

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

27 APRIL 2021

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Barrett
Beauchamp
Birnie (Chairman)
P Hearn
Hobson
McDowell
Ransley
Riddick
Rogers
Silwal (Vice-
Chairman)
Stevens
Timmis

Officers: James Doe Assistant Director - Planning, Development
and Regeneration
Layla Fowell Corporate & Democratic Support Officer
Pennie Rayner Strategic Planning and Regeneration Officer
Craig Thorpe Group Manager - Environmental Services

Also Attendance:

The meeting began at 6.30 pm

1 MINUTES

Action points from the meeting dated 23rd March 2021.

The minutes from the meeting of 23rd March 2021 were agreed by the members present to be signed by the Chairman at the next available opportunity.

Action Point: FJump to send a response to the committee re the higher costs due to Covid.-complete

Action Point: FJump to provide the committee with timetables for maintenance costs – LF to follow up with FJump.

Action Point: J.Doe to provide the committee with details, including costs, of both judicial reviews. – to send an email to member support

Action Point: LF to chase M. Parr on A.P page 24

2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllr Taylor, Cllr Tindall joined as a substitute

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Brian Kazer from Tring in Transition has a question in relation to item 6.

5 **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

None

6 **WATER & SEWERAGE**

The chair moved this item to item 7 on the Agenda

J. Doe gave a brief introduction. This is a report on Water and Sewerage provision in Dacorum which Members requested as part of the recent discussion on the Work Programme. JD introduced Jake Rigg, Director of Corporate Affairs and Communications at Affinity Water and Mark Dickinson, Development Planning Manager at Thames Water. There is a short covering report to introduce this item and reference to the emerging Infrastructure Delivery Plan which Members will be familiar with and produced as part of the Local Plan work.

Mark Dickinson, Thames Water gave his presentation – a copy has been circulated via email.

Following the presentation questions were asked as follows.

Cllr Silwal asked about the Asset Management Plan which covers five years but MD talked about this being a long term plan for 25 years, will the Asset Management Plan be extended or is it a different plan? MD replied that their Asset Management Plan is what they are going to deliver over the next five years, but the long term plan for 25 year plan for water, resources and drainage matters will be split up into five year chunks so there will be five chunks that feed into that more strategic plan.

Cllr Douris asked about the incremental increases, raw sewage in peoples gardens during heavy rain, the responses to planning applications and objections and how to contact Thames Water. MD responded that all catchments are split up into sewerage drainage area codes and each pumped section of the network has a unique code. All codes have trigger levels and are reviewed depending on that level. Flooding

issues are a concern and customers are prioritised and trends investigated. With regard to planning application and objections, there are two reasons why Thames Water wouldn't object, one is due to costs but the main reason is they have a duty to provide, maintain and extend the network, as per Section 98 of the Water Industry Act.

Cllr McDowell asked about the report that has been circulated and Thames Water responses regarding the large scale sites and the lack of detail and seeks reassurance. MD replied that Thames Water is the largest water company in the UK and covers 96 Local Authorities and they get consulted on all the site allocations and all sites are looked at. A broad brush approach is taken and they will advise on whether or not it is felt that the site is going to need off-site infrastructure. The developers will discuss the site with them once the site has been allocated within the Local Plan or provide supporting evidence for their development for inclusion within the Local Plan and support them in that. Cllr McDowell asked if they have fears of capacity being a limiting factor to development in Dacorum in any of the areas. MD replied no.

Cllr Rogers asked about the telephone number to report flooding issues provided in response to Cllr Douris's question and MD apologised if it was the wrong number and will find the right number and qualify it. Cllr Rogers also asked that whilst they are an infrastructure provider what about the current situation regarding the HS2 and the three planned motorway service areas on M25 close to Dacorum and what would get priority, local housing or larger infrastructure developments. MD replied that the duties under the Water Industries Act are to serve sanitary fixtures and fittings and beyond that it becomes trade effluent and then the discharge is subject to negotiations and Thames Water would have to understand what the breakdown is with regard to what is the statutory duty to serve the development and what is above and beyond the requirements.

Mr Kazer asked his questions, noting that, paragraph 1583 of the Affinity Water report states that it is subject to developers and customers reducing their consumption and asked if this statement applies to all of the developments proposed in the DBC's emerging Local Plan. He also asked how is this going to be achieved by DBC given its role in planning policies and conditions, and given that there is a large gap between consumption allowed by building regulations, and the consumption actually existing in Dacorum, and bearing in mind the substantial growth in demand arising from the Local Plan and that the reliance on changing consumer behaviour is incredibly hard to do. Regarding paragraph 1579 of the Affinity Water's report which states "there is sufficient water supply in the region", he asked whether that statement covered all the developments proposed in the emerging Local Plan which runs until 2038 and by what percentage will abstraction from the chalk aquifer need to increase to achieve this.

Jake Rigg from Affinity Water answered that it does cover all developments across Affinity Water supply area and they are encouraging Local Authorities in their Local Planning processes to adopt within the new developments the more stringent target allowed. How this is going to be achieved will be shown through the presentation but the Water Resources Management Plan is an adaptive plan and means that the cheapest way for everyone to balance supply and demand in the short term is to reduce demand. Finally with regard to the amount to be taken from the chalk aquifer, since the publication of the Water Resources Management Plan there is a

greater environmental focus particularly on the chalk aquifer to say how do we, over time, move away from abstracting from chalk ground water in sources that affect the Gade and the Bulbourne by building new assets and speed that up by reducing demand - all of which will be discussed in the presentation.

Cllr Birnie asked Jake Rigg to give his presentation.

MD from Thames Water advised that the contact telephone number for Thames Water is 0800 3169800.

Cllr Birnie noted that Thames Water also supply water to the Tring area and, if there any differences between Thames Water and Affinity Water's approach, he asked that MD would intervene MD explained that he is not an expert on water and he imagined that there would be very similar approaches, normally the twin track approach of looking to reduce before they look to taking more water.

JR reported there are three aspects, supply, upgrades and demand management. There is significant new growth in Dacorum. Affinity Water plans for this future growth in several ways, Water Resources Management level – a major strategic level, Hydraulic Demand level – a granular level looking at new connections and plan for growth. JR explained with regard to the environment that 55% of their abstraction comes from chalk ground water sources. A number of these are in Dacorum and they have an impact on chalk streams particularly on low flows. Last year it was announced that Affinity Water's ambition is to end unsustainable abstraction from these chalk ground water sources over the next 20 years.

Cllr Bhinder asked JR to clarify how much water is abstracted JR confirmed that it is 55%. Cllr Bhinder felt that people would be confused that due to the rainfall we experience that we are still abstracting water from the natural sources and returning untreated water and would like JR to comment. JR replied that the aquifer levels are currently slightly above average. With regard to building reservoirs it would mean they would need to be built at significant distances from Dacorum but they are looking at working with landowners to build very small reservoirs as an option.

Mr Kazer asked whether the ambition of Affinity Water and Thames Water is to turn it into a KPI to monitor and report to the Board on progress to get to the end of unsustainable abstraction from the chalk aquifer JR confirmed that it is already with Affinity Water's Board. MD replied that Thames Water also has a plan for Water Resources Management which sets out what the plans are for the future to reduce abstraction, and encouraging customers to recycle more and use less.

Cllr Birnie asked MD if he could supply some information for the Committee on the Plan at a later date.

JR returned to his presentation and explained what big strategic upgrades are required. There are smaller tactical interventions and then they scale upwards and Affinity Water has a process to establish what supply and demand is required in terms of new demand/housing growth, and will apply environmental constraints and then effectively list the options. These lists contain many options. The key options in this case are utilisation, bringing water from further away, bringing more water from the Thames valley and big strategic regional options. Affinity Water has access to water at Grafham reservoir which doesn't feed the Dacorum area directly but does

have implications for the area and in particularly the chalk streams. This comes through a pipe track to Sundon and Affinity Water are in the process of applying for planning permission to upgrade the small treatment works there which would allow them to bring that water further through the network. Another step is to bring more water from the Thames valley. Strategic Resource options will require using new sources ie reservoirs in Oxfordshire and South Lincolnshire and there are another additional two options, one being the Thames to Affinity Transfer and potential transfer from Birmingham using the Grand Union Canal.

Cllr Beauchamp asked if the River Gade abstraction and the planned reduction talked about some years ago has been met. JR was unable to provide figures but could confirm that there has been a reduction at Piccotts End and is happy to report back on the figures in writing in due course. Cllr Beauchamp asked about the innovation and encouraging people to use less water, as he feels that people are not aware of exactly how much water they really do use daily and asked whether any thought has been given to using a similar process to the electricity board with smart meters to measure people's water usage on a regular basis JR confirmed that, like Thames Water, Affinity is installing smart meters. However, Affinity Water are looking at the same smart meters and other devices, looking at machine learning and artificial intelligence to be able to model usages to track demand.

Cllr Timmis said that every year in the summer a monthly email is received from Affinity Water saying that water is running short and there is a need to be careful. So despite the suggestions and assurances about how you are going to be able to get water from elsewhere for these extra people who will be living in the area, how can this will be delivered in reality? JR replied that it is planned for with all water authorities on the same basis under the guidance of the Environment Agency and DEFRA and is very strictly regulated so all the housing and demand growth is accounted for.

Cllr Ransley asked how the water will be brought from Birmingham on the Grand Union Canal when a lot of the CRT equipment, locks etc are out of date JR replied that the scheme will look at what the problems are and there is a process where water companies are allowed, in developing the big strategic resource options to work with a series of partners in a phased process to upgrade.

Cllr Birnie asked if information could be provided on the mitigations in terms of supply that Affinity Water are working on and the timescales involved to ensure that they correspond with DBC's expansion plans JR confirmed that this can be provided in due course.

JR then explained Demand which falls into three areas, Household demand, Non-household demand and Leakage. With regard to Leakage Affinity Water has a target and to be able to achieve this there are several projects that are underway to identify leaks. With regard to Demand there is a target to reduce demand and there is a programme of several activities. A campaign called "Save Our Streams" has been launched plus they are working with new house builders/developers in getting their developments down to zero additional water use. Also a campaign is being launched working with the ultra-high users.

Cllr Birnie said that he has been very interested in both submissions which have been extremely enlightening and feels his colleagues would agree. The report was noted.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES PERFORMANCE UPDATE Q3

This item was moved to item 6 on the Agenda

C. Thorpe presented the Q3 Performance and provided an update on the key projects. Many of the projects have been completed but also many were put on hold.

Waste Services Operation – a number of improvements have been carried out with regard to Covid measures at Cupid Green. There have been a number of staff off but there were still 180-190 members of staff still coming into work every day so a lot of safety measures were put in place. Two audits were undertaken by the H&S Executive who gave a clean bill of health and were very complimentary on the measures put in place. DBC Corporate H&S have also undertaken a couple of audits and also gave a clean bill of health. LGV Licence training for a number of staff was put on hold but this should now be completed in May.

Some improvements works at Windmill Road Allotments have been done with the help of Cllr England which has meant that the majority of plots are now in full use.

The draft Trees and Woodlands Policy which was brought to the last OSC meeting has now been endorsed. Tree planting continued through Q3 and has been completed for this year. CT is happy to circulate details if required.

Food Waste Recycling roll out to flats is now complete with the exception of flats above High Streets which cause a problem with regard to the dwellers' ability to contain their waste but this is only 2-3% of the flat dwelling population.

The Clothes Swap event had to be postponed and has been re-scheduled for Sunday, 16th May. Also reported at the last OSC meeting was the vehicles that have been ordered and were in-build. These have now been received with just over half the new refuse vehicles being fully operational.

Performance Indicators – the only ones that may give Members some concern are the Missed Bins and Missed Assisted Collections, bearing in mind this is Q3 and there were a number of staff off shielding, isolating or who had actually contracted Covid, this meant there were staff shortages and a number of temping agency staff were used which has given a slightly over target figure. However, the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable are now back at work and CT expects this figure to reduce in line with targets. There is now no one self-isolating but there are still three members of staff off with Covid.

Cllr Silwal asked CT which Clean Safe and Green projects have been put on hold due to staff levels CT replied that the Splash Park hasn't opened yet and the educational awareness events around the clothes swaps and compost give away were postponed.

Cllr Ransley asked if there was a narrow vehicle for use in streets in Tring and elsewhere within the Borough being delivered. CT replied that there isn't one within

the initial 14 ordered, but there are 2 or 3 smaller operational vehicles for use in roads that are narrow due to parked cars and an additional hire vehicle has been bought. There are still 2 small vehicles to purchase in the next ordering process. Cllr Ransley asked if lakes were included as part of CT's remit with regard to Woodlands as Dundale Woods in Tring has a lake. CT said that he had spoken to Luke Johnson regarding this some time ago and it was thought to be private. However, Cllr Ransley reported that this does belong to DBC and CT said he would enquire with Trees and Woodlands but could confirm that his Service is not responsible in terms of maintenance.

Action Point: CT will circulate which projects on Clean Safe and Green have been delayed due to Covid.

Cllr Timmis asked if there has been any progress on the reduction of fly tips.

Cllr Birnie thought that this item should be put on the "to do list".

Action Point: include Fly Tipping on the Work Programme

Cllr Timmis also asked about the regularity of the grass verges cutting etc in view of Climate Change and wildlife preservation. CT responded advising that there are a number of sub-groups set up now to discuss Climate Change and Biodiversity and discussions are taking place with HCC and land owners to establish which areas can be left to wild meadow. There will be a lot more areas that are left to wild meadow and these will be publicised on the website so that residents are aware of why they are being left uncut.

Cllr Beauchamp asked CT about the three members of staff that are off with Covid and if they have been supplemented with replacements? CT advised that they have been replaced with agency staff temporarily. One member of staff returned last week on a phased return basis, one remains in hospital and one still off. Cllr Beauchamp also talked about the problems with rubbish collections from flats above High Streets in particular the Old High Street as a meeting had taken place last week and the problems have been resolved and he thanked CT and his staff for their help with this issue.

Cllr Birnie asked if discussions had taken place yet with HCC regarding an increase in budget for tree works. CT advised that a meeting to discuss the agency agreement had been arranged.

Cllr Birnie also asked about the compost give away and the issue regarding people bringing their own bags. CT advised that this practice has been changed and staff are now going to bag up the compost and put it in the boots of people's vehicles as it was thought to be safer for people to stay in their cars.

Cllr Bhinder asked about the state of shopping centres and in particular the waste bins and whether there was a way to make the public aware that some bins are not DBC's responsibility. CT responded that one of the projects that the Operations Manager at Clean Safe and Green is going to be undertaking is mapping all of the bins that are DBC's responsibility. But in terms of litter generally, CT's Service is going to take over the Street Champions which is a group of volunteers. Cllr Bhinder talked about the state of litter nationally and that he wishes to organise a litter picking

group in his area but seeks some guidance regarding how to carry this out practically in view of the Covid restrictions. CT advised that he would get a member of staff to contact Cllr Bhinder to advise on the process.

Action Point: CT to ask a member of staff to contact Cllr Bhinder regarding setting up a litter picking group.

Cllr Riddick asked about item 5 on page 43 of the Park Opens Spaces Trees and Woodlands Policy and the meeting with representatives of the Herts and Middlesex Badger Group confirming a Set and asked if CT could enlighten the meeting regarding this matter. CT is unable to answer this matter currently but assumes that it is because of some tree work that cannot take place because the badger set is there, but CT will make enquiries and circulate the findings Cllr Riddick asked if it was a new set but CT will have to check with the Trees and Woodlands Officer.

Action Point: CT to make enquiries regarding the Badger set and circulate findings to LF for circulation.

The report was noted.

8 **SOUTH WEST HERTS JOINT STRATEGIC PLAN**

J. Doe introduced Chris Outtersides. CO reported on some key points on the work undertaken on the JSP. The JSP is a strategy plan focusing on strategic housing, employment, infrastructure and green belt and AONB issues. The JSP will also look further than growth at issues such as Climate Change and Negative Carbon etc.

Cllr Birnie asked whether 1.4 bullet point 3 extends to water and sewerage CO confirmed that it does and discussions have already begun with Thames Water and Affinity Water about the long term strategic growth opportunities across SW Hertfordshire.

CO explained the benefits of the JSP which will allow us to unlock infrastructure investment now, the ability for us to look at planning across the larger canvas which does allow us to have a better conversation with government about infrastructure funding and the plan could be adopted in 2024/25 giving us 12 years to get the infrastructure in place before the growth comes along. The other benefit is that although CO works for DBC he does represent the other four districts in the County in the JSP, and gives us the bigger canvas to make decisions in terms of future growth and the best approach for growth across SW Hertfordshire. The benefits of a JSP will be about the capacity of SW Hertfordshire to deliver good growth in the long term and looking at how to deal with growth and the infrastructure interventions that are needed to deliver the growth. The sovereignty of the JSP will rest with each of the Districts and the Boroughs in the County and there is no intention to form a joint committee.

Cllr Birnie asked does that mean that it is not a first step towards a unitary council. CO confirmed that it ~~is~~ exactly means that it is not a first step towards a unitary council and he could not emphasise the point enough that this is a SW Hertfordshire's Boroughs and Districts plan.

In terms of the work done to date, CO summarised the success of the SW Hertfordshire “Your Future Engagement” that took place last year. It was largely an online consultation and not about the JSP and did not mention housing and planning, but it was more an engagement exercise to reach out to the people of SW Hertfordshire. There is now a body of about 600-700 people who volunteered to be used for workshops, testing, focus groups etc. to evolve the thinking about the evolution of the plan. Also work has been undertaken on the Growth Locations Study which is a complicated piece of planning work that is effectively trying to knit together five Local Plans in terms of the growth that the Local Plans are producing and looking at the potential available growth options moving forward and the sustainable transport interventions that potentially will be needed. This work is currently not ready for publication. However, one of the key interventions and inputs into this **report is to ensure that all infrastructure stakeholders ~~that~~ have a part to play in the long term strategic growth.

Another piece of work that CO is undertaking is to lift the profile of the JSP. There is a very active planning group, a strategic members group and a chief officer steering group. A Strategic Planning Member Group meeting took place in March and a 2021/22 Work Programme was agreed. It is an ambitious Work Programme and will mean that work on the JSP will be stepped up and also means that we will be going back to first principles in terms of what do we want the JSP to achieve. There are four key strands of work that CO is proposing in the 2021/22 Work Programme that are set out in bullet point 2.3, and there is a statement of common ground that is currently being drafted which will be brought back through each of the various delegations and planning committees and cabinets through the partnership which will really commit to the JSP moving forward. It will set the scope of JSP and it will set the timing and budget implications which CO is expecting to come through late summer/early autumn. There is a statement of Community Involvement for the JSP which is a procedural planning document that needs to be prepared before we can move to the statutory plan making in the JSP. The third bullet point is an Envisioning and Engagement piece which will reach out to Members, the public and stakeholders and communities and businesses to establish what the vision is for the JSP. Then there will be a more formal consultation of the JSP simply be on the Vision and the Engagement.

In conclusion, paragraph 2.8 and the relationship with Government. Whilst the White Paper was not great news for Strategic Planning CO is confident that in the future the revisions to the planning system will reflect Government support.

Cllr Birnie thanked CO for his report and asked if there were any questions.

Cllr Silwal asked with regard to 1.3 and the plan being reviewed in 2036/50 if there would be any change in the date Also, if any of the five Councils withdraw then what would happen to the JSP? CO replied that in terms of the date the JSP is a post Local Plan matter and the JSP will take the Local Plans as read across the five SW Hertfordshire Districts and the start date will have to reflect the Local Plan dates across the five Authorities and they are all different. The 2050 date can be pushed out and there is no reason why it cannot be amended but the ability for the JSP to be brought forward is limited at this point in time due to Local Plans dates. Regarding any of the Authorities withdrawing, its effect on the JSP will depend on how far

down the line it is. Part of the mitigation is that CO will be available to Committees such as this to ensure that as many people as possible are kept informed.

Cllr Stevens asked about paragraph 2.8 and where it takes us CO responded that was not a great deal of Strategic Planning reference in the White Paper. The Strategic Planning Members Group put a submission back to the Government about the lack of reference. Since then it has been recognised that this was an oversight

Cllr Timmis was interested in the polls that were conducted online with over 600 people responding and the third bullet point of the key findings was about what people's priorities were and one was better health facilities. She asked whether there was anything SW Hertfordshire's project could do about this. Also another question was about making it easier to get about. CO replied a lot of this was done prior to Covid and people put their hands up for better health facilities. CO attends a recently formed meeting co-ordinated through HCC and the NHS and CCG's across SW Hertfordshire looking at how better to join up health provision facilities and feed back into planning applications and Local Plans. J. Doe also said that there was better engagement with the health service now and there is a cross county working group now to get into the wider more strategic elements of the health care needs. With regard to the strategic transport it is a slightly longer term plan and that will enable us to plug into how people's behaviour changes as a result of Covid which will need to be taken into consideration. There is a further piece of ongoing work is the Hertfordshire Mass Transit Project which will run between Hemel Hempstead and Harlow.

The report was noted.

9 **WORK PROGRAMME**

Add Climate Update to 30th June

Cllr Rogers would like to know a little bit more about the planning process that might be undertaken to understand what approach might be adopted relating to e-scooters and e-bikes and other innovative travel facilities.

Cllr Birnie asked JD if this could be included in the Climate Change report with suggestions. JD advised that officers are currently researching e-bikes etc. and will discuss this with M. Gaynor and when there is something meaningful to report back on agree a date for later in the year.

The Meeting ended at 9.30 pm