

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE held in The meeting will be conducted remotely by Microsoft Teams on Friday, 4 December 2020 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Aitchison (Chairman), H. Anderson, G Edgar, J. Greenwell, S. Scott.

Apologies Councillor S Haslam, D Paterson, Ms F Turpie-Laird.

In Attendance:- Chief Planning & Housing Officer (I Aikman), Corporate Policy Advisor (M Cook), Ecology Officer (A Tharme), Environmental Strategy Officer (L Cox), Chief Officer Roads (J. Hedley), Urban Designer (C Cooke), Clerk to the Council (J Wilkinson), Energy & Building Services Officer (J Caldwell), Young Ambassador, (L Barker), Democratic Services Officer (J Turnbull).

1. **MINUTE**

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the meeting of 4 September 2020.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

2. **BIODIVERSITY**

2.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Planning Officer proposing that the Council published the Biodiversity duty report and submit to Scottish Government by 1 January 2021. The report explained that the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 required public bodies in Scotland to provide a publicly available report, every three years, on the actions which they have taken to meet this biodiversity duty. The next report to be published by 1 January covered the period 2018-20. Previous Biodiversity duty reports submitted by the Council to Scottish Government by 1 January 2015 (Reporting period 2011-14) and 1 January 2018 (reporting period 2015-17 could be accessed at: https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/downloads/file/2211/biodiversity_duty_delivery_reports

2.2 Andy Tharme, Ecology Officer was in attendance to give a presentation on the Biodiversity Duty Report and Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Dr Tharme explained that the delivery of biodiversity was cross-cutting over a range of Council services, for example, in planning major projects, engineering and green space management. The establishment of the Sustainable Development Committee, together with the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency would play an important role in meeting its biodiversity duty going forward. Dr Tharme then discussed some biodiversity activity, such as guidance for planning applications to protect species such as bats, and the development of a Regional Strategic approach to maximise the benefits of new woodland creation. He referred to recent biodiversity offset activity, mainly in relation to windfarm schemes such as Langhope Rig. To compensate for the scheme the Council, working with Tweed Forum and Scottish Forestry, had delivered 77 ha of new native woodland which had benefited natural flood protection, controlled pollution and integrated forestry and farming. Another offsetting scheme was the Penmanshiel Compensatory Replanting Scheme. This was where a commercial plantation was felled and the Council took on responsibility, under planning policy, to compensate for the loss, by delivery of 110 ha new woodland. This had created a range of community benefits in terms of recreation as well as enhancing landscape biodiversity. Dr Tharme referred to other Council major infrastructure projects such as Dirt pot corner and Jedburgh Campus. The required surveys for both projects and construction methods employed had protected biodiversity

and species such as otters, bats, badgers and breeding birds. Dr Tharme then referred to Greenspace Management, delivered by Neighbourhood Services, highlighting the creation of wildflower areas and wet woodland to balance amenity requirements with nature. He went on to discuss the challenges ahead and the need to channel resources from other sources. Opportunities would arise from Regional Land Use Partnerships, Borderlands and Natural Capital investment in the green economy. Dr Tharme concluded this section of his presentation by referring to the loss of capacity in terms of outdoor education and the need to work with partners, such as the Tweed Forum and Borders Forest Trust, to facilitate delivery.

- 2.3 In response to questions Dr Tharme advised that with regard to the measurement of acidity in rivers, SEPA oversaw the River Basin Management Plan and analysed water courses to retain good ecological conditions. There was an online interactive tool <https://www.sepa.org.uk/data-visualisation/water-environment-hub/> where further information was available. The Committee suggested that SEPA, and perhaps the Tweed Forum, be invited to a future meeting to discuss the River Basin Management Plan. Regarding grants available for tree planting, Dr Tharme advised that the Tweed Forum Borders Tree Planting grant scheme was available for smaller plots, larger plots could apply for a grant from Scottish Forestry. Regarding developer biodiversity contributions, Dr Tharme explained that biodiversity was a component of compensatory requirements. A Council working group was reviewing the developer contribution process. In Scotland NPF4 to be published next year, would determine how the Council could revise developer contributions. It was noted that the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) to be held in Glasgow next year, would be the important step for Scotland to make clear we were addressing climate change and biodiversity loss Mr Aikman confirmed that the Council would make representations for observers to attend COP26 and report back to the next meeting.
- 2.4 Dr Tharme then went on to discuss the Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2018 – 2028, the key policy drivers of which were the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, Scottish Government Purpose and Land Use Strategy. Climate change was the key driver with priority to action in and around settlements. Dr Tharme advised that consultation with stakeholders and local area partnerships had identified the key actions. He advised that the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy had six key themes: Ecosystem restoration; natural capital; conserving wild species; habitats and protected places; sustainable management of land and freshwater; greenspace for health and wellbeing, and, marine and coastal ecosystems. He explained the importance of ecosystem restoration to make space for natural processes, improving connectivity, habitat management and general water and river catchment, which would increase resilience to climate change and safeguard biodiversity. Dr Tharme then highlighted some of the key activities from the Action Plan including: restoring woodland ecosystems, encouraging biodiversity offsetting and enhancements as part of development planning, natural flood management; integrating woodland with other land users; enhancing habitat for pollinators; enhancing green space for health and wellbeing, conserving wildlife with initiatives such as supporting national species recovery, sustainable land management, ensuring appropriate tree planting, encouraging creative land and freshwater management projects. He then referred to the Marine and Coastal Ecosystem with the focus on the Berwickshire Marine Reserve with initiatives such as marine/coastal wildlife recording, beach litter surveys and beach cleans, reducing plastics in the marine environment. Dr Tharme concluded by quoting a Greek proverb “A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they will never sit in”, suggesting this was an appropriate mind-set to adopt a long term approach to ensure future generations’ sustainability.
- 2.5 In response to questions, Mr Aikman advised there would be an opportunity to respond to the NPF4 Position Statement consultation on national planning policy. The closing date for which was 19 February 2021. Any changes to planning policy would need to flow from national government policy which would then be developed to relate to a borders context. He would forward as an action for the Development Contribution Working Group.

With regard to peatbog extractions, Dr Tharme advised that partners, such as Tweed Forum, were active in terms of peatland restoration. Habitat maps for the Borders, together with the national inventory of peatlands, informed planning policy and forestry planting. With regard to biodiversity and the development of local place plans. Mr Aikman advised that guidelines were still awaited and policy documents would give cognisance to existing development policies; conversations with communities would need to take place to develop individual community place plans. Regarding the Anti-poverty Working Group, there was a volunteer coordinator who was available to assist and support communities interested in the Food Growing Strategy. With regard to the beavers, Dr Tharme advised that they would spread naturally as long as the habitat was suitable, the proposed LBAP action was to future proof habitats so that they could accommodate beavers. With regard to mink, there was not a large scale eradication programme. The Chair thanked Mr Tharme for his attendance and interesting presentation.

DECISION

NOTED the submitted report and that it would be published on the Council's website and submitted to Scottish Government by 1 January 2021.

3. MANAGING OUR OPEN SPACE

- 3.1 The Chair welcomed Jason Hedley, Chief Officer Roads and Carol Cooke, Urban Designer, who were in attendance to give a presentation on the provision of operational ground maintenance services across the Council's public realms, parks, footpaths, play facilities, public toilets and litter bins. It was noted that the service also had a role in statutory duties such as the Food Growing Strategy, Greenspace Strategy, Open Space Strategy and Land Use Planning, and Biodiversity (LBPA). Mr Hedley showed slides demonstrating achievements by delaying grass cutting in cemeteries and war memorials, which had encouraged wildflowers to grow around headstones and wild poppies around memorials, both of which achieved a better outcome for the ecosystem. He also referred to delayed maintenance around the River Tweed which had encouraged pollinators, whilst still retaining access for recreational purposes. Mr Hedley highlighted that delayed maintenance benefits were not always financial but would improve biodiversity. Ms Cooke then discussed how the service could respond to the climate emergency. She explained the four areas were: Mitigation - reducing emissions and carbon footprint, including reduction in grass cutting, introduction of electric vehicles, and reviewing procurement and supply chains. Adaptation - managing climate change with tree and woodland planning, participatory budgeting, managing spaces for nature, removal of bedding plants and increasing pollinator friendly planting, surface water management. Biodiversity – increasing wildflower planting, roadside verges, Food Strategy and ensuring we have the skills and awareness within our workforce. Land use – stewardship of the green estate for health and wellbeing, tree planting, food security and community growing schemes. Ms Cooke explained that wider engagement would be important to make sure the Council had capacity to meet future challenges and manage open spaces for future generations.
- 3.2 In response to a questions Mr Hedley confirmed the grass cutting was approximately 28 days between cuts. Regarding the effect of home working on the Council's carbon footprint, Ms Cox advised that she would request feedback from the Council's Energy Manager and advise out with the meeting. With regard to community engagement the Council would facilitate discussions to move communities to more sustainable practices. All Members and communities would need to discuss a strong rationale in terms of the Council's operational aspects to promote sustainable outputs. An educational and cultural change was also required, with sufficient capacity and resources to ensure that all services had climate and sustainability knowledge. With regard to food waste emissions Mr Aikman advised that a presentation would be included in the plan for consideration at a future meeting. The Chair thanked Mr Hedley and Ms Cooke for their attendance and informative presentation. Following the presentation Ms Barber, Young Ambassador

commented that emphasis should be on directly cutting emissions at their source rather than trying to adapt.

DECISION

NOTED the report.

4. ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Michael Cook, Corporate Policy Officer, referred to the recommendation from the Scottish Borders Council meeting on 25 September 'that the Sustainable Development Committee developed recommendations on a collaborative and inclusive regional dialogue on climate action...' The role of young people in the conversation was particularly important for the quality of life for future generations. Ms Rigby, Youth Engagement Worker, had developed a group of nine young people from across the region. Mr Cook suggested that the Committee build a relationship with this group and could consider each of the young people working with a specific Committee Member and their attendance at future Committee meetings. During discussion it was suggested that clarity was required on what we were asking Members and the young people to do. It was also suggested that young people could set questions for the Sustainable Development Committee to address. Mr Cook advised that he would take forward with Ms Rigby and come back with a proposal for the next Committee meeting in March. The Chair suggested that it might be appropriate to bring the March meeting forward to avoid school examinations.

DECISION

AGREED to develop a proposal for the next meeting on collaborative working and engagement with young people.

5. POTENTIAL AMENDMENTS TO COMMITTEE REPORT IMPLICATIONS SECTION

There had been circulated copies of a report by Executive Director Finance and Regulatory suggesting some change to the Implications section of committee reports to take account of UN Sustainable Development Goals and requesting feedback from the Committee. The report explained that at the Scottish Borders Council meeting on 25 September 2020, it was decided that the 'implications' section of Council reports would be reviewed and updated generally, with a specific objective of addressing the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This review and updating to be overseen by the Sustainable Development Committee with recommendations for a finalised format and approach to the 'implications' section of reports to be brought to Council for decision by 31 January 2021 at the latest. The implications section of committee reports covered a number of specific areas: Financial, Risk and Mitigations, Integrated Impact Assessment, Acting Sustainably, Carbon Management, Rural Proofing, and changes to the Schemes of Administration and Delegation. The paragraphs which were being reviewed were the ones relating to Acting Sustainably and Carbon Management. To ensure officers took account of the UN Sustainable Development Goals when drafting report, it was proposed that a checklist was completed and details given in a new section "Sustainable Development Goals", on the specific UN goals which were being impacted. The draft checklist was attached as an Appendix to the report. Subject to Members' views the intention was that report writers completed the checklist and drew the most salient issues into a brief narrative in the 'a Development Goals' section of the report, explaining relevance and (where appropriate) how the recommendations in the report supported progress against Sustainable Development Goals. While 'taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts' was a UN SDG (SDG 13), it was recognised that, national legislation, the Scottish public policy context (e.g. the Programme for Government 2021-2022), and Scottish Borders Council's own commitments manifested in the Responding to the Climate Emergency Report of 25 September 2020 required specific reference to be made to the Council's efforts and progressed in this area. Accordingly, it was proposed that a paragraph in the implications section was retained under the title 'Climate Change', with report writers setting out details of the impact of the report in this area, and (where appropriate) how the recommendations in the report supported progress against Climate Change objectives. The Committee supported the proposed amendment and it was

confirmed that report writers would receive appropriate training in completing the Climate Change Implications section of reports.

DECISION

AGREED to support the proposed amendment to the implications section of committee reports, in relation to UN Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Change, as set out in Section 4 of the report attached with the agenda.

6. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting was scheduled for Friday, 12 March 2021 at 10.00 am.

DECISION

NOTED.

The meeting concluded at 12.55 pm