

# Public Document Pack

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Date and Time:** Tuesday 9 August 2022 at 7.00 pm

**Place:** Council Chamber

**Present:**

Dorn (Chairman), Butcher, Butler, Coburn, Engström, Farmer, Smith (Vice-Chairman), Woods and Crisp

**In attendance:**

Councillor Axam  
Councillor Neighbour

**Officers:**

John Elson, Head of Environment and Technical Services  
Joanne Rayne, Finance Manager  
Adam Green, Countryside Manager  
Isabel Brittain, Section 151 Officer  
Mike Barry, Biodiversity Officer  
Jenny Murton, Committee Services Officer

### 21 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of 12 July 2022 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### 22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors Davies and Wildsmith. Councillor Crisp was a substitute for Councillor Wildsmith.

Councillor Axam attended virtually.

### 23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Farmer declared a non-pecuniary interest as Chairman of Hart Swimming Club, a voluntary position.

The Chairman reminded officers he was a Ward Member for Odiham in respect of Item 6.

Councillor Butcher declared during Item 8 that he had a non-pecuniary interest due to his involvement with Fleet Market.

### 24 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had three announcements:

- The public participation would take place in Item 6.
- Councillor Butler was proposed to replace Councillor Davies on the Place Service Panel on a permanent basis and the Committee unanimously agreed this.
- The Chairman reminded the Committee the role and purpose of the Service Panel Reviews and to report back and summarise to Overview and Scrutiny Committee what had been discussed.

## **25 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (ITEMS PERTAINING TO THE AGENDA)**

Stuart Royston had previously submitted a statement, which will be read out during Item 6.

## **26 ODIHAM COMMON MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Leader of the Council, who is also Portfolio Holder for the project highlighted that this item is a pre decision scrutiny of the Odiham Common Management Plan, ahead of going to Cabinet to seek approval.

The Countryside Manager and Biodiversity Officer gave a presentation summarising the Plan and its purpose.

Members questions included:

- How climate change is considered within the Plan and how the Common had feared in the last few weeks due to the extreme heat.
- The possibility of a dedicated Ranger for the site who is familiar with this specific type of environment.
- How this Plan differs from the previous one and what officers have learnt from it.
- The funding sources for the Plan and how it could deliver all the desired objectives.
- Biodiversity offsetting and the stages that may be required.
- The possibility of setting up a designated group for the Common, like Fleet Pond Society.

The Countryside Manager to seek further evidence on the differences between this most recent Plan and the previous one and send this to the Committee and Cabinet.

Stuart Royston read out a statement on behalf of a group of Odiham residents. This is attached as Appendix A of the Minutes.

Members questions following this information included:

- The possibilities that may have caused visitor numbers to the Common to decrease over the last 12 years.
- Managing the species effectively that are already on the Common.

- The definition of Hayloing.

Members debated:

- The cost of the Plan and balancing its requirements and resident's expectations.
- Making additional links, 'a contact group' between residents and Parish Councils regarding the Common.
- Balancing biodiversity and moderate access to this Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- The current standard of the existing pathways and whether additional work is needed to make them more accessible.
- The possibility of applying for additional Government funding schemes appropriate to local groups for climate change activities.

The Countryside Manager to provide answers to the questions submitted in the appendix by Mr Royston to Cabinet.

## **DECISION**

Members unanimously agreed that Cabinet:

I) Should not approve the draft Odiham Common Management Plan in its current form and ask it to take note of the issues and discussions raised by Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

II) Approves and adopts a temporary Ash Dieback Strategy until a time where a more formal "Tree Strategy" will supplement this guidance.

## **27 OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2021/2022**

The Committee noted the report and Annual Review letter 2022.

## **28 QUARTERLY BUDGET MONITORING**

The Interim Section 151 Officer gave a quarterly update on the Budget position up to 30 June 2022.

Members questions included:

- The amount spent on climate change and if these spends should be defined as Capital or Revenue items.
- The possibly that the largest contribution from Earmarked Reserves (EMR) to replace the Leisure Centre shortfall could decrease.
- Clarification on savings made since the loss of the dog warden.
- Clarification on the Place Services costs regarding a Health & Safety case.

- The amount of Parking income and how it had differed over the years due to the covid-19 pandemic.

Members praised the report's format and the work from the Finance team.

A Member also requested that more detail on variances and justifications between Budget and Forecast could possibly be included in future reports.

The Committee noted the report.

## **29 TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2021/22 (HALF YEAR REPORT)**

The Interim Section 151 Officer summarised the council's Treasury Management activities during the year ending 31 March 2022.

Members questions included:

- The Barclays extension of £5 million to £10 million.
- Centenary House payments.
- What graphs will be presented to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee in this type of report.

The Committee noted the report.

## **30 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME**

Members questioned the items due to go to Cabinet on the Shapley Heath Audit Review Report in September and the Consideration of the Business Case for a Shared Chief Executive between Hart District Council and Rushmoor Borough Council in November.

The Leader of the Council confirmed that more detail would be known soon.

The Chairman said he would have liked the report that went to Cabinet in August on the Termination of the Shared Corporate Health and Safety Service with Basingstoke & Deane Council, to have come to Overview and Scrutiny beforehand.

The Leader of the Council confirmed it was a Part 2 paper and apologised it had not come to this Committee first.

## **31 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN**

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan was noted.

The Chairman highlighted that he wanted to see less repetition in the Plan regarding the Service Panel Reviews and that the Committee Services Team was working on this.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

### Speaking note for the O&S Committee Odiham Common Management Plan

I speak on behalf of the local people who live on or near the common.

The common is much valued public space used by the local community to enjoy informal recreation. The people we speak for use the common regularly and it is a key part of their daily lives. They are Hart's key customers, stakeholders, and are most affected by changes and activities on the common.

The difficulty of successfully managing Odiham common lies in its dual purpose – it is a SSSI but it also provides public enjoyment to the community – and a successful plan will balance ecological diversity with human use for the benefit of both. The current plan is a biodiversity plan and of course that is essential. The 2010 Plan was also a biodiversity plan but it also embraced human use. It saw the common contributing to quality of life; establishing strong agreement between the various stakeholders; including local people in the management of the common; encouraging enjoyment of the common; and the need for sensitive management to maintain the character with gradual, incremental changes to improve biodiversity. Some of those values and vision have been lost. Biodiversity, enjoyment, engagement should all mix seamlessly into the plan but the list of key performance indicators illustrates the lack of balance. Over the last 12 years public enjoyment and visitor numbers have reduced. One reason has been that the pace of change has outstripped the ability to maintain the changes created.

Potbridge lies between two noisy roads – the M3 and B3016. After a site visit in June 2020 it was agreed no felling would take place in the larger Potbridge compartment and Hart suggested a 10% thinning in the smaller compartment. However when the Woodland Management Plan was submitted felling in the larger compartment had been included to the extent that almost 40% - over 1700 - of the trees would be felled. The smaller compartment we now know has 15% ash. Hart explained that the felling was included because Forestry Commission insisted the entire site was included.

However when we explained to the Forestry Commission the detriment that would be caused they suggested a solution to the problem by the substitution of trees in Potbridge by trees that will have to be felled across the common as

a result of ash dieback. The Forestry Commission e-mail is included in the Appendix.

The Plan proposes replacing the consultative committee by liaison with the parish councils in order to bring a balanced engagement with the entire community. But Odiham Parish Council supports the residents request for continued representation on the Consultative Committee. Winchfield Parish Council has not been consulted. The local residents with their intimate knowledge and use of the common bring a unique perspective to the committee. Given the turbulent history of the common engagement is important. There is nothing to suggest the liaison proposal will achieve the Hart objective or how it would work. We do however agree the present committee does not work well. A revised consultative committee of local stakeholders genuinely sharing ownership of the problems, options for solutions, priorities, and importantly outcomes (with of course the executive authority remaining with Hart) could act as a catalyst.

There is an annual grant of £5,800 but much of this is earmarked for haloing 66 trees and haymaking. Pages 50 and 51 of the plan list 41 habitat operations but only 11 have funding and for example there is no funding for other operations such as path repairs. There is a Hart allocation of £32k but much of this is for a ranger and some of the activities will require contractors.

We attach in the Appendix requests to improve the plan that the Chairman and committee might use.



## APPENDIX

### **1. Invite Cabinet to re-assure itself of the financial viability of the plan**

2. In the light of the response from Odiham Parish Council, the residents, and the lack of consultation with Winchfield Parish Council all of which throw doubt on the wisdom of the proposed 'liaison' arrangements: **invite Cabinet to consider alternative, more effective consultation arrangements that would bring together and unite the key stakeholders at a local level**

3. **Ask Cabinet to appreciate that for a common such as Odiham Common – a SSSI site that offers potential to provide many benefits for people in the community – a successful plan should embrace biodiversity and wider public benefit objectives in a mutually supporting way and that the plan is weak on 'public enjoyment' objectives**

4. Paths and rides provide the essential infrastructure for public enjoyment and poor paths are one of the major factors preventing enjoyment of the common: **invite Cabinet to prioritise repair and maintenance of waterlogged and muddy paths and earmark any unused resource from the £32,227 budget allocation for this purpose**

5. **Invite Cabinet to ensure biodiversity objectives, targets, and performance indicators that particularly enhance public enjoyment are afforded priority and with this in mind:**

a) **Make reduction of bracken a priority with achievement targets at 2 year intervals rather than simply at the end of the plan**

b) **Review the much reduced mowing regime after 2 years to ensure it is adequate for ensuring Odiham Common is an attractive place for visitors**

c) **Prioritise ditch and water management to keep the common free of unnecessary excess water and its ponds attractive**

6. **Invite Cabinet to remove from the plan the non-critical, unfunded tree felling in the small compartments in Potbridge that would be detrimental to the people**

The Forestry Commission e-mail

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your letter regarding Odiham common . The Forestry Commission appreciate and welcome your views on the work within the common .The work in the Woodland Management also is not legally binding and the Forestry Commission do not insist that the work is carried out, we have no legal power to enforce the felling that is in the plan . The Forestry Commission whilst reviewing the works stated that felling could be carried out within the areas other than those that were originally stated . There are areas of Ash trees within the common that are suffering from chalara and unfortunately a significant amount of these will die. As this area is heavily used by the local community the Local authority have a duty of care to monitor the trees following health and safety regulations and best practice . I suggest you contact the local authority directly with any concerns you have regarding the felling of the Ash trees.

The woodland Management plan was approved on the 19th November 2021 and is valid until 2031. AS the plan is approved I suggest that you contact the Local authority to remove the mention of Holly clearance in the Plan. The Holly Clearance does not fall under the Forestry regulations act of 1967 so therefore out of our remit . It is our understanding that there is a capital grant that has been awarded by Natural England for the removal of the Holly . For further information regarding this I suggest that you contact Natural England . The contact details for this are [enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk)

Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] | Field Manager | Mid Home counties

South East & London | Forestry Commission England