

CLEANER GREENER AND SAFER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 24th November, 2016
Time of Commencement: 6.30 pm

Present:- Councillor Wenslie Naylor – in the Chair

Councillors Allport, Burgess, Cooper, Olszewski, Panter, Reddish and Spence (as a substitute for Councillor Dillon)

Officers Becky Allen - Landscape Manager, Jayne Briscoe - Scrutiny Officer and Roger Tait - Head of Operations

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest stated.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Dillon and P Hailstones.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 12 OCTOBER 2016

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2016 be agreed as a correct record.

4. CONSULTATION - OPEN SPACE STRATEGY AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

As part of the consultation process the Head of Operations and the Landscape and Community Manager presented the draft Open Space Strategy and the Green Infrastructure Strategy for consideration and comment by members of the Committee. It was noted that the documents were all available on the Councils public website and that the period for public consultation ended on 15 December, 2016.

The strategies identified a range of strategic aims and objectives for open space requirements in the borough as well as green infrastructure planning, provision, management, maintenance and alternative use to ensure that these assets fulfil their potential to deliver a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits.

A number of key stakeholders – Locality Action Partnerships, parish councils and local councils had been involved in developing the documents which will form part of the evidence base for the Joint Local Plan, once they have been adopted.

In line with a suggestion from the Chair members agreed to confine questions and issues to the overall strategy.

Members were encouraged to be an advocate for the strategies and to encourage residents to engage with the consultation process.

In response to a members question it was explained that issues concerning fly tipping did not fall under the strategy, similarly sites for travellers as they were an operational issue. Surface water was considered as part of the green infrastructure strategy which would look at open spaces to help ensure that they were more resilient.

A member asked about the cost of external consultants who had been engaged to prepare the strategy and it was confirmed that this was approximately £24k.

Although Members were impressed by the high quality of the content and comprehensive nature of the documents they were concerned at their accessibility to the general public due to the complexity of the information and the size of the documents.

In response to a question from a member concerning links to existing strategies officers confirmed that the consultants who prepared the strategy had been advised to consider other relevant documents such as Rights of Way Improvement Plan (Staffordshire County Council, Rural Green Space Strategy and the Borough Equestrian Strategy).

A member highlighted the decreased maintenance strategy and sought reassurance that the open space remained accessible. This was confirmed where it is feasible to do so, depending on the use of the land. Different approaches could be used such as leasing for pasture and grazing, mowing regimes could be relaxed (this can allow natural ecosystems to flourish for example), to enable resources to be moved into the higher priority sites.

Officers confirmed that there would be potential for different types of maintenance, for example a residents group may be able to take over the maintenance of a particular area.

The Head of Operations and the Landscape and Community Manager left the meeting at this point and continuing, Members discussed their response to the public consultation document:-

1. Do you/or do you not support the 'Vision for Open Space' as set out in Open Space Strategy (Page 12, Open Space Strategy). If not how would you change it?

Yes. Any additional comments to be sent by email to the Chair.

2. Are the 'Standards for Open Space' proposed in the Open Space Strategy (Table 2, Page 14, Open Space Strategy) in line with your expectations and are they a suitable basis to meet the needs of residents and nature?

It was noted that the play space for children had reduced and members sought assurance that the informal kick about space was still incorporated and would not be reduced.

3 *Do you/or do you not support the 'sub-strategies for Open Space' set out in Chapter 5 of the Open Space Strategy (Pages 15 – 32, Open Space Strategy)?*

Members were particularly keen to promote new cross border green corridors and 'unbarriered access for a number of user groups (walkers, riders, cyclists, mobility scooter users, buggy users) with neighbouring authorities including Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council.

Members were very concerned to ensure local consultation was carried out and viewed this as very important.

Members recognised that there would be differential management of areas to reflect the different types of use.

4 *Do you/or do you not support the 'Green Infrastructure Vision' as set out in Green Infrastructure Strategy (Page 5, Green Infrastructure Strategy). If not how would you change it*

Page 92. Yes

5 *Do you/or do you not support the 'Green Infrastructure Spatial Strategy' as set out in Green Infrastructure Strategy (Page 24 - 29, Green Infrastructure Strategy)? If not how would you change it?*

This question is unclear; members felt that it was a poor question and it was not obvious what they should be looking at.

6 *Do you/or do you not support the 'Green Infrastructure Thematic Strategy' as set out in Green Infrastructure Strategy (Page 30 – 32, Green Infrastructure Strategy)? If not how would you change it?*

Member agreed to look through these individually.

T4. Offsetting areas agreed in principle but should be maintained as part of the overall public space.

7 *If you think there is an alternative site that should be included within the 'required to meet local standards' lists, please say which site it is, which site would you exclude and why? Please be specific.*

This should be entirely open to public consultation. Members requested clarification of 1 in and 1 out.

8. *Do you consider it to be an option to reduce current maintenance levels on sites which are not required to meet open space needs? If so what sort of reduced maintenance do you think might be acceptable?*

Members agreed there should be an option to reduce maintenance.

Meadow land should be promoted and tree planting encouraged. However members wished to ensure that public access remained into the semi-natural areas. They agreed that there could be fewer organised flower beds.

9 Do you think it would be acceptable to introduce small scale development to some areas of land within larger parks and open spaces if it did not affect the use and enjoyment of the site overall?

Depending on uses and in keeping with the integrity of the recreational space.

10 If there are any other points you would like to make about the draft documents, or related to Open Space or Green Infrastructure then please make them here.

Whilst recognising that it is difficult to convey complex issues members felt that there is much of significance to members of Borough communities and open space users in all areas. We were unable to assess public reaction fully as the results of public consultation were not available to us at the meeting. Members recommended that there should be a 'user friendly' summary 'or key points of future change as the authors of the reports see them, highlight. Also further opportunities explored for information workshops as the strategies begin to be operational. These could be held for example prior to Council or Parish Forum.

Members welcomed partnership working and felt it would be very successful in this context if groups could take over and manage spaces.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

6. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Business.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 14 DECEMBER 2016

COUNCILLOR WENSLIE NAYLON
Chair

Meeting concluded at 8.30 pm

