

HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL

CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY SUB-COMMITTEE 15th April 2021

NOTES OF INFORMAL MEETING

Present: Councillors Diana Toynbee (Chair), Susan Boulter, Cat Hornsey, Dan Powell, Jeremy Milln

Attending: Cllr Tony Pearce Stafford Borough Council - guest speaker, Steve Kerry Town Clerk, Ben Corbet Tourism and Communications Manager.

The Chair ensured that all present could see and hear, and be seen and heard.

It was noted that this was not a formal meeting of the sub-committee but an informal meeting to hear from Cllr Pearce. The meeting was recorded but not live streamed. It was noted that the Mayor had sent her apologies for not being able to attend this meeting.

Death of Prince Phillip

Noting that the meeting was taking place between the death and funeral of HRH Prince Phillip the Duke of Edinburgh, and calling to mind his strong commitment to conservation and the encouragement of young people to engage with nature through the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme, the Chair called for a minute's silence to be observed before the meeting began its business. This was observed.

Guest Speaker

The Chair introduced Cllr Tony Pearce from Stafford Borough Council. She explained that Herefordshire is a unitary authority and we are a parish with somewhat limited powers. Nonetheless, we recognised the climate emergency two years ago and this sub-committee was formed to give some reality to that pledge. Cllr Toynbee thanked Cllr Milln for arranging the contact with Cllr Pearce.

Cllr Pearce thanked the Chair for the invitation and explained he is the only Green member of Stafford Borough, which is a district council in a two tier system in Staffordshire. He was elected two years ago but had previously sat under another label. The Borough had responded to Local Agenda 21 quite enthusiastically in the past but has gone backwards recently. However, his first act on being elected was to move recognition of the climate emergency and although this had been amended in debate the resolution was passed. The Council employs one officer as the only remnant of the team that used to address LA 21 and they are primarily employed to write biodiversity implications comments on planning applications. The Borough has recently appointed a new Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Officer at a quite high level and this is a sign that the backward trend of recent years is now itself being reversed.

In the past there were specific green awards given out but these have been subsumed into broader community awards. Tony felt the community awards were valid in their own right but should have been put alongside instead of replacing the green ones. He was hopeful that the new officer would through active community engagement develop a case for restoring at least some of them.

An important development in the past had been the Eco-Schools Network which had also been recognised in the Green Awards. Reps would meet two or three times a year to share good ideas and challenge each other. One particularly popular initiative from this route had been a reusable nappy project to reduce waste and across the whole range of waste minimisation, recycling, natural planting and tree planting and carbon emission there had been interest and activity.

There was clearly a lot in the awards scheme idea that we could develop and we discussed the very limited plans for an Annual Parish Meeting this year but something much better and more attractive

next year when we shall hopefully be clear of all Covid restrictions and anxieties. Developing green awards was noted as a key area for the Committee to develop.

Tony also referred to a local green arts festival under the slogan "There Is No Planet B" which had been very successful and was something that might be replicated in Hereford using our contacts with the creative community.

It was noted that awards could be in categories including (but not limited to) allotments, schools, community groups, companies and individuals.

It was also noted that with a cabinet system and as one Green out of 40, Cllr Pearce is unable to deliver much, but he can influence and persuade. The new officer and the apparent support of the Chief Executive for taking environmental issues seriously is encouraging, and there does seem to be a wider recognition in the Borough that things have slipped back and that needs to be addressed.

The Clerk spoke about how the new Allotments' Agreement would impose rules on soil management and the preservation of habitat, noting that within the Allotments' Society a pressure group had become active around these issues as there was no point in one plot holder trying to be green if the people either side were spraying insecticides, using chemical fertilisers and putting slug pellets down. This was an ongoing piece of work which would be reported to Community Development Committee in due course.

On the issue of planning, noting that Cllr Pearce is on Stafford's Planning Committee there was clear evidence of shared experience of declarations on policy being rather woolly in their wording, not much enthusiasm for trying to compel developers to meet aspirations on combined heat and power, etc and usually not much more than a few bicycle racks and a bit of planting to tick a few boxes against planning standards. The M6 runs through Stafford Borough and there is an initiative planned to plant trees along its length to try and absorb carbon. The pressure from the government to build more houses and the ability of developers to cite land costs as a prohibitive factor in investing in green development have pretty effectively undermined policies and enabled environmentally insensitive development to continue.

By way of background we noted that Stafford is a Conservative majority council with one green and a group of independents, almost entirely from the town of Stone which has recently been the focus of some very unpopular development being imposed which lead to numerous sitting members losing their seats in the recent elections.

The notes above summarise both Tony's presentation and subsequent answers to questions. Key points noted to follow up were:

- Use of officer time to develop green awards as part of a revitalised Annual Parish Meeting

- Continuing community engagement especially with schools and allotment holders

- Possible reallocation of staff time and budgets to support more green initiatives

- Continuing lobbying for effective and enforceable planning standards around green development

- Key relationship building with schools and the voluntary sector

The Chair thanked Cllr Pearce for a very informative and helpful presentation and subsequent discussion.

Meeting closed at 7 pm