

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Council



held on Wednesday 9 December 2020 at 7.00 pm
as a virtual meeting

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors Margaret Crick (Chair), Jerry Avery, Matthew Barber, Paul Barrow, Ron Batstone, Eric Batts, Samantha Bowring, Nathan Boyd, Cheryl Briggs, Andy Cooke, Andrew Crawford, Eric de la Harpe, Amos Duveen, Neil Fawcett, Andy Foulsham, Hayleigh Gascoigne, David Grant, Debby Hallett, Jenny Hannaby, Simon Howell, Alison Jenner, Bob Johnston, Diana Lugova, Robert Maddison, Sarah Medley, Patrick O'Leary, Helen Pighills, Mike Pighills, Judy Roberts, Val Shaw, Janet Shelley, Emily Smith, Bethia Thomas, Max Thompson, Elaine Ware, Catherine Webber and Richard Webber

Officers: Steven Corrigan, Simon Hewings, Margaret Reed and Mark Stone

Co.123 Apologies for absence

None.

Co.124 Minutes

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meetings of Council held on 7 and 22 October 2020 as correct records and agree that the chair sign these as such.

Co.125 Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest

None.

Co.126 Urgent business and chair's announcements

The chair provided general housekeeping information and advised there were no items of urgent business.

Co.127 Public participation

No members of the public had registered to registered to ask a question or make a statement to Council.

Co.128 Petitions

None.

Co.129 Civil parking enforcement

Cabinet, at its meeting on 4 December 2020, considered the report of the head of housing and environment on the formal application to the Department for Transport to implement enforcement in the district. Cabinet resolved to support an application by Oxfordshire County Council for the introduction of a Special Enforcement Area and bus lane enforcement powers across the districts of Cherwell, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse to provide civil parking enforcement and to support the proposal for Oxfordshire County Council to manage civil parking enforcement. Cabinet authorised the head of housing and environment, in consultation with the head of legal and democratic, to negotiate and enter into any formal legal agreements required between Vale of White Horse District Council and Oxfordshire County Council.

RESOLVED: to approve the addition of a new civil parking enforcement scheme in the approved capital programme of £60,000 as the council's contribution to Oxfordshire County Council's implementation costs, and to approve a revenue supplementary estimate of £30,000 in the 2020/21 budget for costs to be incurred by the council.

Co.130 Treasury management mid-year monitoring report 2020/21

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 4 December 2020, on the treasury management mid-year monitoring report for the financial year 2020/21.

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee and Cabinet had considered the head of finance's report and were satisfied that the treasury activities had been carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy.

RESOLVED: to

1. note that the Joint Audit and Governance Committee is satisfied that the treasury activities have been carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy; and
2. approve the treasury management mid-year monitoring report 2020/21.

Co.131 Council Tax Base 2021/22

Council considered Cabinet's recommendations, made at its meeting on 4 December 2020, on the council tax base for 2021/22.

RESOLVED:

1. approve the interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 4 December 2020 for the calculation of the council's tax base and the calculation of the tax base for each parish area for 2021/22;

2. agree that, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Vale of White Horse District Council as its council tax base for the year 2021/22 is 53,919.1; and
3. agree that, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Vale of White Horse District Council as the council tax base for the year 2021/22 for each parish be the amount shown against the name of that parish in Appendix A of interim head of finance's report to Cabinet on 4 December 2020.

Co.132 Report of the leader of the council

Councillor Emily Smith, Leader of the council, provided an update on a number of matters. The text of her address is available on the council's [website](#).

Council noted the details of an urgent decision taken by Councillor Bethia Thomas, Cabinet member for Community Engagement, to approve the Vale of White Horse District Council's Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme.

Co.133 Questions on notice

Question from Councillor Paul Barrow to Councillor Catherine Webber, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Environment

Given the aspirations outlined in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and Defra's Biodiversity 2020 Strategy, what is being done or is planned for the next five years in terms of increased biodiversity and nature recovery in the Vale?

Answer

1) What is being done?

- A draft Nature Recovery Network map has been produced for Oxfordshire by a partnership of organisations including Officers from all Oxfordshire Local Authorities, wildlife charities and statutory bodies.
- A feasibility study into the potential for the Vale to get involved in Habitat Banking is underway.
- The Vale is actively involved in ongoing work to re-establish a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire.
- A Tree Opportunities Map is being prepared (joint funded by Vale and all Oxfordshire LPA's). This will be a resource available to all to help identify suitable tree planting opportunities. The project will develop maps showing not only where trees might be established but also where they would have the highest impact. They will cover the placement of trees in both rural and urban areas and in the widest variety of forms - as trees in or outside of woodlands; hedgerows; orchards; agroforestry; parks; and gardens.
- The Vale is delivering biodiversity net gain for all major developments. Each application is assessed for its impacts on biodiversity which are measured using a metric. All development proposals are then required to deliver more biodiversity than is lost when planning permission is granted.

- Work is underway to develop projects to be funded from s.106 money from the Grove Airfield development. This is being developed in partnership with the Freshwater Habitats Trust.
- *A Guide to Planting Trees for Community Groups* has been produced and is available on the Council's web site.
- The Council has a District Licence for Great Crested Newts which has delivered 14 new ponds and 74 Ha of high-quality terrestrial habitats in the last year.

2) What is planned for the next 5 years?

- The Strategic Property Review will consider all the Vale's landholdings and will link in with the production of an Open Spaces Strategy to determine where there are opportunities for biodiversity enhancements and tree planting.
- The Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership will be formally established. The LNP will seek to:
 - Develop a Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire
 - Develop a biodiversity net gain targeting strategy.
- Develop and deliver a Tree Planting Programme on Council owned land to enhance biodiversity and sequester carbon
- The Council is working with the Letcombe Brook Project and the Environment Agency to deliver biodiversity enhancements at Willow Walk in Wantage.

3) What else Could the Council do to help meet the targets in the Corporate Plan, these projects would be subject to further agreement and appropriate resourcing?

- Develop a Biodiversity Steering Group involving both key officers and members to oversee and develop the Council's approach to nature's recovery.
- Develop a district wide tree planting programme to deliver projects such as 'Tiny Forests' in Market towns and to facilitate and support the set-up of community tree nurseries.
- Develop new planning policies setting targets for % of Biodiversity Net Gain from new Development
- Fund partner organisations to deliver nature recovery (funding could come from CIL or other sources).

Supplementary question

Councillor Barrow asked the following supplementary question:

As a result of the Covid crisis and given the limited resources that are currently and will be available in the next five years, what criteria will be used in deciding on an order of priorities and is there likely to be any reduction in activity as a result of this?

Answer

Councillor Catherine Webber undertook to provide a full written response. However, she highlighted that Covid had made a difference as government funds had not covered the cost of the council's response to Covid and officers had been diverted to

support the council's response to the pandemic. Whilst some projects had been progressed others had been delayed.

Co.134 Motions on notice

Councillor Bob Johnston moved, and Councillor David Grant seconded the motion as set out in the agenda at agenda item 12.

Those councillors who expressed a view spoke in support of the motion. The reduction in funding for the Environment Agency had reduced its capacity to enforce regulations resulting in an increase in pollution incidents and a reduction in the number of prosecutions. Bathing Quality Water status would improve the quality of the water and address concerns regarding the health of people who swim in the water contaminated with sewerage and improve the biodiversity of the river.

On being put the motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED:

That Council notes the growing popularity of wild swimming, paddling, kayaking and paddle boarding in the River Thames and its tributaries and, more importantly, the intrinsic value of clean water and healthy, biodiverse rivers.

The UK water companies are permitted to release raw sewage into waterways in specific circumstances, under licence from the Environment Agency. Regulators rely on self-reporting on the part of the water companies and there is no way for river users to know in real time when these Controlled Sewage Overflows (CSO's) happen.

In 2017 Thames Water received the largest fine ever handed to a water utility for an environmental disaster after it spilled raw sewage into the Thames, with the judge stating that the company had a history of non-compliance. However, the issue of water cleanliness persists. Data from the River Trust revealed that Thames Water's sewage treatment works spilled raw sewage into the upper Thames, between Lechlade and Reading, more than 1,300 times in 2019, for 17,000 hours in total.

Hundreds of beaches around the UK have Bathing Quality Water status, this ensures that the Environment Agency monitors and reports on water quality throughout the bathing season.

Only a handful of inland lakes, *and no rivers*, have Bathing Quality Water status.

Recognising the intrinsic importance of the river Thames as a natural asset of national significance and its value to our communities, this Council:-

1. Asks officers to work with appropriate partners such as the Environment Agency, the Rivers Trust and Surfers against Sewage to begin the process of applying for Bathing Quality Water status for the river Thames in the Vale of White Horse.
2. Commits to taking part in the meetings of councils from along the River that are being hosted by South Oxfordshire District Council's Thames Champion, Councillor Jo Robb, to discuss opportunities for our council to join others in promoting and working towards cleaner rivers.
3. Asks the Leader to write to Thames Water calling on them to (a) draft and implement an action plan for the elimination of CSO's across its sewage treatment network and (b) to provide accurate, real-time publicly available information about CSO's into the Thames and its tributaries.

4. Asks the Leader to write to the Vale's two MPs asking them to support Philip Dunne MP's Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill when it has its second reading in Parliament on 15 January 2021.
5. Aims to build on opportunities to influence Thames Water's practices – such as our successful application to become a strategic partner in Thames Water's Surface Water Management Programme for 2020-2025.

The meeting closed at 7:50pm