

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)
held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 14 July 2021

**NOTE: This meeting was not held as a public meeting in accordance with the
Local Government Act 1972**

Present:

Members of the Board: Councillor C Miks (Chair)
Councillor M Heaven
Councillor T Jandu
Councillor R Lancaster
Councillor P Male
Councillor E Ruane
Councillor B Singh
Councillor A Tucker

Other Invited Member: Councillor J O'Boyle (Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration
and Climate Change)

Others Present: Adnan Asaif, Canals and Rivers Trust
Charles Hughes, Canals and Rivers Trust

Employees (by Service):

Law and Governance G Holmes. M Salmon

Streetscene and
Regulatory Services D Butler, G Hood, S Newell, T Wetherhill, B Willers, M Yates

Apology: Councillor G Hayre

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th April 2021 were agreed as a true record.
There were no matters arising.

3. Climate Change - Biodiversity

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received a presentation
from the Canals and Rivers Trust West Midlands Regional Director and the INNS

Project Manager & Environmental Scientist, headed Coventry Canal – A Transition to a Greener Future.

The presentation highlighted the following:

- The canal was 5 miles long and the West Midlands Region had 34% of Assets & PPM, 29% of the actual length, 32% of Locks, 39% of Reservoirs, 2m target population of 5.7m overall, 19 SSSI Sites, 1031km of towpaths, 948 access points, National Boat Count 24%
- West Midlands region priorities were to achieve 5x Green Flag sites, maximise brand awareness campaigns through signage, major activities and media, community ownership through local volunteering and adoptions, and activities to promote wellbeing to up to 2m canal neighbours
- Active & Sustainable Travel - £1.4m towpath improvement scheme, funded by the West Midlands Combined Authority, resulting in high usage of the path by local residents and repeat visitors; access and signage improvements from Priestley's Bridge to Hawkesbury Junction; and improvements for walkers, runners and cyclists, encouraging sustainable zero emission transport methods
- Improvement of Biodiversity - Management of water's edge habitat to improve it for key vertebrate species; planting of wild flower seeds along key sections of the canal to improve plant diversity, to attract pollinators and to improve aesthetic value; maintaining trees overhanging waterway channel and towpath to ensure safe access and use of waterways; increasing amount of hedgerow to boost invertebrate and bird biodiversity along sections of the canal; and removal of invasive, non-native plant species that would otherwise displace native species and reduce biodiversity
- Involvement of the Public – Leading wildlife walks along the canal for members of the public; encouraging local members of the public to report sightings of protected species to provide a means of monitoring presence along the canal; Involving the local community in environmental improvements that benefit their wellbeing by increasing volunteer activities such as
- Environmental Protection & Monitoring – As part of the management plan: Air quality monitoring through portable air quality monitoring around roads along the city centre and the canal corridor; water quality monitoring through a regional water quality project to assess the chemical quality of waterways, with Coventry being a priority site; fly tipping: Increased communication with local authority, improvements in data collection/reporting & submission of evidence. Huge volunteer and community assistance in maintaining the canal environment
- Invasive Species Project – Severn Trent: Strategic Partnership Project to tackle invasive species across the Severn Trent catchment (£600k of external funding) utilising treatment methods including chemical, biological, mechanical and exploring new alternatives, covers 4 operating regions including West Midlands - sites on the Coventry Canal are being targeted for treatment & eradication

The Board questioned officers, received responses and discussed the following issues:

- Fly tipping and litter: vision for the canal length from the City Centre to the end of the canal in the city to be free of fly tipping and litter - response team in place to tackle reports of fly tipping, Community Safety Officers

- undertaking talks in schools, Plastics Challenge Campaign working well, committed community and volunteers assisting
- Confirmed receipt of £1.4m from the West Midlands Combined Authority – funds fully utilised to deliver a new all-weather towpath as well as access and signage improvements
 - Future management of towpath to ensure inclusive use for cycling, fishing, walking – Share the Space Campaign: encourages courteous use of towpath and consideration of others. Review path usage through environmental assessments
 - City Culture links – Canals and Rivers Trust are working with the City of Culture Trust on a programme of projects at the canal. Random String- The Canal Networked, was an example of a City of Culture 2021 event/project at the Canal Basin.
 - Marketing – important to spread the message about the benefits of accessing the canal and programmed events and projects
 - Community Roots – Coventry was one of three areas in the West Midlands to have a designated Community Engagement Coordinator
 - Long-term management of the canal – Seeking green flag status, which is regularly re-assessed once awarded, will ensure continued maintenance and adherence to the Management Plan for the future

Members of the Board suggested it may be appropriate to invite a representative of the Canals and Rivers Trust to participate in the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) – Fly Tipping Task and Finish Group.

The Board thanked the Canals and Rivers Trust representatives for their presentation and requested that the presentation slides be circulated to them. They also requested that details of the Community Roots Designated Community Engagement Coordinator, Nick Clever, be forwarded to Members of the Board together with a briefing note providing details of Grass Roots community activities linked to environment and green space, including details from the City of Culture Team.

The Board also received a Briefing Note of the Director of Business, Culture and Investment that introduced a Presentation on Climate Change – Biodiversity. The Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change attended the meeting for this item.

Following an item on Climate Change received by Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee at their meeting on 21st April 2021, the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board requested an item on Biodiversity. The presentation, a copy of which was appended to the Briefing Note, provided information on Biodiversity and Green Space in Coventry and outlined the steps that the Council and partners (River Sherbourne, Coventry Canal, The Catchment Partnership, City of Culture Trust, Friends Groups, Living Landscapes, and Developers) were taking to increase access to green spaces and manage biodiversity across the city. Access to Green Space had a significant impact on health and steps to increase access to green space would have a positive effect on health inequalities. 90% of people say green spaces enhanced their health and wellbeing.

The presentation outlined the following:

- The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives Low emissions identified the pathways to sustainability as: Nature based; Circular economy; Adaptability and resilience; and Equitable and People centred.
- Response to legislation had been through: UK Biodiversity Action Plan 1994; Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006; UK National Ecosystem Assessment 2011; Biodiversity Duty: public authority duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity 2014; Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services; Improving Access to Greenspace – Public health England Review 2020; National Planning Policy Framework 2019 - Biodiversity mitigation requirement; and The Environment Bill 202.
- The provisions of the Greenspace Strategy 2019-2024
- The 2015/16 Revenue Budget for greenspace had been reduced by 25%. The challenges and opportunities faced by the service included having enough staff with the knowledge and expertise for habitat management, setting aside areas for nature conservation, changing the way routine maintenance of parks and open space were conducted, working in partnership with communities and partners for securing funding, the review of Local Plan & Supplementary Planning Guidance, and City of Culture events to engage communities.
- National statistics for local authorities' green space access and deprived neighbourhoods.
- Notable species and where they could be found in the City, and the location of 22 local wildlife site, 272 local nature reserves and ancient woodland.
- 12 Principles of an Ecosystem approach
- Biodiversity Action Plans – habitats & Species and delivering on the Biodiversity Action Plan targets (2010)
- Coventry Urban Forestry Strategy 2021-2031 - 9,864 ha, 360,000 people, 24 parks, 17 woodlands, 44,000 individual trees, 200,000 trees in open spaces, 15% canopy cover, reducing airborne pollution, Mitigating heat island effect and flooding and wind turbulence, promoting biodiversity and health and wellbeing, adding economic value and investment and enhancing landscape character and interest
- Compensating for loss of a mature tree (25 to 40 years) – Carbon fixation
- Bristol Tree Replacement Standard – the number of trees required to compensate for the loss of existing trees

Actions to consider and options for the future were to:

- Establish ways in which Section 106, Biodiversity Net Gain and Nutrient Budgeting could best be used to support the development of open space a, parks and LNR's etc and other biodiversity and resilience measures
- Updating a Biodiversity Action Plan for Coventry
- Informing a review of Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance
- Identifying areas with potential for nature conservation
- Maximising the opportunities for wildlife on public land
- Changing the way routine maintenance was conducted and to have access to the right equipment
- Creating wildlife corridors linking sites integrated with active transport initiatives including safe, traffic free routes
- Promoting environmental awareness e.g. Eco schools, Forest Schools, Tiny Forests
- Data monitoring – the State of the Environment

The Board questioned officers, received responses and discussed the following issues:

- Severn Trent: Strategic Partnership Project – Letters sent to all schools and the Council’s Head of Service Education Entitlement, had been engaging with schools. Progress would be reported in due course
- Working with developers through Supplementary Planning Guidance and Section 106 agreements
- Assistance for companies – companies were being provided with assistance on environmental and corporate responsibilities to provide ecological ways to operate
- The Local Plan would be reviewed in 2022 to ensure it met requirements to achieve all that it needed

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3):

- 1) Supports the actions to consider for the future as set out above, and requests that progress on the actions be reported to the Board in due course.**
- 2) Requests that the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) consider inviting a representative of the Canals and Rivers Trust to participate in the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) Fly Tipping Task and Finish Group.**

4. Work Programme and Outstanding Issues 2021/2022

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received a report of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator that detailed the issues carried over from the Board’s Work Programme 2020/2021 and suggested for meetings of the Board in 2021/2022.

The Board noted that it was proposed that the meeting of the Board scheduled for 8th September 2021 be held at the Coventry Transport Museum. However, consideration would need to be given to the Government Guidelines in relation to Covid at that time, to ensure that the meeting could be held safely at the venue.

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) notes the issues carried over from the Work Programme for 2020/2021 and suggested for meetings of the Board in 2021/2022, and Members were invited to suggest further items as the year progressed.

5. Any other items of public business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 3.50 pm)