

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Environment and Communities Committee** held on Thursday, 27th March, 2025 in The Capesthorne Room - Town Hall, Macclesfield SK10 1EA.

PRESENT

Councillor L Braithwaite (Vice-Chair)

Councillors D Clark, C Browne, L Crane M Brooks, T Dean, S Gardiner, D Jefferay, H Moss, C O'Leary, H Seddon, H Whitaker, G Marshall

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Phil Cresswell, Executive Director of Place
Chris Allman, Director of Planning and Environment
David Malcolm, Head of Planning
Ralph Kemp, Head of Environmental Services
Tom Evans, Strategic and Environmental Planning Manager
Mark Darbyshire, Bereavement Services Manager
Steve Reading, Principal Accountant
Mandy Withington, Principal Solicitor
Frances Handley, Democratic Services Officer

20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Warren, L Smetham, B Posnett, J Bratherton. Councillors G Marshall, C O'Leary, H Moss, L Crane and attended as substitutes.

21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In the interests of openness and transparency, in relation to agenda item 5 (Service Budgets 2025-26), Councillor C O'Leary declared that he was the administrator of the Save Bollington's Recycling Centre Facebook page.

22 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair proposed a minor amendment to the minutes of the previous meeting, as set out below:

That the line 'Cllr Douglas urged the committee to reject options do something 3 and 4' was changed to 'Cllr Douglas urged the committee to reject options do something 2, 3 and 4'. The committee supported this amendment.

The committee took the opportunity to thank Tom Shuttleworth, former Interim Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods, for all his hard work

during his time with Cheshire East and asked that this be recorded within the minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2025, subject to the above amendment being made, be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.

23 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

The Chair referred to the decision to disallow some visiting members and members of the public to speak at today's meeting in relation to Household Waste and Recycling Centres and the Strategic Leisure Review and confirmed that the decision was taken following advice from officers, as these items were not substantive items on the agenda. The Chair highlighted that an update on the Strategic Leisure Review would be presented to the committee in June, and visiting members/members of the public would be welcome to come to that meeting and ask a question/make a statement.

Councillor S Firkin, Congleton Town Council, addressed the committee in relation to agenda item 6 (Cemeteries Investment Programme). Cllr Firkin stated that there had been concerns in relation to Congleton cemetery, Howey Lane, and its limited future capacity for some time. It was stated that poor drainage onsite caused significant problems for burials on land previously thought to be suitable, and therefore, Congleton welcomed the commitment to invest in drainage and the potential future groundworks to mediate the site. Cllr Firkin asked what the current best/worst case scenarios were for continued operation onsite for burials. Finally, it was suggested that officers looked to utilise the Streetscape team, as originally intended, for ongoing maintenance and groundworks of the cemetery. Officers agreed to provide a written response.

Councillor K Edwards addressed the committee as a visiting member and spoke in relation to items 7 (Local Plan Next Steps: Local Development Scheme Update and feedback from the Issues Consultation 2024) and item 8 (Heritage and Local List Supplementary Planning Document). Councillor Edwards stated that Bollington Town Council had spent considerable time searching for indoor provision for youth activity, particularly during winter months, and that the Issues document did not reference the physical land needs of young people. Councillor Edwards asked the committee to ensure that the requirements and needs of young people were consulted upon and contained within future reiterations of the report. In response, officers confirmed that there would be further consultation on the issues throughout the local planning process and that part of the process would consider land use and the requirements of different age groups.

In relation to agenda item 8, Cllr Edwards welcomed the report and urged the committee to support the recommendations. Cllr Edwards stated that, in the future, the committee should consider moving from just a list of buildings to looking at particular areas of Cheshire East with significant common historical and heritage value.

Councillor J Place addressed the committee as a visiting member and spoke in relation to agenda item 7 (Local Plan Next Steps: Local Development Scheme Update and feedback from the Issues Consultation 2024). Councillor Place referred to the information provided by the council on its website, which was last updated in November 2024 and asked that this was updated regularly as the consultation process moved forward. Cllr Place stated that a communications strategy was key to ensuring that residents and members were regularly updated throughout what would be a complex and fast-moving process. Cllr Place referred to the Bollington Neighbourhood Plan and hoped that Neighbourhood Plans would still feature in future planning frameworks. In response, officers committed to ensuring that information published on the website was up-to-date and confirmed that Neighbourhood Plans were still very much active in planning policy at a national level.

24 SERVICE BUDGETS 2025/26 (ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE)

The committee received a report on the allocation of approved budgets for 2025-26 following approval of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025-26 – 2028-29 by Full Council on 26 February 2025. The committee asked a number of questions, as summarised below.

It was highlighted that the Strategic Leisure Review Stage 2 budget line (74) reported an additional £403k spend compared to 2024-25. It was queried if this included the reduction of funding at Middlewich Leisure Centre. The decision relating to the asset disposal at Holmes Chapel and Middlewich, and alternative delivery models was also raised. It was queried that, as no alternative delivery models had been identified, should this have been considered by the committee as a policy matter. It was confirmed that the decision taken by the committee in March 2024 delegated authority to the former Interim Director Environment and Neighbourhoods to take all necessary steps to implement the proposals agreed by the committee however officers committed to reviewing the decision/delegation and providing a written response. It was confirmed that the £403k did include the reduction in the service budget spend at Middlewich Leisure Centre.

It was noted that the 2024-28 MTFS had estimated a £350k saving in relation to the Libraries Strategy – Stage 1, for 2024-25 and £250k saving for 2025-26 however there was an underachievement reported at Financial Review 3 of £74k. The 2025-26 budget suggested there would now be £100k saving for stage 1. It was queried where the remainder of the originally anticipated saving had gone and if the £100k saving was an

additional saving, or a saving previously agreed by the committee. In response, it was confirmed that the saving reduction was the result of the decisions made previously by the committee in relation to 'Tiers' and a reduction in opening hours. The second budget change line related to the 'Trust' for libraries, as when further explored this was not deemed appropriate at this stage.

It was highlighted that a recent Officer Decision Record (ODR) published on the mobile recycling service stated that there was no growth in 2025-26 however a net growth in environmental services was reported. It was queried if the ODR would result in a budget cut or was within current budgets and how this would sit within budget lines 83 and 84 (Environmental Services Growth 2025-26 onwards / Environmental Services Savings 2025-26 onwards). A detailed breakdown of lines 83 and 84 were requested. Officers committed to providing a written response.

In relation to Household Waste and Recycling Centres, it was noted that there was a total of £1.490m in capital projects, including £900k for a review. A detailed breakdown of this funding and what it would mean for Macclesfield HWRC was requested. Officers committed to providing a written response.

It was noted that, in relation to libraries, £297k income was anticipated. It was queried if this included an allocation for Town and Parish Council's contributing through the 'Top Up Service' and if so, how many T3 libraries had signed up to this. Officers committed to providing a written response.

Councillor Browne took the opportunity to highlight that Councillor Cllr Vince Fogharty, from Alderley Edge Parish Council, previously spoke at the committee in November 2024 and raised a number of questions in relation to the Library Strategy, and that a written response was promised, but still outstanding. Councillor Browne further highlighted that the Parish Clerk, Alderley Parish Council, had contacted the council in relation to an agreement however no response had been received. The Director of Planning and Environment agreed to follow this up and ensure responses were provided as soon as possible.

Questions were raised in relation to the Strategic Leisure Review. The Chair sought advice and confirmed that this matter was not a substantive item on the agenda and should not be debated during today's meeting. It was requested that a written response be provided to the committee setting out the grounds for not allowing questions on this matter.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. To note the decision of the Finance Sub-Committee to allocate the approved revenue and capital budgets, related budget changes items and

earmarked reserves to the Environment and Communities Committee, as set out in Annex A.

2. To note the financial reporting timetable for 2025/26 set out in Annex B as approved at Finance Sub-Committee on 10 March 2025.

25 CEMETERIES INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report which sought approval of the Cemeteries Design guide to progress cemetery development in accordance with the principles of the adopted Strategy and the Cemeteries Investment Programme for 2025/26 and 2026/27.

The Committee asked what facilities were provided at the major cemeteries within the borough and that some operate chapels that can be used for services however there were dormant chapels on other sites and queried what consideration was being given to bring those back into use.

The Committee noted that the two crematoriums operated in Crewe and Macclesfield have chapels that operate and early consideration was being given to the dormant sites.

It was suggested there be a review of sites currently owned by Cheshire East and queried the maintenance and encouraged discussions with Town and Parish Councils to consider taking on ownership of venues and sites.

The Committee noted that the maintenance of the sites are currently self funding through the services that they provide.

The Committee asked what areas were being considered to secure S106 funding for land expansion of cemeteries and what was being considered to secure money from developers.

Officers agreed that the current SPD be reviewed in terms of the ability to secure funding through section 106 contributions from applications should that be deemed to be appropriate in terms of public mitigation and whether developer contributions is justifiable in evidence which would have to be appropriate to each application.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Approve the adoption of the Cemeteries Design Guide, as contained at Appendix A to this report.

2. Note the approach taken to prioritising future investment into the Council controlled cemetery sites and the need for this programme to be regularly reviewed to ensure that it remains relevant to the immediate and longer-term needs of the estate.

3. Approve the delivery of the Cemeteries Investment Programme for 2025/26 and 2026/27 and delegate authority to the Director Planning and

Environment, to take all necessary steps to implement the programme, subject to funding and grant availability.

26 LOCAL PLAN NEXT STEPS: LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME UPDATE AND FEEDBACK FROM THE ISSUES CONSULTATION (2024)

The committee considered the report which sought approval of an updated Local Development Scheme which sets out proposed next steps to support the preparation of the new Local Plan.

The Committee welcomed the report and noted that there were various versions of the plan however the update was provided to ensure that the dates will align correctly in the plan and to give a wider information on what was happening nationally and how that would impact the Local Authority in the months ahead. It was noted that there will be regular to the Committee and updates on the website with the Local Plan timetable.

The Committee queried whether there was a process for suggesting development sites and it was noted that the Council was not currently in an active plan making phase however through the plan making phase there would be an opportunity to submit potential sites.

The Committee asked for clarification on whether the brownfield register is up to date and it was confirmed that it is constantly reviewed and updated and Members will be kept informed on the housing monitoring update which is due to be published in the near future. The Committee were pleased to note aligning of the mineral plan with the local plan. Officers were encouraged to engage young people in the plan and to make them aware that the decisions that are being made currently will be those that impact their futures.

Officers committed to articulating the definition of sites such as 'brownfield' within the plan.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Agree that the update to the Local Development Scheme, appended to this report (Appendix 2) is published on the Councils' web site; and
2. Agree that the Issues Consultation Report of Consultation is also published on the Councils' website

27 HERITAGE AND LOCAL LIST SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

The committee considered the report which set out proposals to consult on, and update the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), including the proposed selection criteria and methodology for designating a locally listed building. It was noted that the current 'Local List of Historic Buildings SPD' was adopted in 2010 and therefore was in need of a review and update.

The committee welcomed the report and the approach to ensure that the Local List could be updated more frequently, allowing the council to be more responsive to proposals for local listing and protecting local heritage assets across the borough. The committee were pleased to note that the council was proposing to move forward an 'evergreen' approach keeping a live catalogue, via a digital Local List, of local heritage assets and agreed that the digital approach should be adopted across all aspects of planning, where possible.

The committee noted the process for removing entries from The Local List and that this was the same as adding items to the Local List and followed the same decision-making process. It was suggested that the appeals process be reviewed, and that appeals should be heard by an officer group, alongside several councillors from the Environment and Communities Committee, rather than appeals being heard only by the Head of Planning in consultation with the Chair of the Environment and Communities Committee

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Agree to the publication of the first draft Heritage and Local List SPD (appendix 1) for public consultation, for a minimum of four weeks.
2. Publish the associated Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report ("SEA") (appendix 2).
3. Publish the associated Equalities Impact Assessment Screening Report ("EQIA") (appendix 3).

28 WORK PROGRAMME

The committee considered the Work Programme. The following was noted:

- The committee agreed to hold one twilight meeting during 2025-26. Due to the number of substitutes present at the meeting, it was suggested that an email be circulated to the committee to seek a preference on which meeting of the

committee be held as a Twilight meeting (starting no earlier than 5.30pm)

- CCTV Services Update would be moved to September 2025.
- Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty Notice of Motion received at Full Council would be added to the Work Programme and considered by the Committee in June 2025.
- Mobile waste recycling centres: officers agreed to provide an update to members on the pilot.
- Planning Enforcement: It was requested that a protocol be established to deal with planning enforcement, particularly in regards to the non-compliance of conditions attached to Planning Permission. It was confirmed that this would be picked up under the Corporate Enforcement Policy already on the Work Programme. It was requested that Cllr Gardiner pick this matter up outside of the meeting with the Director of Planning and Environment to ensure all his concerns were covered within the report.
- The committee discussed the issue of closing public facilities via delegated powers and felt that a better understanding of recommendations/delegations was needed going forward. Officers committed to taking this away and ensuring that future reports were clear on these matters and that when the committee felt the delegations were not clear, that these be reviewed with the Monitoring Officer to improve communication and understanding.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be received and noted.

The meeting commenced at 16.00 and concluded at 17.55

Councillor L Braithwaite