

**7 MARCH 2024**

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**PLACE AND SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Place and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 7 March 2024

- \* Cllr Steve Rippon-Swaine (Chairman)
- \* Cllr Alvin Reid (Vice-Chairman)

**Councillors:**

- \* Peter Armstrong
- \* Keith Craze
- \* Allan Glass
- \* Matthew Hartmann

**Councillors:**

- \* Stephanie Osborne
- \* Adam Parker
- \* Malcolm Wade

\*Present

**In attendance:**

**Councillors:**

Jack Davies  
John Haywood

**Councillors:**

Janet Richards

**Officers Attending:**

James Carpenter, Tim Guymer, Andrew Herring, Sally Igra, Joanne McClay, Chris Noble, Iain Park, Clive Tritton, Joe Tyler, Richard Knott and Matt Wisdom and Mike Allgrove.

**Apologies**

No apologies were received from Panel members.

However, Cllr Woods and Millar, who had both submitted call-in requests on the Hampshire and Minerals and Waste Plan, sent their apologies.

Cllr Poole sent his apologies for item 4.

**37 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

**38 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

On item 4, Cllr Wade declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was a resident in the area effected by the water disruption in November 2023. He concluded that there were no grounds under common law to prevent him from remaining in the meeting to speak on the matter.

On item 5, Cllr Parker declared, for transparency, that he worked for a company that quarries in Dorset. He concluded that there were no grounds under common law to prevent him from remaining in the meeting to speak on the matter.

### **39 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was public participation scheduled for item 5, the Call-in Request on Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan. The Chairman clarified that those in attendance who had registered to speak would be invited to do so at the relevant time during item 5.

### **40 WATER SUPPLY DISRUPTION - POST INCIDENT REVIEW**

The Service Manager for Environmental and Regulation introduced the item and provided the update to Panel. The main points raised were as follows:

- The report in front of Panel solely relates to the lessons that were learnt from the water supply incident in the latter stages of 2023, as opposed to other issues like pollution and storm flooding. The incident in question occurred in November 2023, with 18,000 homes affected in the waterside area, some of them up to three days. This was due to the impact of storm Kieran on the Testwood Water Plant.
- The Council set up an emergency control centre to support Southern Water and respond to incident in conjunction with multi agency partners. The report highlights the role of the District Council during the incident and sets out the responsibilities of other agencies during the incident.
- Key areas of feedback showed that Council's response was good with officers and members working closely and effectively together. There was good internal structure within the Council allowed effective communication and decision making, a task and finish group chaired by HCC had been set up to carry out collaborative working in future and implement improvements.
- Areas of improvement identified were: notification of incident, set up location and management of bottled water sites, ensuring delivery to vulnerable customers – internally we must look at increased use of technology to drive our response and engage long term with providers. Relevant services will implement these actions but wider issues outside of the Council's remit had also been fed into the debrief discussions.
- The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) debrief was undertaken via a multi-agency approach. Some actions that had been highlighted by the LRF had already been implemented.
- It was confirmed that the Council's Leader and Chief Executive had met with the Chief Executive of Southern Water. This was a very productive meeting where issues with the company's response to the storm Kieran were discussed. This included the infrastructure issues and the short- and long-term investment programme for quicker recovery in future.

After the report had been presented, members of the Panel were invited to make comment and ask questions. These were as follows:

- Disappointment was expressed that Fawley Parish Council were not directly spoken to during the response.
- Complaints were raised regarding Southern Water's delivery of bottled water and the failure to provide sufficient bottled water to vulnerable residents.
- Some members expressed their disappointment that investment in water distribution infrastructure was insufficient.

The Panel noted the report, the issues it raised and the associated action plan.

#### **41 CALL-IN REQUEST - HAMPSHIRE MINERALS AND WASTE PLAN (PARTIAL UPDATE) CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

The Chairman explained the Call-In procedure and the reasons for the item coming to Panel.

Deputations were heard from a member of the public and from a Councillor of the Fordingbridge Town Council.

Cllrs Wade, Davies, Richards, Osborne and Haywood were invited to speak as those who submitted call-in requests. Cllrs Millar and Woods who also submitted call-in requests had sent their apologies and therefore did not address the Panel.

The main points raised during these representations were:

- The environmental impact that would arise from allowing a quarry at Midgham Farm. The number of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) would cause pollution to the local area whilst also disturbing the natural environment and habitat for local animals. Reference was made to other mineral extraction sites in the District that saw neighbouring residential areas suffer from dirt and dust, particularly in the Summer months. Reference was also made to specific animal habitation, such as those of the sand lizard and dormouse.
- Concern was raised on the impact to the local highways network around Midgham Farm, due to the use of HGVs in and around the area, as well as transportation of machinery to and from the site. In addition, there was concern over the new access route that would be required for Midgham Farm site which would need to be laid through forest land, therefore causing more environmental disruption and damage.
- 962 objections to the Mineral and Waste consultation had been received and 42% of these related specifically to the Midgham Farm site. There was very strong local opinion on the matter and members felt that the New Forest District Council's proposed consultation response did not adequately reflect the local sentiment.

Cllr Ward was invited to address the Panel as a non-panel member after submitting a request to speak to the Chairman. She explained that the proposed consultation response was not robust enough and that the proposed extraction site at Ashley Manor Farm would cause further issues to existing problems with dust, gravel, noise disruption, environmental protection and an inadequate buffer zone.

The Acting Assistant Director for Place Development introduced the report and gave his presentation. The main points were as follows:

- A summary of the review timeline was provided, and the Panel were reminded that Hampshire County Council were the plan-making authority. A review of the Minerals and Waste Plan was initiated in 2020 when parts of the plan were marked as requiring update. In 2021, Officers made comments on HCC's sustainability appraisal and baseline report. Regulation 18, was responded to by the District Council in January 2023 by way of a formal consultation response. The proposed response now being considered would relate to Regulation 19, which features a number of changes to the Regulation 18 plan, primarily a change in the proposed sites.
- The geology of the District dictates the selection of mineral extraction sites. Many of the existing sites are coming to the end of their lifecycle and there is therefore a need for new sites to be identified for benefit of the local and national economy.
- A summary of NFDC's views given during the Regulation 18 consultation were provided and the Acting Assistant Director for Place Development explained the reasons why some aspects of NFDC's views had changed since this initial response. The inclusion of landscape buffers and the addressing of impacts on ecological concerns were among the reasons why NFDC's position had changed; concerns raised by Officers in the Regulation 18 response had been addressed.
- A contextual plan and explanation were provided to the Panel highlighting Midgham Farm's location and its proximity to the existing Bleak Hill site.
- The options available to Panel were reiterated and members were invited to comment, discuss, and ask questions on the report.

The Portfolio Holder addressed the Panel on the proposed consultation response, the main points were as follows:

- Reference was made to the draft report that was circulated for comment prior to the proposed consultation response being written. It was highlighted how no objections had been raised relating to Midgham Farm during this stage of the process.
- Advice from specialist officers on technical aspects of hydrology and ecology had been sought. As a Portfolio Holder, he relied on the professional advice of Officers.
- It was confirmed that the consultation was still running and any individual with concerns regarding the plan was welcome to submit their thoughts to Hampshire County Council.
- It was acknowledged that mineral extraction was never popular but that it was becoming more difficult to designate sites that were suitable.

Members of the Panel were invited to make comment and ask questions on the report. The main points were as follows:

- A member commented on the level of pollution and dust that was created at an existing site at Hythe quarry.
- Reference was made to Hampshire County Council's Regulatory Committee and the number of complaints made regarding the issues at Hythe quarry.
- Significant concern was raised by a member on the proximity of the proposed Midgham Farm and Ashley Manor Farm sites.
- Comments were made on the closure of certain sites during the Winter months, suggesting that there was only seasonal benefit to the sites.
- A member made reference to Calshot quarry and specified that the volume of traffic and strain on the highways surrounding this site would be a concern if it saw an increased or if replicated elsewhere in the District.
- It was acknowledged that sand and gravel were required to build the District's much-needed houses.

**RESOLVED:**

That the panel refer the decision to full Council for debate at a Council meeting to be held within fifteen working days' time.

**42 SOLENT FREEPORT: SECURING A LEGACY FOR THE NEW FOREST**

The Strategic Regeneration Advisor introduced the report and provided an update to members. The main points were as follows:

- The Solent Freeport was now in the delivery phase following the business case that was approved in April 2022.
- The New Forest District contains a high proportion of 'tax sites'. These sites will play a vital role in the delivery of the Freeport.
- The key benefits of the Freeport include a forecasted 7000 new jobs, £290million of retained business rates and 303 hectares of developable land. Investment was now required to realise these benefits.
- Another major benefit of the Freeport was the retention of business rates above a fixed base level on tax sites for a period of 25 years. The approved Retained Rates Investment Plan establishes that retained business rates will be re-invested across five key areas, these being:
  - i. Skills - 15% of available funding
  - ii. Net Zero – 7.5%
  - iii. Hotbeds of innovation – 7.5%
  - iv. Regeneration and enabling infrastructure – 60%

- v. Local Investment Priorities – 10%
- These provide a clear indication of the Freeport priorities and it is now for the New Forest to progress their own proposals for how it would like to see retained business rates re-invested in the region.
- A delivery plan is now required to establish the outcomes that a successful Freeport would deliver in the New Forest. The plan would be the basis for future discussions with the Freeport on the use of business rates and other funding opportunities.
- Following discussions between the Future New Forest Partnership Board and the Waterside Steering Group, the agreed priorities to be developed into a New Forest Freeport Delivery Plan should be as follows:
  - i. Transport/wider infrastructure
  - ii. Employment and Skills
  - iii. Prosperous Communities
  - iv. Environmental Sustainability
  - v. The Development of a Local Delivery Plan
- It was now for the NFDC Cabinet to decide whether it agreed with the proposed priorities and receive comments from the Panel on this process.

Panel members asked questions and made comments on the report. The main points raised were as follows:

- Following comments regarding the former Fawley Power Station, the Strategic Regeneration Advisor explained that detailed proposals for this tax site were being awaited. The Panel were reminded that the Freeport was a 25-year process and that plans and proposals would be revisited, but that the purpose of the paper in consideration was for the District to set out its priorities at this stage. Full proposals for individual tax sites are awaited but the report is about ensuring the district has clear priorities.
- The Panel heard from one member that the Freeport process contained both risks and benefits over a lengthy period of time. The Member commented that it required a level of flexibility from all contributors to enable pragmatism alongside the changing landscape.
- A question was raised on the projected employment figures that the Freeport would bring, with reference being made to the 2000 unemployed people living on the waterside. It was explained that the Government were looking at the skills gap as part of the ongoing Freeport project. The full business case and guidance contained a good level of input on employment and skills and it was explained that the work on bridging the skills-gap was being looked at on a regional level. There was concern over how the distinctive, local issues would be addressed, particularly the fact that the New Forest contained mainly Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It was suggested, therefore, that employment and skills should be listed as

one of the priorities for the District Council. Discussions had already commenced with partners, such as Brockenhurst College, local universities and employers.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Panel supported the intended Cabinet recommendations as set out in the report.

**43 SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT: PLANNING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE**

The Senior Policy Planner and the Local Plan Team Leader introduced the report and summarised the matter. The main points raised were as follows:

- This matter was last brought to Panel in Spring in 2023. The document will support the policies in the current Local Plan and assist the determination of planning applications whilst also aiding the actions set out as part of the climate emergency declaration made by the Council in 2022.
- The key objective is to encourage the development industry to maximise renewable uses and minimise expected carbon emissions when designing and constructing new buildings, adapted adequately for climate change.
- The SPD cannot introduce new standards over and above the Council's current Local Plan – however it will provide a basis to develop more detailed climate policies and seek agreement in the new Local Plan Review processes being undertaken.
- Following the consultation responses, a balance was struck on the varying priorities and opinions within the context of the Local Plan to put the SPD in the best framework possible.

Following the update, the Panel were invited to make comments and ask questions. These were as follows:

- It was clarified that the SPD in question would support the current Local Plan whilst acting as a building block for the new Local Plan to address the climate emergency matters.
- A member acknowledged that this SPD was not the end result of the process and would be a component step in the process of the Local Plan review to best address the climate emergency.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Panel supports the intended Cabinet recommendations as contained within the report.

**44 GRASS CUTTING PROGRAMME - SPRING 2024**

The Assistant Director - Place Operations, Waste and Transport presented the item and gave a summary of the main points, which were as follows:

- The Council had trialled the national initiative campaign of No Mow May. The report provided to members contained the key learnings from this trial and the recommendations going forward for 2024.
- Section 4 of the report detailed the key learnings and the Panel heard that use of the word 'No' in a campaign title was not desirable. Therefore, the new phrase for 2024 would be 'Let it Bee'.
- Feedback on the No Mow May initiative in 2023 was divided. Comments had been taken on board and would be utilised for refinement next year.

Following the item summary, the Panel were invited to make comments and discuss the item. The points raised were as follows:

- On the subject of weed-spraying, it was explained that there were difficulties in funding a second weed-spray across the District however the Council were spraying areas with the highest footfall a second time.
- A member paid tribute to the initiative ahead of its implementation in 2024 and also to NFDC staff who worked on wildflower areas.
- Advertising and communications were recognised as being important ahead of Spring 2024 to inform the public on what the initiative is and what it would entail.

The Panel noted the report and the approach to grass cutting in Spring of 2024.

#### **45 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATE**

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy provided an update on the key areas within his portfolio. The main points were as follows:

- The Local plan review had now begun with updates to be given to Panel in future months.
- The first meeting of the Totton Regeneration Partnership had occurred, with the aim of assessing where to focus improvements to Totton Centre. £136,000 had been provided for 'quick wins' that had been designated alongside the Town council for Summer 2024.
- The shop doctor scheme had engaged 32 businesses and feedback would be provided shortly to those participants along with the Mystery Shopper scheme returning for 2024.
- The Rural England prosperity fund was open for businesses with information on how to apply available on the Council's website. Some money from this had been re-allocated for community use as take up from businesses not as strong.
- Information on ready to start apprenticeships and the Council's skills hub was now available on the Council's website. 50 businesses had signed up to the apprenticeship scheme.
- On CIL funding, the final list of projects splitting the £1mil CIL fund stood at 26.

Following the update from the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, members of the Panel were able to make comments and ask questions. These were as follows:

- On Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), it was explained that the majority of the listed targets were marked as 'green'. The measures listed currently related to the existing Corporate Plan and some of the indicators were marked as grey as they had not reached the end of the measuring period. The new Corporate Plan with its new set of measures was currently being drafted and therefore the KPI list would be revised in the near future.
- The Panel heard that a KPI could be set on the take up of the Council's newsletter.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability gave an update on the key pieces of work that had been undertaken recently within his portfolio. These were as follows:

- Following the Waste Strategy approval at February Council, preparations were underway ahead of the key service change in 2025. Messaging and communications were to be constant and consistent with all information kept up to date online and disseminated to all town and Parish Councils, residents newsletter and as well as all social media channels.
- Conversations regarding the waste strategy were being monitored and the 'Change is Coming' campaign would be underway in Summer 2024.
- The Portfolio Holder met members of the New Forest litter pickers and other volunteer groups to discuss the challenges of collecting and disposing of litter, including the sharing of ideas and best practice tips on how to reduce litter. Thanks was given to all of the volunteers across the District who worked hard to keep the District clean. The NFDC Street Scene Team were working hard to remove litter before the Easter Break.
- On fly tipping, several occurrences had been reported and thanks were given to the team that had proactively been to clear the fly tipped items as well as search for the individuals who had left the rubbish.

Following the update, members of the Panel asked questions and made comments, which were as follows:

- A question was asked on the closure of tips at Somerley and Marchwood. It was explained that a corporate response was being drafted on these issues following conversations with Hampshire County Council on the closure of the tips. The HCC panel meeting to consider these budgeting issues would be held on 28 March 2024.

- A comment on staff training and the handling of the Council's website was acknowledged by the Portfolio Holder and would be taken away for response shortly.

The Panel noted the Portfolio Holders' Update.

**46 WORK PROGRAMME**

**RESOLVED:**

That the Work Programme be approved.

CHAIRMAN