

18 JULY 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, 18 July 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:

Geoffrey Blunden

Councillors:

Derek Tipp

Officers Attending:

James Carpenter, Dean Brunton, Steve Cook, Tim Guymer, Sally Igra, Roxanne King, Chris Noble and Iain Park.

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Craze.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 March and 13 May 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

On item 4, Cllr Reid declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he was a Ward Councillor for one of the areas included in the Christchurch Bay Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy. He concluded, however, that there were no grounds under common law to prevent him from remaining in the meeting to speak on the matter.

On item 4, Cllr Parker declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he worked for a civil engineering company that often works on marine projects. The company in question was not involved in the strategy and therefore he concluded that there were no grounds under common law to prevent him from remaining in the meeting to speak on the matter.

6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

7 CHRISTCHURCH BAY AND HARBOUR FLOOD AND COASTAL EROSION RISK MANAGEMENT (FCERM) STRATEGY

The Service Manager of Coastal introduced the item and provided a summary of the item to the Panel. The main points were as follows:

- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP), New Forest District Council (NFDC), and the Environment Agency (EA) had been working to develop a new Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) strategy for Christchurch Bay and Harbour since the Spring of 2021 and has been fully funded through grant aid provision from the EA to BCP Council.
- . There had been extensive engagement with local communities, officers, members and statutory stakeholders alike to identify and subsequently recommend an adaptive approach to how the risks of coastal flooding and erosion can be managed sustainably over the next 100 years in a changing climate.
- The Strategy identified where, when and what type of works will be required to manage and address the risks of coastal flooding and erosion over the next century and what the costs of delivering the identified measures.
- As Coast Protection Authorities, BCP and NFDC do not have any statutory duty to undertake coast protection work but can use permissive powers to protect the coastline and work with communities to help them adapt to future coastal change.
- This strategy, that covers the Christchurch Bay frontage focus is on the Western side of the District as this was where the greatest risk is to our coastline, through storm impacts, coastal erosion and assets with a reducing lifespan.
- A further strategy (concerning Lymington to Redbridge) may be considered by the EA, as contained in their Longer-Term Forward Plan, but would not likely come to fruition until after the completion of the Hurst to Lymington strategy, due September 2026.
- The respective councils were now looking to take the strategy through their decision-making process to be adopted before being submitted to the EA for the formal assurance process, likely happening in the early part of 2025.
- An important aspect of the adoption of the Strategy was that it did not guarantee funding from the EA or central Government, but it also does not commit NFDC to funding any aspects of the projects.
- . The Strategy sits at the second level of shoreline management, below the Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) which are the high-level overarching policy. The Strategy itself contains the risk, cost options, delivery and implementation of the actions required to provide coastal erosion management.

- The Strategy provides a 100-year risk assessment and subsequent list of protective actions to reduce significant flooding or erosion risk across the bay. The wider coastal area face coastal impacts from sea level rise, climate change and storms. The Strategy development process analysed the impact to properties, assets, the local environment and considered how the risk to these could be addressed and mitigated against. The Strategy aligns with the SMP policies already in place at a District level and it identifies options that would be environmentally and financially viable, were funding made available.
- The defences across the BCP and NFDC sea front are coming to the end of their lifespan. Christchurch bay was given as an example and the sea walls were referenced as nearing the end of their life cycle. The Strategy would enable BCP and NFDC Councils to address the issues experienced in the past with sea wall failures and beach front losses.
- In terms of risk, circa 1200 properties were identified as being at risk due to coastal erosion over the next 100-year period. This figure was split between Barton on Sea and Milford on Sea. Along with around 139 properties at Milford on Sea at risk of flooding.
- There was further risk to assets, such as toilet blocks, car parks, beach huts and infrastructure around Christchurch Bay frontage.
- The Barton on Sea project of cliff stabilisation and drainage works was estimated to cost £27million. £3million of this would potentially be made available by Grant Aid from the EA. Therefore, there was a large funding gap identified.
- On Hordle to Milford, the works included a combination of rock works, , beach recharge, works to existing groynes and sea wall systems. The cost of this was estimated at between £10million - £30million with the projected Grant Aid figure to be £4million. Therefore, significant partnership funding was required to meet the costs needed. This would be a partnership funding challenge in order to implement the actions of the Strategy.
- Since 2021, the Strategy has undergone significant engagement through events held at Milford, Christchurch and other areas within the region. There have been online briefings held for both Councillors and members of the public to inform what work has been undertaken in developing the Strategy. There was, therefore, a high level of awareness on this topic and a firm understanding of the requirements of the Council.
- Support and endorsement of the recommendations contained within the report were being sought from the Panel, whereby members acknowledge the risk involved to the District from flooding and coastal erosion and the big funding challenge involved to implement the mitigation measures.

After the report summary was given, members had the opportunity to make comments and ask questions. These were as follows:

- On the funding challenge, members were reminded that there was no commitment on NFDC to fund the Strategy. What was being asked of NFDC was to adopt the strategy and its component policies so that funding could then be sought to implement the necessary measures. The creation of the Strategy and its adoption would act as an imperative step in submitting a business case to the EA for funding, along with other organisations. In order to secure funding, there had to be an identified plan and solution, which was contained within the Strategy itself.
- On questions regarding a strategy for the Eastern side of the District, the Panel were told that there was a Lymington to Redbridge strategy being considered within the EA's Longer Term Forward Plan. It was highlighted that the EA had responsibility for coastal flooding whereas NFDC were the coastal protection authority for coastal erosion.
- Thanks was given to officers of NFDC and BCP Council for their work on the strategy. It was acknowledged that the thorough and detailed Strategy would provide a substantial case for grant funding.
- Following a question on Taddiford clifftop, it was explained that the SMP in which Taddiford was considered Had a management policy of no active intervention. It was deemed that there was no material asset or property at risk on that stretch of clifftop. Furthermore, erosion of that specific area of cliff was considered positive as it would add natural material and sediment to the beach which would supply material to the existing beaches to the east.
- On a follow up question regarding the Eastern section of the District, the Service Manager of Coastal explained that the majority of the east coastline frontage was predominantly private and undefended. Further contact would be made with the EA where concerns would be relayed.

RESOLVED:

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

8 PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S UPDATE

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

- The Portfolio Holder gave thanks to the Service Manager for Coastal and his team for their substantial contribution to the Christchurch Bay and Harbour Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy.
- It was reported that all of the damaged beach huts from Hordle Cliffs were removed and repairs to the sea wall at Milford had been completed Meetings were also taking place with Milford Parish Council to provide a regular update to local members.

- On Changing Places, two new facilities were completed in April at Ringwood to supplement the existing facilities at Brockenhurst. The Changing Places scheme supports people with physical disabilities or learning difficulties to use toilets safely and comfortably within the community. This would enable people, regardless of ability, to be able to enjoy the local shops. Amended layouts at Brockenhurst provided a further Changing Places facility. This brings the total number of Changing Places facilities across the District to 6, with a continuing commitment to maintain and improve inclusivity in the New Forest.
- The Let it Bee ran between the months of May and June. This initiative saw the selective refusal of cutting of grass areas where possible. This initiative aligned with many other Local Authorities, landowners, residents and national Government in recognition of the importance of letting grass grow at this time to help pollinators. The relevant team were careful not to let this cause obstruction. It was considered a successful year and the relevant team had been out mowing again since June. The Portfolio Holder reported that orchids had been seen growing in some areas of the Appletree Court grounds.
- On Garden Waste, the first collections from the new wheeled bins had taken place in April. It was reported that NFDC was enjoying its highest ever number of subscribers to the Garden Waste scheme and that composting had also increased from 500 to 800 tons following the improved service of collection from doorsteps.
- The Street scene team had attended a meeting of New Milton Town Council and had given an excellent presentation on ground maintenance and litter challenges. Further meetings like this one had been arranged for Milford Parish Council.
- The Crabby Campaign and A35 Litter projects had been running throughout the Summer and the Council had commissioned an in-depth study to explore littering behaviours. A sculpture made entirely from littered materials was being made to promote the message of anti-littering.

Following the Portfolio Holder's update, members were able to make comments and ask questions. These were as follows:

- On Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), it was explained that the measures related to the existing Corporate Plan and that some of the indicators were marked as grey as they had not reached the end of the measuring period. It was explained that the dashboard displayed the last quarter of the existing Corporate Plan and the Portfolio Holder was confident that the points raised by members would be addressed in the new KPI dashboards.
- Following a question on tree planting, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council's policy was for two trees to be planted for every one that is removed. It was explained that the majority of the Council's tree planting took place during the Autumn months and was not evenly spread throughout the year, this was due to the optimal, seasonal time frames for tree planting.
- On the Let it Bee campaign, following comment on the various benefits of wildflower meadows and enabling grass to grow during the month of May, it

was confirmed that each site would be assessed on its own merits in future years and that feedback was always welcomed from residents.

- A question was raised on ragwort growing in the District and how it was a poisonous weed when eaten by ponies and other wild animals. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that he would look into this matter.

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

- 995 planning decisions had been issued.
- £945,000 was spent on recreational mitigation projects.
- 50 businesses had engaged with the New Forest apprenticeships and skills hub and 140 businesses and residents had benefited from NFDC's business start-up support.
- £100,000 funding was secured to improve the digital planning process.
- A meeting had been held with the Totton Regeneration Partnership where agreement, subject to approval from the Town Council's, would see a Totton master plan be commissioned.
- On KPIs, the only KPI measure that was not 'green' was New Forest filming. This was affected by the writers' strike in the USA but filming in the New Forest was set to return to former levels in due course.
- The Portfolio Holder explained that the Local Plan development had begun looking at its evidence base, with commissioning work being undertaken on housing needs, open space needs, recreational needs and the requirements of the various communities within the District. NFDC had engaged with the Environment Agency, Hampshire County Council, the National Park amongst others.
- A statement of community involvement would be submitted for consultation in October 2024 and in February 2025 an issues and options consultation would go out to the public.
- The Local Plan Working Group had arranged to meet in June however this was rescheduled due to the General Election and new dates had been agreed from September 2024.
- A new Development Management Manager had joined the Council.
- A nationally significant infrastructure project, the Solent Co2 Exon pipeline, was currently in its assessment phase with different routes being evaluated, with NFDC featuring as a consultee.
- On Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) more money was expected to be gathered and some further projects were being considered for funding.

Following the Portfolio Holder's update, members were able to make comments and ask questions. These were as follows:

- It was confirmed that an announcement on further CIL funding would be made shortly and local organisations would be able to apply again for funding in the coming months.
- On KPIs, it was repeated that the present KPIs refers to 2020-2024 corporate plan. the Portfolio Holder reminded the Panel that with the new Corporate Plan the Council would work to make the new performance management framework and subsequent KPIs as relevant and up to date as possible.
- A Panel member was pleased to see that, in the Annual Performance Report 2023-2024, that the number of subscribers to the 'Helping Business Grow' e-newsletter had remained above 3000, exceeding the target. The Portfolio Holder reassured the Panel that the business unit would continue to be advertised and promoted across the District.

9 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman explained that the Waste Programme Timeline report would be added as an item to the September meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be approved.

CHAIRMAN