

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin and by video conference on Thursday, 8 September 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Karen Edwards (Vice-Chair), Pauline Edwards, James Elson, Martyn Hogg, Alan James, Delyth Jones, Michelle Walker, Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams (Chair)

Observers - Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts and Councillor Emrys Wynne

ALSO PRESENT

Interim Head of Highways and Environmental Services (AC), Flood Risk Manager (WH), Ecology Officer (JW), Scrutiny Coordinator (RhE), Committee Administrators (SJ (Host) RTJ)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brian Blakeley and Merfyn Parry. Apologies had also been received from Tony Ward (Corporate Director: Environment and Economy) who had recently assumed the role of corporate support to the Committee, Andy Clark, Interim Head of Highways and Environmental Services was in attendance on his behalf.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Martyn Hogg declared a personal interest in business item 5, 'Proposed Central Rhyl and Central Prestatyn Coastal Defence Schemes' on the grounds that he knew the owner of the PKS Kitesurf Centre located on Rhyl seafront and kite surfed at the location.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised with the Chair of the Committee prior to the meeting.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 30 June 2022 were submitted. It was:

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2022 be received as a correct and true record of the proceedings.

No matters were raised in relation to the contents of the minutes.

5 PROPOSED CENTRAL RHYL AND CENTRAL PRESTATYN COASTAL DEFENCE SCHEMES

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport, Councillor Barry Mellor, introduced the report (previously circulated) on the Proposed Central Rhyl and Central Prestatyn Coastal Defence Schemes alongside the Interim Head of Highways and Environmental Services and the Flood Risk Manager.

The report detailed two potential coastal flood risk management schemes for Central Rhyl and Central Prestatyn. The report aimed to provide an update to the Committee regarding the development of the schemes and the next steps involved, to allow the Committee to scrutinise both schemes before they were presented to the Strategic Investment Group (SIG), Cabinet & Council (where a decision to deliver the schemes would be sought). Full Business Cases for both schemes were in development and would be submitted to the Welsh Government (WG) by the end of September 2022. However, draft Business Cases were attached as Appendices 5 & 6 to provide further details of the rationale for taking both schemes forward to the construction stage. Both these appendices were exempted from public disclosure.

Members of the Committee discussed the following further –

- Councillor Martyn Hogg thanked the officers involved with the schemes as he had emailed them before the meeting requesting additional information, which had been provided. However, he sought further information relating to the rock scouring and the carbon offset with the development. Councillor Hogg wanted to ensure that the rock scouring would not cause the sandy beaches in the area to disappear; he also queried what impact the development would have on carbon emissions. The responding officer assured the Committee that the rock scouring would be monitored to ensure the sands would remain at the beaches and that the carbon impact of the site would be offset by the benefit to the communities of building the defences to reduce the risk of flooding from the sea.
- Officers confirmed to the Committee that some kiosks would have to close to accommodate the flood defence construction, although there would be opportunities available for them to re-establish their businesses once the construction work had been completed. The children's village would not be required to move. Communication with all affected parties was continually undertaken in a bid to minimise the impact of the disruption on all involved.
- Rhyl Golf Club and whether the Prestatyn Coastal Defence scheme would impact the club was raised. It was confirmed that the Golf Club would be required to close temporarily as would the cycle path alongside it for a short period. The Council, the owner of the land where the Club was situated, had a good working relationship with the Golf Club. Arrangements had been facilitated with other local golf clubs to permit Rhyl Golf Club members to play at other courses for the duration of the closure period.

Having considered the information provided in the report and its appendices, along with the answers provided during the discussion to members' questions, the Committee:

RESOLVED: to –

- (i) acknowledge the value and benefits to be gained from investing in both schemes to the communities in Rhyl and Prestatyn and to the county in general;*
- (ii) recommend that both schemes be submitted to the Strategic Investment Group (SIG), Cabinet and Council successively for their respective approval (as per the timetable in Appendix 4 to the report);*
- (iii) confirm that, as part of its consideration, it had read, understood and taken into account the Wellbeing Impact Assessments for both schemes (Appendices 3a & 3b to the report); and*
- (iv) support the progression of both schemes to construction, subject to funding approval.*

6 WILDFLOWER MEADOW PROJECT

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport Councillor Barry Mellor introduced the Wildflower Meadow Project Update report (previously circulated) alongside the Interim Head of Highways and Environmental Services and the Council's Ecology Officer.

The Wildflower Project was a collaborative project between the Biodiversity Team, Streetscene and other Council departments, the aim of which was to create urban and peri-urban local provenance meadows through a reduced 'cut-and-collect' mowing regime. This project was regarded as key to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and tackle the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

The report aimed to provide information regarding the effectiveness of the steps taken to improve engagement and increase publicity with all stakeholders of the Wildflower Project.

The Chair thanked officers for attending, as the matter had been discussed at Communities Scrutiny Committee previously, and the issues raised then had been addressed and vastly improved.

The Ecology Officer (EO) highlighted the main points raised previously, including the need to improve communication and consultation. He explained that he and other officers had communicated with elected members on all levels and that the website had been updated. In addition, correspondence issued to residents now included contact details for officers. There had also been a push on social media and with the local press highlighting the purpose and benefits of the wildflower projects. Tours had been arranged for elected members of some of the wildflower meadows across the county.

The Committee discussed the following in further detail –

- Members were confused as some wildflower meadows had been cut, such as an area in Rhewl and surrounding the Denbigh area. It was queried why elected members were not informed on the matter prior to the cut being done

in order that they could alleviate any concerns raised by the public, and whether there were any internal communications breakdown that had led to this happening. Officers advised that there was work underway to refine the highway grass-cutting policy. They also clarified that many areas were cut ahead of Eisteddfod yr Urdd in Denbigh, some by residents themselves who wanted to 'tidy' up the approach routes to the festival.

- The use of volunteers and whether the project had enough resources to maintain it for the long term – approximately 50% of the staffing resources working on the projects were funded through grant funding on a 12-month basis, which the EO highlighted was a challenge in terms of long term work planning and future sustainability.
- The Committee raised fire safety concerns, particularly as the year had been hotter and drier than usual. The EO did agree that the year had been hotter than usual. Consequently, the team contacted the Fire Service and the AONB Team to arrange fire safety and fire risk assessment training. In future, all sites would be subject to a fire risk assessment on a monthly basis.
- The Committee suggested that the success of the wildflower meadows be used for tourism purposes; the project was a significant achievement for Denbighshire and could attract people to the area and educate those who came to the county. Officers assured members this was something which officers intended to pursue.
- Engagement with schools and Denbighshire's housing and business/industrial tenants was raised, and whether there had been any push to get them to plant wildflower areas in school fields/gardens/land. The EO responded, stating that the wildflower meadow project logo had been designed by Denbighshire school pupils; approximately 55 seed planting sessions had been held with schools as part of the 'bee hotels' initiative. Pupils were keen to engage with these sessions. The EO was in contact with the Housing Department who were extremely keen to be part of the project in future. The Committee also suggested contacting housing associations/registered social landlords (RSLs) operating in the county with a view to getting them engaged with the project.
- The variety of the plants which would grow at wildflower meadow sites was raised; the EO clarified that some plants would grow and establish themselves at different rates dependent upon the type and quality of soil in the area. The Green Gates nursery in St. Asaph was key in securing the success of the project as nurturing and caring for the seeds sown there would allow more 'attractive' plants to be planted quicker. Since it had opened 5,000 trees and 10,000 wildflower plants had been grown at the nursery prior to being transplanted in woodlands and wildflower meadows across the county.

At the end of the discussion, the Chair, summing up the Committee's views, emphasised the importance of strengthening the following aspects with a view to securing the Project's continued success and expansion:

- effective communication with all stakeholders

- working with the Council's Housing Department, local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), businesses and tenants of domestic and industrial properties to persuade them to engage with the Project;
- educating residents of all ages on the purpose and long-term benefits of the project (including using elected members as a conduit for informing and educating their residents) ; and
- exploring the potential benefits of promoting the Council's approach towards the development of wildflower meadows as part of the tourist offer available for people visiting the county.

At the conclusion of an in-depth discussion the Committee:

RESOLVED: *subject to the above observations –*

- (i) *to confirm that it was happy with the steps taken to improve engagement and increase publicity, along with the progress made to date in delivering the Project's benefits; and*
- (ii) *to pledge its continued support for the Project.*

7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator introduced the report (previously circulated) seeking members' review of the Committee's work programme and providing an update on relevant issues.

Discussion focussed on the following:–

The Scrutiny Coordinator informed the Committee that the reports on the Mistreatment of Dogs and the New Waste and Recycling Model would be available for consideration at the next meeting on 20 October 2022. However, the report on Second Homes and Short-term Holiday Lets was dependent upon further information from the Welsh Government and would therefore be rescheduled for December's meeting.

The Committee was also advised that the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) following consideration of a number of scrutiny requests at its July 2022 meeting had referred two topics to the Committee for detailed examination. These related to the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust's response times to emergency callouts, and the impact of the introduction of the 20 mile per hour speed limit on the county's roads on the Authority and on residents. Both items had been scheduled on the Committee's forward work programme for its December 2022 meeting.

Having considered the above the Committee:

RESOLVED: *- subject to the above amendments to confirm the Committee's forward work programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.*

The meeting concluded at 11.20 am