stronger connectivity across Council departments. Members were advised that conversations had been had with the Waste Team where school trips to the energy recovery facility had been discussed.
- Members noted that the programme focussed on low-cost behavioural changes that schools would be able to implement easily. The Principal Climate Change Officer advised that all schools were presented with options they could explore to decarbonise but that the answer may be different for a maintained or academy school.
- Members were advised that no school had directly declined the offer, but some had not responded to engagement communications.
- Members referred to the strong low-carbon sector in Peterborough and questioned what external support could be used to support this programme. Members were advised that the team had spoken with the new university and various businesses to strengthen these links as schools were keen for speakers.
- Members were advised that best practice research had identified that not many Councils had a programme like this published and that the team had explored ways of celebrating schools progress through an end of academic year celebration event.

AGREED ACTIONS

The Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to scrutinise the work done under the Peterborough School Climate Change Programme and provide feedback for programme development.

38. TREES AND WOODLAND: ASH DIEBACK ACTION PLAN

The Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee received a report in relation to the Trees and Woodland: Ash Dieback Action Plan.

The purpose of the report was to determine whether the Scrutiny Committee wished to express any recommendations to Cabinet regarding the proposed threat posed by Ash Dieback and allow the Committee to receive and comment on a draft Ash Dieback Action Plan and the measures outlined within it.

The Natural and Historic Environment Manager accompanied by the Assistant Director Planning introduced the report and highlighted key points including:

This report presented the draft action plan for dealing with ash dieback. There had been a recent trend where the infection had spread, and an action plan needed to be put in place to cope the growing problem. Ash dieback is a fungal disease that would lead to the slow decline and eventual death of a tree.

The Action Plan had been produced using the template and guidance in the Tree Council's toolkit for ash dieback which was universally used and covered key issues.

The Officer hoped the report would communicate the impact of the disease on the infrastructure in the city with the potential for trees to become dangerous as well as the environmental implication of the decline in ash trees. The report looked at two scenarios where there would be a 90% failure in the ash stock over a ten-year period and a 50% failure over a ten-year period.

The Corporate Risk register had been updated to notify the Council that a financial treat had developed. The action plan was a document to deal with the threat of ash dieback which would affect a significant proportion of the Council's ash trees.

The Council owned over 22,000 ash trees and measures in the action plan would help to mitigate and control the impact of ash dieback.

The Chair advised the Committee that they had approved a request from Councillor Sandford to speak to this report. Members noted that Councillor Sandford would be unable to take part in the debate or vote on any recommendations made on this item.

Councillor Sandford raised points including:

Members were advised that Councillor Sandford would focus on sections 6.14-6.24 of the report and would refer to a Woodland Trust report.

Councillor Sandford commented on section 1.4 that asked at what point a diseased ash tree would become dangerous or pose a threat to the public or property. He noted that this seemed to be a risk-based approach which would be sensible but suggested that this had not been followed in the approach to Bretton Woodland where there had been a suggestion for large scale removal or coppicing.

The report referred to the large-scale removal of ash in Bretton, in 2019 and Members were advised of the heavy machinery that had been used in wet conditions.

Councillor Sandford noted that if the approach had been solely risk based, trees would only be removed if close to a footpath or a path of the wood which if they fell would cause an injury to people.

He then referred to a Woodland Trust report that had identified that it would be difficult to estimate what proportion of ash would be lost to the disease. The Woodland Trust zoned their woods to separate out affected areas which would then be a part of a selective felling process. Their aim was to retain diseased ash trees for as long as they can as there was the potential for some diseased ash may recover. They had also advised that wide-scale removal should not be carried out as it could hurt species recovery.

Councillor Sandford noted that when an area of was ash coppiced it would make the trees more vulnerable to the disease. He then questioned whether coppicing was the best way forward when there was a significant amount of ash.

Councillor Sandford referred to the use of Milton Estate as an example which he believed to be an invalid comparison as it was a commercial forestry plantation on a private estate.

He suggested that the committee considered to defer work until 2024, so further advice from external experts could be commissioned.

The Chair thanked Councillor Sandford for his time and moved onto debate.

The Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members queried if felling would increase the risk of the disease spreading. The Officer advised that the issue with ash dieback was that it had the tendency to attack young growth which was more susceptible than a mature tree.
- Members were advised that the fundamental issue had been to understand Bretton Woods where, prior to ash dieback, the trees had been in poor condition and 70% had significant fungal decay (*Inonotus hispidus*). The lack of management of these issues had caused the trees to become a liability and increased their risk potential. This combination would have meant intervention, irrespective of ash dieback.
- The Natural and Historic Environment Manager advised that if the trees were perfectly healthy, he would have advised that any felling was delayed.
- Members were advised that there was no option of do nothing about Bretton Woodland as the asset would be lost. Where there had been intervention, there were small gaps where new species had been introduced.
- Members noted that ash dieback compounded existing issues and increased the need to do something earlier than intended.
- Members referred to their experience of Bretton Woodland and the devastation the coppicing work caused. The use of machinery, woodchips and mass clearings of every tree had suppressed natural growth and the planting did not mitigate what had been taken down.
- Members asked to see a review into the existing work reported back to the committee so to be fully informed before any further work is commissioned.
- The Officer agreed that Bretton Woodland did look significantly worse than it should have but that one season had seen a notable difference. Members were reassured that consent had been given under a felling license from the Forestry Commission.
- Members noted that Woodland trust representatives had been invited to Bretton Woodland and were supportive of the work.
- Members were advised that the recommendations from the management scheme for Bretton Woodland had been independently drafted by an arboricultural consultant.
- The Officer advised that the number of trees planted after felling were a condition within the felling license.
- Members queried if there was a plan in place for replacement trees and what species they would be. The Officer advised that if a tree was felled, it would be

replaced. In certain belts there would be an opportunity for natural regeneration and there would be an important consideration for the younger shelter belts and impact of felling trees is less significant as machinery is smaller.

- Members noted that tree were replanted the following planting season and it had focused on native trees where appropriate.
- Members questioned what percentage of ash was in the coppiced areas. The Officer advised that there had been an estimate of 75% ash in Bretton Woodland.
- Members questioned how the planned felling would be communicated to the public. The Officer advised that the approval of the action plan would not mean immediate felling but was a preparation for what was coming. There was an indication that the spread of ash dieback would be severe, and earliest intervention in Bretton Woods would be in 2024.
- Members noted that as the trees declined the public would be educated on the diseases and the Officer highlighted that it would be clear what trees were diseased.
- Members noted that the works proposed had not been funded but there was sound evidence that there was a need to do something.
- Members asked if they could be provided with images that showed where the affected ash trees were in the city. The Officer advised that all specimen ash trees were plotted and could be shared with Members.
- Members sought clarification on page 58 that no allowance had been made on the cost of inflation for the works and the issues in tree stock supply. The Natural and Historic Environment Manager advised that the tree stock had been an issue and efforts were made to replace with local provenance. The Council had good relationships with reputable nurseries where strong links for supply had been created.
- Members noted that inflation had been a concern but that the document included estimated costs but there would be numerous variables. Only time would allow for there to be more accurate pricing as and when the disease was at the point where action needed to be taken.
- Members also noted that the Tree Contract would need to be retendered and there was no firm cost for this work, but further intelligence would allow for more precise business case.
- The Officer confirmed there would be a tree survey in 2024 and agreed to bring that survey back to the committee. Bretton Woodland had a separate management plan which had gone out to public consultation and was what was currently being delivered. The Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission were consulted on this document.
- There was the intention to amend the document as a result of the increase in ash dieback. The 2024 management plan would be amended, and the team would apply for a new felling license from forestry commission.
- Members noted that the issue was serious but there was no need to panic as the plan would mitigate some effects. The Officer advised that this was not reactive but pre-emptive and without a plan the situation would be worse.
- Members queried what impacts the coppiced stumps would have if they were left to fall into a woodland. The Officer advised that the biggest challenges would be to make sure things were safe. As there were informal routes within the woodland, the Council were duty bound to intervene as leaving trees to fall was not suitable.
- Members sought clarification on whether the amended management plan would be brought back to committee after the 2024 survey. The Officer confirmed that he would be happy to do this.
- Members discussed some potential recommendation amendments to which the Officers discussed and advised on.

Cllr Burbage proposed that unless there was a health and safety issue or a risk to life that no further mass felling took place until the 2024 survey and amended plan was presented to the Committee.

The Natural and Historic Environment Manager advised that there was no intention to conduct a mass clearance in Bretton Woodland before 2024. He advised that there would be a need to carry out health and safety work as a result of the previous survey in 2022. This would be communicated with the public and the relevant ward Councillors would be informed. The Forestry Commission had allowed an exemption for the Council to carry out those works but that anything beyond this would require a felling license. The Officer reassured Members that the Tree Hazard Risk Evaluation and Treatment Systems (THREATS) was a recognised standard, and the management strategy would be followed in accordance with this.

The Committee requested that the Bretton Wood Management Plan be brought back to the Committee after the 2024 survey had been conducted.

AGREED ACTIONS

The Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note the current threat posed to the Council's tree stock by Ash dieback and the potential pressures imposed. Consider the Ash Dieback Action Plan and offer any further views which will subsequently be reported to Cabinet.
2. Endorse the draft Ash dieback Action Plan and recommend it to Cabinet

The Committee also requested that the Natural and Historic Environment Manager:

- Provide the Committee with information images that show where the affected Ash Dieback trees are in the city.
- Bring the Bretton Wood Management Plan back to Committee after the 2024 survey has been conducted.

39. COMMITTEE START TIME REPORT

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and sought the committees' views on what start time they would like for the new municipal year 2023/2024.

The following recommendation was made by Councillor Wiggin and seconded by Councillor Judy Fox, that the Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee pre-meeting should start at 6pm and the formal committee meeting should start at 7pm.

The Committee voted **UNANIMOUSLY** in favour of the recommendation and the recommendation was **CARRIED**.

AGREED ACTIONS

The Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to agree that the start time for all Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee meetings for the Municipal Year 2023-24 to be 7pm.

40. FORWARD PLAN OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which included the latest version of the Council's Forward Plan of Executive Decisions containing decisions that the Leader of

the Council, the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would make during the forthcoming month. Members were invited to comment on the plan and where appropriate, identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Committee's Work Programme.

- There were no questions raised.

AGREED ACTIONS

The Climate Change and Environment Committee considered the current Forward Plan of Executive Decisions and **RESOLVED** to note the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions.

41. WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2022/2023

The Democratic Services Officer presented the report which looked at the work programme for the municipal year 2022/23 to determine the Committees priorities.

- There were no questions raised.

AGREED ACTIONS

The Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee considered the Work Programme for 2022/2023 and **RESOLVED** to note the report.

42. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the Joint Meeting of the Scrutiny Committees was noted as being 23 January 2023.

The date of the next Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting was noted as being 28 February 2023.

CHAIR

Meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 8.23pm