

**Minutes of the Economic, Planning and Housing Committee meeting held on Thursday, 7 January 2021 in Virtual Meeting - Zoom Webinar, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council at 6.30 pm**

**Members of the Economic, Planning and Housing Committee in attendance:**

Councillor S Frost(Chair), Councillor A Konieczko, Councillor O Cubitt, Councillor P Gaskell, Councillor D George, Councillor P Harvey, Councillor G James, Councillor L James, Councillor P Miller, Councillor J Vaux, Councillor G Watts and Councillor C Wooldridge

**30/20 Apologies for absence and substitutions**

There were no apologies.

**31/20 Declarations of interest**

Cllr Wooldridge declared a personal interest under item 5 of the Agenda.

Cllr Vaux declared a pecuniary interest under item 5 of the Agenda and agreed to stand down from the committee for that item.

Cllr Harvey later declared a personal interest under item 6 of the Agenda in relation to nitrates.

**32/20 Urgent matters**

The Chair proposed a brief pause in proceedings at 8.00 pm in order to join the 'Clap for Heroes' initiative.

**33/20 Minutes of the meeting held on 5th and 19th November**

Cllr Harvey requested that item 22/20 of the 5<sup>th</sup> November minutes be amended to reflect that the committee had been informed that the SS9 Task and Finish Group subject was still sub judice.

Further to the above amendment, the minutes of the meetings held on 5<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> November were confirmed by the committee as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**34/20 Housing Issues and COVID 19**

The Portfolio Holder for Homes and Families introduced the Housing Issues and Covid 19 report.

The Portfolio Holder for Homes and Families diverted from the report to provide the committee with the most up to date figures which recorded that 1,234 residents had been assisted in the period March 2020 to date with homelessness prevented for 90% of the households. It was reported that of the remaining 121, 71 had been supported into settled accommodation, 45 had returned home or made their own arrangements and 5 were in bed and breakfast accommodation. It was clarified that

bed and breakfast accommodation was intended only as a short term option.

The Leader of the Council thanked the team for their hard work during the pandemic. He reported that he had been lobbying central government to ensure that the eviction ban continues for the foreseeable future.

The committee thanked the team for their hard work over the past year and made the following observations and comments:-

- It was queried whether the MHCLG had made a similar instruction to that of March 2020 requiring all local authorities to offer accommodation to all rough sleepers in the current lockdown. The Portfolio Holder for Homes and Families reported that the team had been pro-actively monitoring the situation and had continued an 'Everyone In' approach locally throughout the pandemic. It was reported that Basingstoke was in the fortunate position that there were no rough sleepers currently within the borough, although it was noted that this was a very fluid situation.
- Concern was raised at the length of time some residents were having to wait for landlord repairs and at the state in which some residents were being forced to live. It was reported that housing associations were continuing to respond to emergency repairs during the current lockdown but postponing more routine repairs. It was acknowledged that this would lead to a backlog of work once restrictions were lifted.
- It was noted that there could be future challenges caused by cessation of mortgage holidays and the eviction ban. The Portfolio Holder for Homes and Families acknowledged this but commented that processes and procedures were robust within BDBC and that the team would be proactively monitoring the situation.
- The Leader of the Council agreed to lobby central government in relation to extending the current Universal Credit increase and the Local Housing Allowance rate increase.
- In response to a member claiming to have observed rough sleepers recently in the town, the Social Inclusion Manager responded that the team were confident that there were currently no rough sleepers in the borough, however urged people to notify Streetlink or BDBC should they observe anyone apparently rough sleeping. It was further noted that the new supported living scheme currently being developed would also assist by providing a more welcoming space.
- The Portfolio Holder for Homes and Families did not envisage another pause in social housing lettings.
- The Housing Needs and Homelessness Manager clarified that the 5 residents in bed and breakfast accommodation were all single people with move on plans. Canteen facilities were being provided and the Outreach team were supporting all with food packages.
- It was clarified that whilst the formal rough sleeper estimate was a figure provided annually to MHCLG, the team would be aware of the number of rough

sleepers in the borough at any given time.

- The Portfolio Member for Homes and Families clarified that in relation to MHCLG funding, the 16 additional units of supported accommodation referred to predominantly single person accommodation across HMOs. It was confirmed that ward members would be involved in such development schemes as early as possible.

Agreed Actions:

- Head of Environmental Services to provide a written response in relation to the impact to the Environmental Health team as a consequence of the rise in smoke and noise complaints.
- Housing Needs and Homelessness Manager to obtain clarification on the position and circulate a response in relation to the current spend on Discretionary Housing Payments.
- Housing Team to include intelligence gathering of private renters in arrears as a specific priority for the forthcoming year.

**Resolved:** the Committee note the report.

## 35/20 **Green Infrastructure Strategy - Annual Progress Report**

The Green Infrastructure Strategy Annual Progress Report was introduced by the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Infrastructure and Natural Environment.

The Natural Environment Team Leader introduced a short video presentation highlighting some of the successful projects that had been delivered during the past year.

The committee praised the work of the team and the initiatives that had been introduced. The following comments and clarifications were discussed:

- In response to a query the Natural Environment Team Leader confirmed that he judged there to be adequate funding to meet the commitments set out in the 2018 Green Infrastructure Strategy.
- It was queried whether there would be sufficient funding and resources to manage land transferred to BDBC via planning consents, particularly given the potential budget cuts to frontline services. The Leader of the Council clarified that the budget process was not yet complete and that the council was in a slightly better position than originally anticipated. He also committed to the long term management of open spaces. The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Infrastructure and Natural Environment added that sites taken on were all affordable and that budget would not be cut to prevent delivery.
- The Head of Environmental Services commented that the council's Annual Monitoring Report which was due to be heard by the committee at its meeting the following week, would outline the council's strategy in relation to striving

for nitrate neutrality. The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Infrastructure and Natural Environment further added it was an issue that the council planning team were proactively reviewing, encouraging developer solutions where possible.

- It was confirmed that grass verges were still categorised as open spaces.
- It was suggested that Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty should be recognised as an important partner in achieving the green infrastructure strategy.
- It was requested that going forward the BIZ initiative take account of the allotment network and 'bee lines project' throughout the borough.
- It was clarified that the number of bat roosts had dropped significantly from the previous year due to the type of applications being received.
- It was reported that the replacement of the skate park in the War Memorial Park was currently in the process of having its final design fine-tuned by the design company following community consultation.
- The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Infrastructure and Natural Environment reported that plans for the Basingstoke canal, included creating conservation areas along the Cavalier Road and Redbridge road sections, investigating the feasibility of installing a footpath along the piece of borough owned canal and restoring the link between Eastrop Park and Greywell Park as a link route for multiple users.
- The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Infrastructure and Natural Environment reported that the situation in relation to volunteers had improved from the previous year. BDBC had been working closely with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust who had undertaken a lot of successful volunteer training.

#### Agreed Actions

- It was agreed that there would be a future paper to review and evaluate progress of the Green Infrastructure action plan.
- Natural Environment Team Leader to circulate information relating to the required size of grass verges to be categorised as open space.
- Natural Environment Team Leader to review a specific site highlighted by Cllr Watts in relation to a request to include it within the biodiversity improvement zones initiative.
- Democratic Services Officer to invite representatives from the Environment Agency (EA) and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), to attend a forthcoming meeting and present updates on the rivers Loddon and Test to the committee.

**Resolved:** the Committee note the work undertaken during year two of the Green Infrastructure Strategy (2018).

### 36/20 **Review of work programme**

The committee reviewed and agreed its work programme with the following general comments:-

- It was noted that the Infrastructure Funding Statement and Authority Monitoring Report for Planning would be reviewed on 14<sup>th</sup> January;
- It was noted that the Local Plan: Outcome of Issues and Options Consultation and the Economic Recovery framework update would be reviewed on 4<sup>th</sup> March;
- The Chair requested a paper to review and evaluate progress on the Green Infrastructure action plan to be scheduled in the 2021-22 municipal year; and
- The Chair requested that representatives from the EA and AONB be invited to attend a meeting and present to the committee on the state of the rivers Loddon and Test.

The committee also discussed the status of the SS9 Task and Finish group. The Chair confirmed that the group subject was no longer sub judice and that there had been officer delays in informing the committee of this development. The Chair reported that he had received apologies for the delay. The Chair re-assured the committee that officers had confirmed that the delay would not have impacted any input by committee members to council policy.

The following actions were agreed.

- It was confirmed that a written response to Cllr Harvey's questions would be circulated to the Task and Finish group members prior to 14<sup>th</sup> January;
- Chair to seek a response to questions raised by Cllr L James; and
- It was agreed that the group would meet on 28<sup>th</sup> January at 6.00pm with invited attendee officers Kate Dean and Jonathan Banham.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm.

**Chairman**