

## **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**27th October 2020**

- Present:** Councillor Joy Squires in the Chair
- Councillors Allcott, B. Amos, Biggs, Collins, Griffiths, Laurenson, Roberts, Stafford (Vice-Chairman), Stalker and Udall
- Officers:** Shane Flynn, Corporate Director – Finance and Resources  
Lloyd Griffiths, Corporate Director – Home and Communities  
Sian Stroud, Deputy Director – Governance  
David Sutton, Deputy Director – Policy and Strategy  
Mark Baldwin, Head of Finance  
Sue Horrobin, Head of Environmental Services  
Alice Davey, Head of Community Services  
Ruth Corral, Environmental Sustainability Officer  
Nick McGowan, Tree Officer  
Mark Cox, Technical Services Manager, Worcestershire Regulatory Services

### **11 Appointment of Substitutes**

None.

### **12 Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillor Collins – Environmental Sustainability Strategy for the City of Worcester 2020-2030 (Minute No. 16) – As an employee of Bosch Thermotechnology Ltd.

Councillor Griffiths – Allotment Review (Minute No. 18) – As an allotment holder in the City.

### **13 Public Participation**

Alison Morgan, Co-founder of WEG – Worcester Environmental Group -addressed the Committee on improving biodiversity in Worcester. The Committee were informed that the group had come up with 52 actions to improve diversity and would be contacting local councillors on how to get involved. The group would take photographs, issues press releases and post on social media. Alison thanked the Committee for their continuing support and allowing the group to speak at Committee.

The Chair gave thanks to Alison Morgan and stated that the Environmental Sustainability Strategy identifies some proposals on the approach to biodiversity emergency.

#### 14 **Minutes**

**RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> Mach 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed remotely by the Chairman.**

#### 15 **Setting of the Budget for 2021/22 and MTFP to 2025/26**

The Committee considered a report on the setting of the budget for 2021-22 and the Medium Term Financial Plan to 2025-26.

The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources introduced the report and the Head of Finance commented on the detailed aspects of each of the appendices (1-4b)

Members were asked to review the budget for each service and consider whether it is appropriate for the service delivery requirements.

In a separate report to this Committee meeting, Members received a progress report on the various projects aligned to this Committee. Members were asked to consider whether the current projects aligned to this Committee are still appropriate and whether the amounts allocated to the City Plan themes are still appropriate.

Members were invited to submit suggestions of potential service improvements that could be included in the services' Income and Efficiency Plans in order to continue to achieve service objectives and to deliver the relevant aims of the City Plan. The Committee did not recommend any change of emphasis for the services' Income and Efficiency plans.

The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources responded to questions Members.

In particular the development of the Strategic Play Area Development Plan and why this has not progressed. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources thought that this was incorporated late in the budget and there are available reserves but would seek to confirm this. However, the Head of Environmental Operations explained this was not the case. The project was still on the agenda but have not had the capacity to progress it to date. Planning and Environmental Services need to both be involved and certainly the pandemic has played a part, together with a number of priorities which had taken place. The Head of Environmental Operations agreed to pick this up again with the Corporate Director – Place and will liaise with the Chair and Vice Chair of Committee to look at a realistic timescale. The Chair also asked that the relevant Member be involved with the discussion.

Members were informed that if they did have priorities or any suggestions to take forward to the January 2021 meeting then they were to inform the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources or the Head of Finance.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee note the Budgets for the various services identified for 2020/21.**

**16 Environmental Sustainability Strategy for the City of Worcester 2020-2030**

The Committee received a report on the Environmental Sustainability Strategy for the City of Worcester 2020-2030.

The draft Environmental Sustainability Strategy was approved for consultation on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and a public consultation and independent appraisal have since been carried out. The strategy has been further developed in response to the feedback and is included in Appendix 1 attached to the report.

Consultation on the draft strategy had taken place via three webinars, an online survey, individual meetings with key organisations and stakeholders, and an exhibition in the Guildhall courtyard for three days. A full analysis of the activities were outlined in Appendix 2 attached to the report.

The consultation was held in two phases and three primary findings from the consultation were highlighted in paragraph 3.4 of the report which have been included and enhanced in the draft strategy. The substantial changes made to the strategy, compared to the draft, were summarised in paragraph 4.3 of the report.

The Environmental Sustainability Officer responded to questions from Members.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, gave thanks to the Environmental Sustainability Officer for the report, which had been well consulted upon, and there had been a good level of engagement despite restrictions. Members also welcomed the accessible format of the document.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee:**

- 1. notes the feedback from the consultation on the draft Environmental Sustainability Strategy approved in January 2020; and**
- 2. endorses the updated Strategy and recommends it to Council for adoption.**

**17 Annual Gull Control Report and Proposed 2021 Gull Control Work**

The Committee considered the Annual Gull Control report 2020 and the proposed 2021 Gull Control, Work Programme. The Technical Services Manager, Worcestershire Regulatory Services, in presenting the report highlighted the key points.

A programme of gull control activities to be undertaken by the Council during 2020 was approved at the Environment Committee on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2019. This report provided an update on that programme of work and proposes actions for next year's breeding season considering experiences and evidence.

It was confirmed that the work programme, identified within the report, could be delivered within the existing budget of Worcestershire Regulatory Services and £30,000 gull control funding. Paragraph 5.1 of the report provided a breakdown of the cost of implementing the proposed 2021 work plan.

The Chair on behalf of the Committee gave thanks to the Technical Manager and to the Gull Officer for an interesting and well set out report and to the work carried out despite the Covic-19 restrictions which was much appreciated.

Members welcomed the report and acknowledged the progress that had been made and how much knowledge, expertise and understanding of the problem had been gained. It was also noted that a lot had been achieved on a small budget and possibly consideration could be given as to what could be achieved if an additional £5,000 or £10,000 was available in the budget.

The Technical Services Manager responded to a question from Members, particularly around egg replacement licences and the contractor Red Kite Pest Control. The Technical Services Manager explained the process to be followed going forward to apply for licences to Natural England demonstrating evidence upfront bearing in mind public safety and public health.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee:**

- 1. notes the work undertaken during 2020; and**
- 2. approves the proposed Gull Control Work Programme for 2021 as detailed in section 3 of the report.**

**18 Allotments Review**

The Committee considered a report on the review of allotments.

Worcester City Council works in partnership with the Worcester Allotment Forum to provide allotments around the City, appendix A attached to the report, provided a map and details of all the allotment sites.

An information report outlining how the City Council's allotment service operates was considered by the Committee in October 2019. As part of the work independent experts will review the purpose of the allotments taking into account wider changes and trends in society together with the City Council's own aspirations for allotments now and in the future.

The preferred option, outlined in paragraph 3 of the report, identified the appointment of an independent organisation to undertake a review of the way that allotments are governed and managed including their social, financial and environmental impacts. It was anticipated that a report would be brought back to the Committee with the conclusions of the review in March 2021.

Some Members welcomed the report and accepted that a review of the current system is needed and would like to see more officer/member involvement. It was however suggested that the review be carried out in house rather than spending £12,000 appointing an independent organisation.

Other Members felt that they could not support the proposal as it needed to be a much wider scope, the review itself was not of concern but were concerned about the lack of boundaries to the piece of work which were not found in the report.

The Chair stated that the service would not have the capacity to carry out this piece of work in house, as a huge amount of consultation and engagement would be required.

It was considered that the review would give the opportunity to look at what other councils are doing and look at best practice. To give everyone the opportunity to be involved would be a huge task for officers, therefore the appointment of an outside organisation would be a benefit.

Members agreed that engagement with the plot holders was important and that the right people were being involved, whether it was being carried out in house or externally. The allotment holders were key to all of this.

The Chair suggested a possible amendment to 1.2 of the recommendation that the Chair and Vice Chair initially agree the scope then put to members of the Committee, this may be able to be done by email or special meeting, before the next meeting, to give reassurances as to what the scope would be.

The Deputy Director – Governance suggested that there were two options open to Members to enable them to reach a decision – a full scope of the review to come back to Committee before work is commissioned or agree a form of words in principle, that the outcome of the review has to report back to Committee before it is implemented.

In referring to the Committee report, the objective is about the sustainability of these as valuable community assets. The review would ensure that they can carry on being valuable community assets and how we make them sustainable.

The Chair stated there needs to be some method form of sharing the scope of the review before any commissioning takes place, with the Committee before we go forward, Members would then have reassurance as to what's being looked at.

A suggestion was made for a task and finish group of no more than 4/5 Members of the Committee to look at the parameters of the review, and report back to Committee with the proposals.

The Chair agreed to the suggestion to set up a task and finish group for a time limited period and proposed an amendment to 1.2 of the recommendation that the Chair and Vice Chair establish a time limited, task and finish group, to include other Members of the Committee, to agree the terms of reference and scope of the review. This was agreed.

The Deputy Director – Governance stated that although the Committee agree to delegate authority to the Chair and Vice-Chair to agree the terms of the review, following consultation with the task and finish group, to also explicitly record the purpose of the review to ensure the sustainability of these community assets.

On being put to the vote the proposal was unanimously agreed, subject to the amendments to recommendations 1.1 and 1.2 in the report.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. that an independent organisation is commissioned to help the City Council review the purpose and management of allotments to ensure the sustainability of these valuable community assets; and**
- 2. that the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee establish a Task and Finish Group to agree the scope of the review to be commissioned by the Corporate Director – Place, with the outcome of the review being reported back to the Committee at its meeting in March 2021.**

**19 Astwood Cemetery Drainage Options**

The Committee considered a report on drainage options for Astwood Cemetery.

The Head of Community Services presented the report and provided Members with the background to the issue of water egress, which had been identified in section 38, being the designated Muslim Burial Site, which had been in use since 2001.

Following a range of surveys and a detailed analysis, carried out in line with Environment Agency guidance, further burials in this site were prevented and consideration was given to utilise part of the area for a fitting memorial tribute.

Technical professional consultants, Jacobs, were commissioned by the Council to investigate the matter as outlined in paragraph 3.3 of the report. Five options were identified to mitigate the water ingress to the graves in this area, which were outlined in paragraph 3.5. Each option, showing advantages and disadvantages, were shown in Appendix 1 attached the report.

Option (i) is the preferred option and is also the preferred option identified by family members. Expert advice indicates that this option could take up to 12 months to complete with the Council looking to procure a contractor to undertake the works as soon as possible.

Members were informed that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee would be kept informed with progress on the areas of work to be carried out and continuous communication would take place with the family representatives.

The financial and budgetary implications for this work was outlined in paragraph 7.1 of the report.

On being put to the vote it was unanimously agreed and

**RESOLVED: That the Committee:**

- 1. notes the professional advice provided to the council in respect of this matter, and the views of family representatives, in relation to options for drainage works within the Muslim Burial Area at Astwood Cemetery;**

**2. recommends Full Council to make capital and revenue budget provision for both the drainage improvement works, and the memorial garden works outlined at Section 7.1 of this report; and**

**3. authorises the Corporate Director - Homes and Communities to procure the works necessary to implement both the drainage improvement works, and the memorial garden works.**

## **20 Managing Trees Including Ash Dieback**

The Committee considered a report on managing trees including Ash Dieback.

The Head of Environmental Operations, in presenting the report, referred Members to the Seminar held in September whereby the Council's Tree Officer gave an overview of the wealth of trees in Worcester including areas with the most prominent tree populations.

The City Council's service standards for dealing with tree enquiries have been in place for several years, the table in paragraph 3.1.5. of the report provided the number of enquiries received regarding trees for the last 2.5 years. Inspections are carried out based on risk as detailed in paragraph 3.1.6.1 It is recognised that a review of approach and service standards should be undertaken to ensure that tree works balance the need of the customer with the environmental and arboricultural benefits.

A key part of the seminar focused on Ash Dieback and an officer from the County Council's countryside service delivered a presentation which outlined the key issues around Ash Dieback and its problems. Work will take place with the County Council and other Authorities and organisations to develop an Ash Dieback plan.

The management of trees has strong links to the Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy and working in partnership with community groups, such as WEG, is extremely important.

The Head of Environmental Operations was pleased to inform Members that funding had been secured through the Urban Tree Challenge Fund for 6,000 trees.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked all those involved in the very informative seminar that was held in September, this was shared by many.

The Head of Environmental Operations and the Tree Officer responded to questions from Members.

In response to a question relating to paragraph 3.1.16 of the report, in particular trees on land which is still under the responsibility of the developers in Warndon Villages, the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources agreed that a written response would be provided.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee note the contents of the report and the 3 successful bids made to the Urban Trees Challenge Fund which will result in over 6,000 new trees for Worcester.**

## **21 Quarter 2 Performance Report 2020/21**

The Committee considered the Quarter 2 Performance for the Environment Committee for 2020/21 attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report. In response to a question on the performance indicator for Carbon Emissions it was confirmed that the figure for the 2019-20 emissions will be reported in the Quarter 3 performance report.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee note the Council’s Quarter 2 performance for 2020/21.**

## **22 Any Other Business**

### Lyme Disease

Reference was made to a question asked at a recent Council meeting with regard to raising the awareness of the dangers of Lyme Disease and to consider what action could be taken to inform residents who use the Council’s nature reserves and parks about the dangers and how to avoid it. It had been requested a report be brought to a future meeting to consider options for a public education campaign, which may include signage and information at the Laugherne Brook Nature Reserve.

The Chair agreed to discuss this with the Vice-Chair and Officers at their next briefing.

**Duration of the meeting:** 7.00p.m. to 9.00p.m.

Chair at the meeting on  
26th January 2021