

---

## ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

---

**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 11 January 2023 from 7.00 pm - 8.16 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Oliver Eakin, James Hall, Ann Hampshire, Nicholas Hampshire, Peter Marchington (Substitute for Councillor Pete Neal), Julian Saunders (Chair), Sarah Stephen, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine (Vice-Chair), Mike Whiting (Substitute for Councillor David Simmons), Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Martyn Cassell, Grace Couch, Philippa Davies and Graeme Tuff.

**OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually):** Janet Hill, Jay Jenkins and Jo Millard.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually):** Councillors Cameron Beart, Tim Gibson, Angela Harrison and Ken Rowles.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Pete Neal, David Simmons and Eddie Thomas.

### 565 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

### 566 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

### 567 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 November 2022 (Minute Nos. 415 – 421) and the Extraordinary Meeting held on 19 December 2022 (Minute Nos. 544 - 548) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct records.

### **Part B Minutes for Information**

### 568 **Forward Decisions Plan**

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the report be noted.**

### 569 **Open Spaces and Play Strategy - a review**

The Greenspaces Manager introduced the report which provided the basis for starting the process and the consideration of a reviewed and updated Open Spaces and Play Area Strategy for Swale.

In response to an initial question from the Chair, the Greenspaces Manager provided some information on the future provision of new burial space and the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) process. He explained that there were currently five cemeteries within the Borough, with new plots only being available at Faversham and the new Iwade site, which

had about ten years of burial space remaining. The Greenspaces Manager said it was not a statutory duty for the Council to provide burial space. The Head of Environment and Leisure explained that it was necessary to review this now as any suggestions for provision of land for new burial space would need to be included within the Local Plan process.

The Greenspaces Manager explained that in the past five years there had been no new open space provision adopted by the Council from developers. There was a policy in place whereby developers managed open spaces through management companies or other arrangements, although the Council still took on strategic open spaces, such as large country parks or countryside gaps. These management arrangements for open spaces were usually agreed through Section 106 Agreements and required the developer to continue to own, manage and maintain the open space and public access. The Greenspaces Manager explained that there had been a move towards community asset management transfer, with, for example, sports clubs taking on an open space as part of their remit with the club investing and managing these through leases. There was a legal requirement to keep the land as public open space within any agreement. This reduced the burden on the Council in terms of budget, but there was always the risk that the land could be returned to the Council.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Considered open spaces to be a high priority for the Council and a very important asset;
- the health benefits of residents using open spaces should be recognised;
- the Council should make a statement about the importance of open spaces;
- additional assets, such as the introduction of toilet facilities and benches, were beneficial to open spaces;
- tree planting should be continued;
- open spaces had improved and needed to continue to do so;
- natural burials were becoming more popular;
- sought information on the cost to the Council for maintenance of cemeteries;
- if the CAT transferee defaulted on their duties, would there be a cost to the Council?;
- suggested stand-alone solar panels be introduced where required in open spaces;
- it was very important to remain focussed on good quality open spaces;
- the existing policy was very good;
- the key principles set out in paragraph 3.3 of the report still held true and suggested these be carried forward;
- the cemetery issue was an important one, and acknowledged the importance of planning ahead on this, in relation to the Local Plan, as noted in paragraph 4.2 of the report;
- concerned with the delay in the strategy being reviewed;
- suggested that when open spaces were reviewed again that updates be included on what had been achieved, with reasons if targets had not been met;
- were play areas under the remit of the Community Committee?;
- was there a plan to remove any existing play areas in the Borough;
- the Climate and Ecological Emergency was the biggest potential change to the strategy;
- welcomed the action to minimise the use of pesticides in open spaces;

- the potential to reduce grass-cutting should be added to the strategy, with the benefits to bio-diversity that this would bring;
- the Council should be planting for pollinators;
- welcomed the use of natural burial grounds;
- it was sometimes difficult to separate aspects of open spaces from play areas;
- concerned with the use of management companies and the potential cost of these to householders, and they did not always work for the benefit of residents;
- it was important to place play areas on new developments with an appropriate Section 106 Agreement;
- considered play areas sat alongside open spaces and suggested the constitution working group amended the remits of the Environment Committee and the Community Committee;
- there was reference to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder in the strategy, how should that be amended now that there was a committee system?; and
- businesses and schools should be encouraged to wild their hedgerows to increase bio-diversity.

In response, the Head of Environment and Leisure explained that burials were not a profit-making service in Swale. He said the work on the burial site in Iwade had given an understanding of what was needed if creating new burial spaces and the time it took. He spoke on the CAT opportunities for open spaces and said that it was important that a robust process was undertaken to grant leases to established groups, rather than a non-constituted group, and that informal volunteer groups, who although they played an important part in the parks and open spaces, were not considered to be appropriate groups to take on a CAT.

The Greenspaces Manager explained that currently there were no solar powered units within the Borough's open spaces. He added that the electronic gates at Milton County Park had recently been installed to run via solar power and this would be monitored to see how effective it was. He acknowledged the new technology and that solar power was the way forward, and welcomed the potential of when battery life was sufficiently long to power over-night. The Head of Environment and Leisure explained that solar power in buildings and open spaces was in the top ten climate action points for the forthcoming year.

The Head of Environment and Leisure confirmed that open spaces were within the remit of the Environment Committee, with play areas under the Community Committee. The Covid-19 Pandemic had contributed to a delay in reviewing the strategy, but he considered the current strategy was robust, with principles in place to deliver at the time and they continued to do so.

The Greenspaces Manager explained that there was an option to remove some play areas if they were in a poor condition, there were anti-social behaviour issues, and if there was an alternative provision within walking distance. This was considered on a case-by-case basis, with Member agreement.

The Head of Environment and Leisure explained that taking on more play areas would mean more maintenance costs to the Council.

The Greenspaces Manager said that instead of consideration by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder, this would now be by members of the Environment Committee.

The Chair said that he would speak informally to the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee to explain that there were arguments for play areas to sit alongside open spaces, under the remit of the Environment Committee.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the initial views and contribution by Members in the development of the new Open Spaces and Play Area Strategy be noted.***

**570 Sittingbourne Car Club Proposal**

The Climate and Ecological Emergency Project Officer introduced the report which summarised the benefits of expanding the Hiyacar run Car Club, the justifications for the vehicle locations and the proposed route for procurement.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Welcomed the proposal and hoped it could also be introduced on the Isle of Sheppey;
- liked the aspect of the provision of an Electric Vehicle (EV) giving an opportunity to 'try before you buy' as set out in paragraph 2.10 of the report;
- were there opportunities to pick up a vehicle in one location and drop off at another?;
- would welcome a differential pricing structure dependent on the type of vehicle that was hired;
- were there plans to extend this initiative to rural areas?;
- suggested more EV vehicles were used, not hybrid vehicles;
- this was a good initiative;
- it would be interesting to know more about the CO2 savings;
- this was a great way of using Section 106 monies; and
- this scheme could be beneficial to residents struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.

In response, the Climate and Ecological Emergency Project Officer explained that the proposal was a 'back-to-base' model, and there would be additional costs if the pick up and drop off places were different. She said this could be an option in the future. With regard to differential pricing structure, this was not something written into the contract, but was in place in any case.

Work was ongoing with the Active Travel Co-ordinator to see if the scheme could be expanded to include rural areas as well. The scheme was looked into initially as being fully operational with EVs, but hybrids were included for accessibility for people who were unfamiliar with EVs, and also there was a higher cost for installing EV charging points. Hybrids could be changed to EVs in the future, but that would incur higher costs. The Climate and Ecological Emergency Project Officer said that she could share a report on the CO2 savings, but highlighted that the savings were not so much from the use of the car itself, but more about the modal shift of car users giving up their personal car use and changing their habits to use both public transport and the car in the manner within the scheme.

Councillor Tim Valentine proposed the recommendations and these were seconded by Councillor Steve Davey.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the car club expansion of two hybrid vehicles and one electric vehicle in Sittingbourne be agreed.**

**(2) That the direct award of £29,262 to Hiyacar via the TPPL framework, with an additional cost of £4000 for a dedicated car club charge point funded from Section 106 monies proceeds.**

**571 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

There was no need to pass this resolution as Appendix I was not discussed at the meeting.

**572 Sittingbourne Car Club Proposal - a review - Exempt Appendix 1**

This item was not discussed.

Chair

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel