

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON THURSDAY, 13 DECEMBER, 2012 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK
PART 1

PRESENT:
Councillors

Bottomer, B. (Chairman)
Lovell, A. (Vice-Chairman)

Anslow, C.	Rowley, J.
Ball, G. D.	Sutton, Mrs. H. M.
Jones, R.	Toth, J.
Pearson, A.	

(The Chairman advised that he had agreed to the order of the agenda being amended)

10. Apologies

All Members were present.

11. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

No Declarations of Interests were made in addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members' Interests.

12. Minutes

Consideration was given to the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 October, 2012. Concern was raised with respect to the flood risk assessment referred to at that meeting. The Head of Environmental Services advised that the County Council had advised that additional work would be carried out in Rugeley Town Centre but clarification of what was intended to be carried out was awaited. He advised that he would endeavour to gain further information on this issue and would circulate this to Members of the Committee.

A Member raised concern with respect to flooding problems at the Springfields Estate due to leaves decaying and drains becoming blocked. Councillor J. Rowley advised that the County Council would be carrying out work to address this problem.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 October, 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

13. Performance Outturn Updates – Quarter 1 and Quarter 2

The Head of Environmental Services advised that the outcomes detailed in the Performance Outturn Updates were self explanatory and the only item not on target had now been addressed in quarter 3 and would be reflected in the report presented to the Committee at their meeting in March, 2013.

Concern was raised with respect to the brown bins not emptying properly due to garden waste being wet at this time of year. The Head of Environmental Services advised that he would report the concerns back to the Waste and Engineering Services Manager. Members enquired as to what the position was with respect to burning rubbish in gardens. The Head of Environmental Services agreed to contact the Environmental Health Department and forward the information to Members of the Committee.

14. Urban Forestry Strategy – 2013-2018

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager, introduced this item pointing out this was the third revision of this strategy which was due to expire in 2013. The Committee received a presentation from the Urban Forestry Officer. He reported that the Urban Forestry Strategy had been updated and was presently in its draft stage. A copy of the Strategy was circulated at the meeting which included a matrix of some of the responses received from the public consultation project undertaken.

It was explained that Cannock Chase Council had a requirement to manage and maintain the Council's tree stock known collectively as 'the tree stock'. The trees for which CCDC are responsible for are located within parks and open spaces, i.e. Cannock park, Hednesford park and Elmore park, woodlands, nature reserves such as Mill Green, the mineral lines and Cannock, Rugeley, and Hednesford town centres, closed church yards such as St Luke's Church, housing properties and housing communal land.

The Council has a database of all trees over 7cm girth size and there were in excess of 22,000 recorded trees. There were also 458 individual groups of trees recorded. Although the numbers within each group were not listed, as an average there were at least 50 trees per group. This brought the total number of trees which were managed and maintained to over 45,000.

The Council had a responsibility to ensure the tree stock was kept at its current levels or higher, and to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of both the trees and the general public. There was also a legal duty of care to make sure the trees were kept in a safe condition. This meant that Officers actively inspected the trees on a regular basis. The inspection regime and practice was also set out in the Urban Forestry Strategy. The inspections had been carried out on all individual trees with any tree failing to meet the health and safety requirements being either pruned or removed and replaced with a new tree. The inspections were a central part of all

trees within the public realm and a percentage of trees would continue to be inspected each and every year. No tree was left longer than 5 years before it was inspected again.

It was reported that under government guidance it was a requirement for all local authorities to produce a document to outline how their tree stock would be managed and maintained and was part of ongoing commitments through the Governments Trees in Towns projects. It was explained that it was now appropriate that all local authorities adopted a local tree strategy which outlined the benefits the trees brought to the community and included:

- Environmental reasons
- Biodiversity requirements
- Regeneration of areas (including economic benefits)
- How they enhanced the visual amenity settings of the area.
- How they helped to increase the overall well being of peoples lives (Social Benefits)

The Council strive to maintain a balance between the built up area, peoples concerns and the natural wildlife and in order to ensure that it was up to date and in line with other local authorities the Strategy was reviewed on a 5 year basis.

At each review the guidance within the document was questioned and benchmarked against other local authorities, particularly those that bordered the district (Walsall, Litchfield, Stafford and South Stafford), to show consistency throughout the immediate area and also wider afield within the County and England as a whole.

It was explained that the role of the Council was to help promote the benefits of trees to the local area and to show how by having trees it was helping to shape the future of Cannock Chase. In order to review and draw on any new recommendations from central government and new thinking from best practice it was important that Cannock Chase Council maintained a regime of continued reviewing. This would ensure the best possible balance between customer needs, requests made and current economic restraints were achieved.

At the heart of all tree Strategies was its core policies and service requests and the decisions taken by the Council had been included in the document. The Strategy outlined what would and would not be done in order to maintain the tree stock. The Committee was advised that it was a fine balancing act of weighing up central governments polices on the environment (such as planting more trees and woodlands, to mitigate against climate change and in line with Local Agenda 21), against the local concerns of leaf fall and blocking light to gardens. Most policies were very similar from council to council and Cannock Chase Council's policies were no different.

The document had been updated and a few amendments had been made, with the inclusion of English Heritage, trees in towns, tree stock within the District, current tree population, the updated Corporate Vision and the Council's commitments, policies, targets and tree pruning practices.

From the consultation process it was ascertained that residents wanted trees to

remain and only pruned when trees were dead, dying or dangerous. Overall the results indicated that over 90% supported the idea of increasing the tree population for local wildlife and climate needs. Residents had indicated that they would also like to see more trees being planted in parks and the inclusion of new woodlands and open spaces within the district. The Urban Forestry Officer advised that it may be possible through new large development applications to look at the possible creation of new woodlands. It was reported that in the whole the residents of Cannock Chase were very supportive of the trees that were planted in the area and did not want to see them heavily pruned or removed.

The Urban Forestry Officer advised that trees were very important within the Urban area and especially within Cannock Chase. Being so close to nature and the Chase, required the Council to show and demonstrate how the Urban area could co-exist with its natural settings and help the natural environment and wildlife. One of the main ways for this was to use trees to become structural and help to soften or screen buildings from each other or from public land.

It was explained that the social benefits of trees was hard to define. However they did help to produce oxygen and provide cleaner air and, in the summer months, offered shade to people and animals. The Urban Forestry Officer explained that although the debate of climate change was still ongoing, the Rio de Janeiro summit of 1992 drew up article 4 in order to achieve environmental protection. In the UK this became known as the Local Agenda 21, and was appraised at local levels in the form of the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan. Trees naturally drew up water in the summer months and helped to protect properties. It was reported that as far as was possible the Council would continue to plant trees in order to satisfy both the Staffordshire BAP and also the Local Agenda 21.

Concern was raised that trees surrounding properties could also block out light. The Urban Forestry Officer explained that trees could be pruned but if the height was reduced this could produce other problems with the tree becoming more dense at a lower level, causing future problems to the residents. Members gave details regarding a number of sites where they considered trees were causing problems which the Urban Forestry Officer undertook to investigate.

With regard to ash dieback it was explained that trees were currently in their dormant period. The disease could be deep within the tree and it would not therefore be known until the spring which trees were affected. The Forestry Commission and neighbouring authorities had not so far reported any problems.

The Urban Forestry Officer advised that with regard to Tree Preservation Orders central government had produced a tempo score sheet to assist in evaluating if a TPO should be issued. Concern was raised relating to the amount a resident had been quoted by someone to inspect a tree. It was explained that the Council was not insured to inspect trees on private properties. If a TPO had been placed on a tree on private land, the Council did not assume responsibility for the tree, but would offer advice. Residents had the right to appeal against TPO decisions.

The Environment Portfolio Leader expressed concern that there was no mechanism within the Strategy to enable elected Members to consider residents concerns with respect to trees rather than decisions being made by Officers. Members considered

that trees could also have a detrimental affect on people's lives and accepted the principle of having clear guidance through the strategy.

The Environmental Services Manager advised that what was allowed in legislation relating to trees would be explored and the draft Strategy would be further considered by the Committee at their next meeting. It was considered that no major changes would be made to the Urban Forestry Strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the draft Urban Forestry Strategy be further considered at the next meeting.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 5.15 p.m.