

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD REMOTELY
THURSDAY, 1ST APRIL 2021 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: M J Hart (Chairman), S J Chambers (Vice-Chairman), N J Desmond, P Dyke, C Edginton-White, S Griffiths, A L L'Huillier, S Miah, T L Onslow, S E N Rook and D R Sheppard.

Observers

Councillors: G W Ballinger, J F Byng, R H Coleman, H E Dyke, I Hardiman, P Harrison, F M Oborski MBE, M Rayner, C Rogers and A Totty.

OS.81 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

OS.82 Appointment of Substitutes

No substitutes were appointed.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor P Dyke as a substantive member of the Committee. He had replaced Councillor M Rayner following her appointment to Cabinet.

OS.83 Declarations of Interests by Members

Councillor S Miah declared in respect of agenda item 6 – Strategic Asset Management Plan 2021-26, that he was the Chairman of the HELP Charity.

Councillor S Griffiths declared in respect of agenda item 6 – Strategic Asset Management Plan 2021-26, that she was a fundraiser for the HELP Charity.

Councillor F Oborski declared in respect of agenda item 6 – Strategic Asset Management Plan 2021-26, that she was the treasurer for the HELP Charity.

OS.84 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 4th March 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman advised that representatives from the Environment Agency, Severn Trent and Worcestershire County Council had been invited to attend the meeting to give an update on the temporary barrier at Beales Corner following the flooding in January 2021. He said that a wider update on the flooding issues would be given at

the May Committee meeting.

He welcomed the representatives from the Environment Agency; Dave Edwards, Team Leader for Flood and Coastal Risk Management, and Lindsey Sayner, Senior Engineer for Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Gloucestershire; and from Severn Trent; Tim Smith, Flooding and Partnerships Manager and Matthew Jaynes, Wastewater Networks Manager, Worcestershire & Gloucestershire.

He advised that there was no representative from the statutory highways authority, Worcestershire County Council, as they are in the purdah period for the May elections and felt it was not appropriate to send an Officer at this time.

OS.85 Update from the Environment Agency

The Committee received an update from the Environment Agency (EA) on the investigation into the circumstances which led to the compromise of the temporary barrier at Beales Corner, Bewdley.

Dave Edwards presented the report and gave a brief summary of the roles and responsibilities of the EA. He said that in terms of flood and coastal risk management the EA had legal powers to undertake certain flood risk management works for the greater public good; they were permissive powers rather than statutory duties.

He explained that works are carried out across the country, at public expense, to reduce flood risk. This is done because of the wider economic and social case for reducing the effects of flooding. He said there was not a general right to be protected from flooding or to be protected to any particular standard when risk management works are undertaken by the EA. He added that the EA also have an incident response role and in terms of flood risk management (FRM), the EA operate their FRM Assets, and issue flood warnings where possible.

Dave Edwards explained that in January significant rain fall was experienced right across the River Severn catchment which led to rising river levels. The FRM assets were deployed at Severnside North, Severnside South and Beales Corner. On the evening of Friday 22nd January with the river levels still rising the temporary flood defence barrier at Beales Corner was, unfortunately, compromised.

He further explained that following the barrier's compromise, the EA were able to offer help and support to those affected by the flooding and they immediately commenced a review into what happened. Information had been shared with stakeholders via the EAs regular newsletter and on 27th January they were able to share a copy of the initial findings report with stakeholders. He said that the EA had also held a socially distanced Covid safe drop-in session on 28th January to update those who were present.

Lindsey Sayner gave an update on the technical side of the report. She explained that she had previously been involved in technical reviews and assessments for other temporary barrier systems such as the barriers at Iron Bridge and Stratford-upon-Avon.

She advised that on Monday 25th January the water levels had dropped low enough

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for the EA to see the site and they had to break a significant amount of ice to get on there. An initial findings report, attached at appendix A of the report, was issued the following day. The initial report will be backed up by a full post incident report which she was currently working on and was scheduled to be finished by late June.

She said that from the initial site visit the road surface had not only been scraped back by the barrier systems under the load, but it was also allowing water to come through the road surface. Having outlined a summary of the points that would be considered as part of the post incident full review and assured members that the EA were working closely with WCC to resolve the issues. She said whatever was happening with the road was getting worse and they had seen evidence of that. She advised that a decision had been made to pause the temporary barrier deployment until the review had been completed, as the EA did not want to do anything too quickly which would result in a further slide event and put people at further risk.

She added that in the short term the EA have created thorough plans with individual contact points with the residents, purchased some additional smaller pumps and have materials available so that if the levels are predicted to be similar to when the EA would have considered deploying the temporary barriers, that is the point they will be making communication with all those residents and helping them tailor their protection to their individual needs.

Councillor G Ballinger joined the meeting at this point, (6.36pm)

In response to concerns raised by a member in relation to the work on the temporary barriers and potential funding for a permanent barrier scheme, Dave Edwards was pleased to advise that should the temporary barriers be deployed again, there would be no bearing on the funding availability for a permanent scheme as they were completely separate from each other.

Tim Smith outlined Severn Trent's roles and responsibilities which included what they do as part of the multi-agency plan at Beales Corner during incident mode. He said Severn Trent managed the sewer network and sewer flooding and was one of many key organisations involved in flood risk management. He explained that during events when the temporary barriers are deployed Severn Trent undertake temporary pumping of the surface water systems and foul pumping station which is on the riverside.

Matthew Jeynes spoke about the purpose of the pumps and the workings of the non-return valves. He explained that when the temporary pumps were deployed, the pump station at Beales Corner is switched off as it not as effective as it normally would be due to the level of the river and the ingress. He said the temporary pumps not only do the job of the pump station by protecting properties from sewer flooding, they also protect properties that are at risk of flooding directly from the river when the barriers are over topped or in the case of a no barrier situation, and a number of properties that are further away.

He further explained that in January, to try and protect as many properties as they could, a decision was taken to keep the temporary pumps in place and operating for as long as possible with the risk that they could incur some damage which they did when the river overtopped. He said four of the pumps had been catastrophically

destroyed because of the event, which unfortunately resulted in a spillage of fuel as they are not designed to work underwater. However, if the pumps had been switched off and removed before the barriers were compromised, the properties would have been contaminated with sewage.

In conclusion, Tim Smith said that he hoped the updates had conveyed a real sense of commitment from both the agencies and outlined the issues they had to grapple with and the dynamic decision making during a flooding event. He said that it was right and proper that the EA carry out the investigation and during this interim position when the temporary barriers will not be deployed reliance will be on the property flood resilience. He said Severn Trent would not be able to deploy temporary pumps as there would be no defenced area for them to be positioned.

The Chairman thanked the agencies for giving their time to attend the meeting and for the written and verbal updates.

Agreed: The update be noted.

OS.86

**A Strategy for Enabling Business Growth and Enterprise
2021-26**

The Committee considered a report from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place which set out the proposals to update and adopt a Strategy for Enabling Business Growth and Enterprise 2021-26.

The Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place presented the report and advised that the authority adopted a similar strategy in 2016. He explained that the general approach and aspirations were still current but it had been refreshed to ensure it was up to current standards. He said It still remained an important document as it sets out how the Council expects to deliver against the corporate strategy and corporate priorities around economic growth, and hoped members recognised that it was a very important part of what the authority was doing going forward.

The Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place outlined the key issues of the report and happy to report that good progress was being made with the development of the industrial units opposite Aldi on the Silverwoods site. He said it was the Council's first and to date, only development loan fund proposal and was really good news that it is going ahead. He said the double benefit for the Council was that the authority are going to be purchasing six of the industrial units that will be known as Forest Industrial Estate. This will add to the Council's portfolio of properties and demonstrated good local leadership as the market for good quality industrial units was really picking up at the moment,

The Committee discussed the report and welcomed the news that Barton Firtop Engineering Co. were relocating to Wyre Forest. Members thanked the Corporate Director and his team for the work they had done in promoting business growth within the District over many years and for the securing the relocation of Barton Firtop.

A member suggested that since 2016 a climate emergency had been declared and the authority had taken steps to address the issues. It was suggested that additions be made to the objectives and principles within the strategy to include reference to the green growth agenda and the promotion of Council's expectation of net zero carbon emissions.

Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet that the Strategy for Enabling Business Growth & Enterprise 2021-26 is agreed, subject to the Green Business Growth agenda being included within the Enterprise and Business Growth Ambitions on page 52 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

OS.87 Strategic Facilities Asset Management Plan 2021-26

The Committee considered a report from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place which set out the proposals to update and adopt a Strategic Asset Management Plan (SF&) 2021-26. The report also included the management and marketing plan for tenancies at Wyre Forest House.

The Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place presented the report. He explained that the plan was about how the authority manages its operational buildings. He said it was a refresh of a previous strategy and important in terms of making sure the buildings were healthy and safe for Managers to deliver their services from. He was pleased to advise that despite the pandemic, the authority was beginning to see more interest in the vacant space at Wyre Forest House.

Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet that the Strategic Facilities and Asset Management Plan 2021-26 is agreed.

At 7.42pm, the Committee agreed unanimously to suspend Council Procedure Rule (Standing Orders) 1.1 (iii) to allow the meeting to continue past 8pm.

OS.88 Strategic Asset Management Plan 2021-26

The Committee considered a report from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place which set out the proposals to update and adopt a Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) 2021-26.

The Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place presented the report and explained that it was a refresh of the same document that the authority adopted 5 years ago and was heavily related to the business growth and enterprise strategy.

He added that in 2013-2014 the authority reviewed its assets and started to take a different view in relation them. They were not just there to be disposed of for capital receipt, it was more about how they could be used both in terms of supporting the economic regeneration of the district and also in terms of revenue generation as well.

He further explained that a number of things have happened since the original strategy was adopted, such as; the development of the Evergreen Investment Fund whereby when an asset is disposed of for capital receipt the capital receipt is ring fenced with a view to it being recycled back into economic regeneration and

revenue generating opportunities; the Capital Portfolio Fund which is aimed at supporting our economic growth across a wider geography using the Local Enterprise Partnerships' geography; working with PSP which is all about how we can better utilise the assets that we have. He added that it was a developing document and it is a very important part of what we want to agree going forward, as it was all about the development of the Council's asset base and using that asset base to improve the economic prospects within the District.

The Committee discussed the report. It was suggested that whilst it was important the authority maximised the assets to their full potential, there was also a community aspect to a number of the assets and formed part of the history of the area. It was important that the document reflected the assets were not just used for commercial purposes, they were part of and used by the community.

Agreed: Recommend to Cabinet that the Strategic Asset Management Plan 2021-26 and accompanying Disposal Strategy 2021 is agreed, with the inclusion of comments referencing the community benefit to be derived from some assets rather than simply their financial yield.

OS.89 Press Involvement

There were no future items for scrutiny that might require publicity.

OS.90 Exempt Information

Decision: Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of "Exempt Information" as defined in paragraphs 2, 6 and 7 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

OS.91 Strategic Asset Management Plan 2021-26: Appendix 2 – Property Disposal Strategy 2021

The Committee considered the confidential disposal strategy. The document is reviewed on an annual basis and covers areas such as the retention, redevelopment and disposal options of the Assets.

Councillors S Miah, S Griffiths and F Oborski declared there interests at this point.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 8.18pm.

The full meeting is available for viewing on the Council's website
<https://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/53298>