

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 22 FEBRUARY 2021 FROM 7.15 PM TO 10.08 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Shirley Boyt, Paul Fishwick, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Abdul Loyes and Alison Swaddle

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Parry Batth, Gary Cowan and Charlotte Haitham Taylor

Officers Present

Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist), Francesca Hobson (Service Manager – Community, Heritage, Green & Blue Infrastructure), Anne Hunter (Lead Specialist - Democratic and Electoral Services), Andrew Moulton (Assistant Director - Governance) and Grant Thornton (Senior Specialist Economic Prosperity & Place)

Others Present

72. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Emma Hobbs.

73. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted from Shirley Boyt in relation to agenda item 77, on the grounds that she was a Member of the Working Group that worked on this strategy. Shirley stated that she would take no part in the discussions or voting for this item.

74. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

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75. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited Members to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

75.1 Gary Cowan asked the Chairman of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following question:

Question

The agenda states that and I quote "During the financial year 2020/21, the Flooding and Drainage team made further progress in fulfilling Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) statutory obligations as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) under the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010. The primary responsibility as an LLFA is to manage the coordination of surface water and groundwater flood risk in order to protect residents from flooding"

My question is does surface and Ground water risk include reservoirs and Dams or Not or is that a different water that residents do not need protecting from?

Answer

The Lead Local Flood Authority is responsible for coordinating the response to surface water and groundwater flood risk. The Environment Agency is responsible for overseeing the management of reservoir flooding and for the management and implementation of reservoir safety regulations in England. They are also responsible for coordinating the management of fluvial (river) flooding. In regards to reservoirs and specifically dams etcetera as well, that actually comes under a separate act of parliament – the Reservoirs Act 1075, in which reservoirs, with you being in Arborfield the principle reservoir that you are probably asking about would be the ones in Bearwood Lakes, which are covered under that act. Essentially, it is the responsibility of the land owner to conduct a 10 year structural risk assessment under the Reservoirs Act, and then coordinate with the Local Authority as to any planning that needs to be done in order to mitigate any risk. I think that Bearwood is coming up in 2024 or 2025, and the reason why I know this is whilst I was on Earley Town Council we did research into the Maiden Erlegh Reservoir Lake, and that report was done a few years back.

Supplementary Question

You have studied the subject very well, well done. The problem I've got with it is, and I agree with pretty much everything that you say, is that although the Environment Agency might have dam responsibilities, we have a responsibility to our residents. The Council has granted planning permission to build 18 houses directly under the flood burst zone, and so there has to be a link between the Council having responsibility in planning terms and the local flood risk as the local flood authority. The question is although the Council never informed the Environment Agency of this planning application, there is a very grey area where planning applications turn up, so how does our planning and flood risk fit in with this broad principle? I don't expect an answer now as it is fairly comprehensive.

Supplementary Answer

Indeed Gary, I may need to look to Francesca to take a stab at this. I agree with Gary that this is a grey area, and what makes it 'greyer' is that the ownership of the lakes has transferred as I believe that Reading Football Club now owns it.

The planning application, the Environment Agency were consulted on and we would expect them to comment on fluvial and reservoir flooding. So they were consulted on the planning application and if they had any concerns about reservoir flooding they would have commented as such. But, the Environment Agency, as Guy has already said, is responsible for reservoir safety regulations and so they are responsible for making sure that the reservoir owners or regulators are ensuring that they have done all of the works necessary to make sure that they are safe so that they won't breach and then cause flooding. The main point is that it really is a responsibility for the Environment Agency, and in relation to that planning application the Environment Agency were consulted.

At this point, some further discussions were had about this topic.

76. FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 5 to 10, which gave an update on flood risk management within the Borough.

The report outlined 11 key areas whereby actions had been undertaken in the past twelve months. These actions included the completion of Surface Water Management Plan for Earley, emergency response to flooding and subsequent S19 incident reports, delivery of capital drainage schemes, and smart drainage trials.

Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure) and Francesca Hobson (Service Manager – Community, Heritage, Green & Blue Infrastructure) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

During the ensuing discussions, Members and the invited expert guest raised the following points and queries:

- The asset register was critical both for proposed developments and retrospective, as a lot of detail could be hidden in areas such as slight dips in the ground.
- The NFM feature in Maiden Erlegh was brilliant and fundamental piece of work. There had been internal flooding further down that section of ditch towards the river. Was the modelling for the aforementioned feature inclusive of the reach down towards the river? Officer response – Officers were concerned that the culvert at Egremont Drive was acting as a bottleneck, meaning that although it was causing flooding at that location it could lead to other problems downstream should it be removed. Whilst the consultant was carrying out these works, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) ensured that they included all of that information in the modelling to ensure that the removal of the culvert would not have any adverse impact downstream. The contractor monitors this site on a weekly basis, compared to a monthly check for other locations within the Borough. In addition, the contractor would proactively check the site in the event of heavy rain.
- What support was in place for residents whose homes flooded? Officer response – WBC was working to set up dedicated support groups, in addition to working with flood action volunteers. WBC was aiming to be as proactive as possible in setting up flood resilience groups, with the Swallowfield flood resilience group being an excellent example. These measures were key, as flooding had a longer psychological impact on affected persons.
- In planning terms, some developments did not get built in the order they were envisaged. How was this managed to avoid a situation where an asset was not exactly where it should be? Officer response – The team had expanded over the years from two officers to six officers. This gave additional capacity to monitor these sort of situations. Lots of residents reported such instances, and officers were sent out to investigate.
- Could the programme of when each area would receive a surface water management plan be detailed, in addition to how each area was prioritised? Officer response – In terms of priorities, historical reports of flooding were used alongside the surface water flood risk maps and reports from residents. Currently, 1 surface water management plan was being developed per year, and this was based on a set amount of funding from Central Government. However, works were still carried out in other areas, for example this year a surface water flood risk management plan had been carried out in Earley in addition to a lot of capital works being carried out in other Borough locations.
- The A329, specifically the roundabout section in Winnersh, had been flooded in February 2020. Was there a reason why this particular location had not been included within the investigations? Officer response – When the river backed up the gulleys and drainage system at the roundabout, flooding occurred. Therefore, investigation was not required as the issue was known. Officers wanted to deliver a scheme to prevent

this issue from occurring, and were awaiting funding and liaison with stakeholders to do so.

- Officers and contractors should be thanked for undertaking works to install all CCTV and drainage works and surveys across the Borough, during a year with lower road usage. There had been a noticeable decrease in flooding in a number of usual problem locations.
- There had been instances of some gulleys not being emptied for some time in some locations. Officers were aware and were meeting with the relevant Members.
- Could a couple of examples be provided regarding partnership working, and how it reduced flooding? Officer response – A particular focus was using SUDs to reduce flood risk, to move towards sustainable drainage systems in above ground locations, as these had additional benefits such as amenity value.
- Would the Section 21 asset register include dams such as Bearwood Lakes, which would therefore be included within the Borough's emergency plan? Officer response – None of the dams were formally recorded within the asset register, as they were recorded through the Reservoir Act via the Environment Agency.
- When this item came to Committee in 2019, concerns were raised over residents paving over their front garden to convert it into additional parking when planning to extend their properties. At the time, a sub strategy had been agreed, however instances were still occurring commonly. What was being done to address this issue? Officer response – On a small scale this did not cause a significant impact, however, if this was happening frequently then the cumulative impact resulted in a large area where water would now run off and create surface water flood risk. Where possible, an informative was added to planning applications asking that green space be retained where possible. In some instances, planning permission was not required for some work. Officers were looking at the possibility of a Berkshire wide policy, or a joint communications strategy.
- Had ground water levels now risen after a period of lower than average rainfall? Officer response – A few years ago there were concerns as the ground water levels were low. Over the past couple of years there had been increased rainfall, leading to relatively stable water levels. This was subject to the changing weather.
- Thames Water had been brilliant regarding their communications on ongoing works. It was noted that making a note of their reference number, and always referring to that number allowed all works to be noted down in one central place.
- There had been an issue of flooding for several years in the area of Sandford Lane in Woodley, when would this issue be addressed? Officer response – Sandford Lane flooded on a regular basis as it crossed two sections of river, causing fluvial flooding. One solution to this involved raising the road out of the flood plain, compensating for the material being used to raise it out of the flood plain immediately next to the flood plain, where there was no suitable location to do so given the amounts of materials involved. A much wider natural flood risk management scheme was planned, which would hopefully hold back water downstream of the M4 motorway, resulting in water being released much slower towards the River Thames, thereby reducing flood risk. This scheme would require a significant amount of funding a stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholder engagement had started positively, and an application had been made to DEFRA for their innovative flood resilience fund which, if successful, could be used to deliver this scheme.

- Was data relating to how many times an asset was visited recorded? Officer response – Yes, this was recorded and could be provided to Members on an annual basis.
- Loddon Bridge Road had a number of properties that were at risk of flooding, were any works planned to help these properties? Officer response – As these properties were close to the River Loddon, they could be at risk of fluvial and surface water flooding. Fluvial flooding risk would be reduced by the scheme mentioned above. Significant works regarding drainage had been carried out in that area to reduce the risk of surface water flooding, and therefore if this was still an issue then officers would take this away.
- Was South Lake the responsibility of WBC, and if so were we responsible if it flooded? Officer response – South Lake was owned by WBC, however it was not within the remit of the officers presenting this report. However, as it was a WBC asset then reports and mitigation measures would be in place.
- Members wished to thank officers for the thorough and well-presented report.
- Members wished to thank officers for the works carried out at Egremont Drive.
- There had been hope of other funding sources for the aforementioned major flood risk management scheme, had this materialised? Officer response – WBC had made an application to Thames Water, and were shortlisted as one of two authorities. Very little was then heard for a year and a half, and Thames Water had to significantly reduce the number of authorities that they could offer funding, from nine authorities to three. As a result, WBC unfortunately did not receive this funding. Officers were hoping to hear in April 2021 whether they DEFRA would progress our application to the next stage, which would require submission of a business case. Officers were hopeful that their feasibility case would help with this application. In addition, Thames Water had said that they were impressed with the works carried out within the Borough, and a partnership had now been created. There was a minimum of £125,000 available for the Borough to carry out surface water schemes.
- How many sandbags did the Borough have available? Officer response – Approximately 1500 filled bags and 4000 empty bags which were ready to be filled were available.
- Was there a threshold of silt in a gully that then led to it being cleared? Officer response – The percentages were actually in relation to how much of the inlet or outlet are covered. If it was over fifty percent, then works would be immediately carried out. Currently, when the percentage went above twenty percent, works were being carried out.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Parry Batth and Francesca Hobson be thanked for attending the Committee;

- 2) Data relating to how often assets were visited be provided to Members on an annual basis;
- 3) Officers and contractors be thanked for their hard work relating to flood risk management within the Borough over the last year;
- 4) An update return to the Committee in approximately 12 months' time.

77. ARTS & CULTURE STRATEGY

Shirley Boyt declared an interest in this item, and therefore did not participate in the discussions.

The Committee received a report, set out in agenda pages 11 to 24, which set out the proposed Arts & Culture strategy for the Borough.

The report outlined the consultation that had been undertaken regarding the proposed strategy, and the changes that had been made as a result. Some of the changes included contextualising the strategy within the frame of the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic, reference to the declared climate emergency including a commitment to ensure that the aspiration to be carbon neutral is fully factored in to implementation plans and related activities, and the inclusion of one of a desired outcome being that of new and enhanced cultural venues.

Charlotte Haitham Taylor (Executive Member for Regeneration), Grant Thornton (Senior Specialist Economic Prosperity & Place), and Robin Cops (Vice Chair of the Arts & Culture Alliance) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Would the northern Parishes be included in the Arts and Cultural Alliance (ACA)? Executive Member response – The ACA would welcome the contribution of the northern Parishes, as well as all other areas of the Borough. All Town and Parish Councils had been contacted as part of the development of the proposed policy, and it was hoped that more communities within the Borough would join the ACA as time progressed.
- Were we reaching out to people of an older generation? Executive Member response – The consultation had seen a far greater response rate from people of an older generation rather than those from a younger generation. As such, part of the action plan involving reaching out to younger people was seen to be a key action moving forward. The action plan had picked up issues including social isolation of older people, and therefore aimed to reach out to such individuals.
- It was noted that the ACA really valued the local knowledge from within specific communities, and welcomed engagement from across the Borough.
- It was noted that the proposed strategy was a framework, which aimed to identify gaps in the current support and provision of arts and cultural events, institutions and communities across the Borough.
- Which were the five Town and Parish Councils that had responded to the consultation? Officer response – A conclusive list would be provided outside of the meeting?

- Winnersh Parish Council would like to be involved in the ACA, was this planned? Executive Member response – All Towns and Parishes were welcomed and encouraged to get involved, and this included Winnersh.
- What considerations and adaptations had been made to the proposed strategy as a result of the C-19 pandemic? Executive Member response – Both the strategy and the action plan had been adapted throughout the course of the pandemic. Both the strategy and the action plan will be reviewed every 6 months during the pandemic and recovery stage, and then every year afterwards.
- How was the proposed strategy being prioritised against other WBC services? Executive Member response – There were lots of officers working on various aspects of the proposed strategy and action plan. The strategy had ties across many WBC services including economic development, adult social care, libraries, and children’s services. As such, the strategy was not seeking to compete with these services, but instead enhance them.
- Where did the ownership of the ACA sit? Executive Member response – The document itself was owned by WBC, however this was a true alliance and it was therefore a community centric strategy.
- Would the title of the strategy be changed to 2021-2031 as it was a ten year strategy? Officer response – Yes, this would be amended.
- What level of support was needed from WBC to support the ACA? Executive Member and Vice Chair of the ACA response – The current arts and cultural officer was a major start, as it provided a dedicated budget to support the strategy. In addition, there was support from various officer across the Council. Both the Council and the working group were ambitious, and resource was being pulled from various areas of the Council, though it was not specifically allocated. The extra resourcing worked well as it benefitted the community in ways including health and wellbeing, whilst progressing the ACA and the proposed strategy.
- It was noted that all areas of the Borough should be included within the ACA.
- It was noted that the ACA meant that a programme of ongoing outreach would be undertaken. Members were urged to get in touch if they knew of organisations or individuals who would like to get involved. It was noted that the Woodley Town Centre Management initiative had already been involved.
- All involved were thanked by the Committee for the comprehensive report, and the steps made to fulfilling parts of the overarching vision for the Wokingham Town Centre regeneration to become a cultural hub.
- What support would arts and cultural organisations require from WBC after the C-19 pandemic? Executive Member and Vice Chair of the ACA response – Organisations wanted a ‘can-do’ attitude from WBC. There had been a good history of tremendous support from WBC officers and many Members, and it was hoped that this would continue. Any outreach that WBC could offer to involve more young people would be greatly appreciated. WBC communications officers, sports and leisure staff, and library staff were used as a resource to help groups and organisations put on events and get

people involved. The 'WOCCA' app was available to help promote events across the Borough, and all residents should be encouraged to download it to know what is going on in their area and across the whole Borough.

- It was noted that a film studio was planned within the Borough, subject to planning permission. If approved and built, this would put the Borough on the map as a true hub for art and culture.
- The Chairman requested that the proposed strategy and action plan be added to the Committee's work programme on an annual basis, in order to monitor delivery and assist in making the Borough a hub for arts and culture.
- The Committee offered their support for the proposed strategy and action plan, and thanked all those involved in its development and future implementation.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Grant Thornton and Robin Cops be thanked for attending the Committee;
- 2) A list of the five Town and Parish Councils that had responded to the consultation be provided;
- 3) The title of the strategy be amended to make reference to 2021-2031;
- 4) An update be provided to the Committee on an annual basis in order to monitor delivery and assist in making the Borough a hub for arts and culture;
- 5) The strategy be commended to the Executive.

78. UPDATE ON MAY 2021 ELECTIONS

The Committee received a report, set out in agenda pages 25 to 28, which gave an update on the Elections due to be held in May 2021.

The report outlined that the number one priority was to ensure that a safe and secure election would be carried out across the Borough. In addition to this, there was a commitment to make the count and vote as timely as possible for electors and Members, whilst taking the above into consideration. It would therefore be a balance, with a longer counting process ensuring the safety of all involved, whilst still being as transparent and thorough as ever. Many polling stations would have additional measures in place to ensure that they were safe for electors and staff, whilst some venues would have to change to a more Covid-19 (C-19) secure venue.

Andre Moulton (Assistant Director – Governance) and Anne Hunter (Lead Specialist, Democratic & Electoral Services) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- When would the candidates and agents briefing take place? Officer response – This was planned for 9th March 2021 at 6pm.

- Was it planned to write to all electors who did not currently have a postal vote to inform them of the option to do so? Officer response – Yes, this was in the election project plan to set out the choices available to the electorate.
- What percentage of the Borough was currently registered to vote by post? Officer response – Approximately twenty percent of the Borough was registered to vote by post. This was subject to change as we approached the election.
- Would the letter to electors, explaining the options of a postal vote and containing a form to apply for one, be sent to people on the current register of electors or the March register? Officer response – The letter would be sent to people on the register at the time when the letter was finalised.
- What campaigning would be allowed regarding this election? Officer response – Any interested groups or persons would be advised to keep close attention to the Electoral Commission's website for any and all advice.
- It was noted that the count would be conducted in stages, to ensure that the numbers within the counting area were at safe and C-19 compliant levels.
- Members supported the strategy of informing residents of their options to vote by post, as this would be more comfortable and safer for a lot of people this year.
- Were the elections team able to access more support to administer these elections safely? Officer response – There was already additional resource within the core team to help manage the workload. As a corporate event, the team had support right across the Council.
- Were nomination forms be required to be wet signed this year? Officer response – Yes, and the candidates and agents briefing would provide additional information regarding this.
- It was noted that the count for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) would not be undertaken centrally this year, as it was a decision for the Area Returning Officer as to how the count was conducted.
- Was there any ways that schools being used as polling stations could remain open on polling day? Officer response – Officers had done a lot of work over recent years to reduce the number of schools being used as a polling station, and we were now down to four schools across the Borough. Officers were working directly with those four schools to see how the impacts of polling day could be mitigated for them.
- Had the role of a teller been considered considering the C-19 pandemic? Officer response – Yes, this issue was on the risk assessment list.
- It was noted that Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) were encouraging and informing residents about the opportunity to vote by post, and it was definitively not about mandating it. Polling stations would be safe and secure, however this gave people a further option to cast their vote should they wish.
- The Chairman proposed that a joint meeting of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee be arranged in the late

summer or autumn of 2021, to evaluate lessons learned from the running of this election in conjunction with the corporate risk register.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Andrew Moulton and Anne Hunter be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The Committee give their thanks to the Elections Team for their ongoing work to deliver a safe and transparent set of elections;
- 3) A joint meeting of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee be arranged in the late summer or autumn of 2021, to evaluate lessons learned from the running of this election in conjunction with the corporate risk register.

79. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their remaining meeting of the current municipal year, set out on agenda page 29.

RESOLVED That the work programme be noted.