

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Climate Change Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday, 30 June 2020 at 6.30 pm

Councillors Present:

K L Jaggard (Chair)

R S Fiveash, J Hart, T Lunnon and A Pendlington

Also in Attendance:

Councillor G S Jhans, C J Mullins and P C Smith

Officers Present:

Elizabeth Brigden	Planning Policy Manager
Ian Duke	Deputy Chief Executive
Heather Girling	Democratic Services Officer
Richard Mosinghi	Planning Officer
Karen Rham	Neighbourhood Services Manager
Louise Skipton-Carter	Sustainability Manager
Clem Smith	Head of Economy and Planning
Kate Wilson	Head of Community Services

1. Disclosures of Interest & Whipping Declarations

No disclosures of whipping declarations were made.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Climate Change Scrutiny Panel held on 27 February 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Witness Sessions

The Chair provided some background information on the Panel then witnesses were asked to offer views on Community & Green/Blue infrastructure and to understand the challenges currently faced – now and in the future, together with the provision of support currently being provided.

Elizabeth Brigden, Planning Policy Manager (CBC), Richard Mosinghi, Planning Officer (CBC), Kate Wilson, Head of Community Services (CBC), Karen Rham, Neighbourhood Services Manager (CBC), together with Councillor Jhans (Cabinet

Member for Environmental Services and Sustainability) and Councillor Mullins (Cabinet Member for Wellbeing) updated the Panel as follows:

Strategic Planning:

- The Environment Bill currently progressing through Parliament requires development to conserve and enhance the natural environment to a higher level than that previously determined.
- There was a balancing act across local authorities which sought to determine developments which were important, necessary and beneficial to each local area.
- The Local Plan must be followed in accordance with government legislation. This encourages tree planting in accordance with policy CH6. Landscape proposals for residential development should contribute to the character and appearance of the town by including at least one new tree for each new dwelling, of an appropriate species and planted in an appropriate location. Where development proposals would result in the loss of trees, applicants must identify which trees are to be removed and replaced in order to mitigate for the visual impact resulting from the loss of the trees. It was confirmed that the additional, replacement tree planting requirements (including maintenance for a certain period of time) would normally be expected to be met within the development site. But where the local planning authority agrees that this is not feasible or desirable, commuted sums will be sought in lieu on a per tree basis, taking account of constraints to planting. This would usually be determined through the Development Control process when considering spending the Section 106 monies or a wider strategy if deemed set up through that agreed process.
- In terms of tree species it was confirmed that UK trees were the preference and there may be a requirement for drought resistance trees in some areas but the inclination would be to opt for UK native trees for the purposes of biodiversity and these were determined on a site by site basis.
- The Green Infrastructure SPD supports the local planning policy, national legislation, policy and guidance, whilst providing a greater level of detail to explain how they can successfully be implemented. There is a priority focus of protecting biodiversity sites and securing a net gain on new sites. It was acknowledged that securing a net gain in biodiversity was a new requirement for national planning policy. There was a critical balance between green infrastructure and development, yet it was recognised that any biodiversity issues would be undertaken throughout the planning application process.
- It was confirmed that as part of the evidence to support the emerging Local Plan there was currently 3 studies being undertaken; Indoor Built Strategy, Playing Pitch Strategy, Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment. The Indoor Built Strategy explored indoor sporting facilities, together with athletics facilities, whilst the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment identified Community Food Growing Initiatives, whereby food growing areas could be envisaged in limited open spaces (roof tops, community spaces or balconies).
- There was likely to be a deficit in the majority of open space typologies by 2035 as a result of future population growth. It was recognised it would be paramount to protect and enhance existing open space for multi-functional purposes, whilst providing multiple benefits to residents, natures and the climate.

Neighbourhood Services

- The Neighbourhood Services division maintains the green and blue infrastructure across the borough and this included the tree lined areas of the town, central reservations and the grass cutting on behalf of WSCC. The blue infrastructure typical focuses on a watercourse management role, although this also includes a flood prevention programme together with a reactive function.

- It was estimated that the total green infrastructure within Crawley was 1,931 out of 4497 hectares, divided up via three main areas of managed open space, sport and recreation; designated sites and reserves; habitat spaces. It was predicted that the green infrastructure removed just 1-1.5% of the overall emissions (Centre for Ecology & Hydrology). However it was important to note that other contributing factors were equally important such as carbon sequestration and storage, air quality, water management and urban cooling together with habitat and wildlife.
- It was estimated that Crawley has 250,000 trees and consequently it was welcomed that the government was currently consulting on accelerating tree planting.
- The scale of green infrastructure means that green spaces have multiple demands that frequently result in a conflict of uses. There is a requirement to ascertain the best solution and often means changes would only have a marginal impact.
- The wilding of grass verges was one such area whereby the conflict with aesthetics and preference for “managed wild” existed. The wild verges also posed issues with dog poop management yet there were still requests for additional sites for wildflower verges and engagement with councillors was due to be undertaken to identify potential sites where it was practical. It was noted these sites required investment as well as programmed maintenance.
- It was discussed that unfortunately littering not only created significant costs but also impacted on climate change. Whilst fixed penalty notices were able to be served this only impacted marginally and it was behaviours that needed to change through publicity and campaigns.
- It was acknowledged that the recent grass cutting through lockdown had been successful although had impacted on the machinery and potentially reducing cuts may be an option.
- The Panel wished to pass on its thanks to the Head of Community Services, Neighbourhood Services Manager and Teams during the pandemic for their ongoing hard work.

Councillor Jhans

- It was recognised that green infrastructure has an important role to play and as severe weather becomes more frequent it was important that the infrastructure the council brings in is resistant to the changes, for example drought resistant trees.
- There was a need to reduce flood risks, create natural flood storage areas, sustainable drainage systems, carbon storage using trees for example.
- Maintenance is a central part to maximising the benefits of green infrastructure.
- The tension was recognised between the resources required to maintain green spaces versus the benefits and reconciling the dynamic between potential climate benefits and financial cost.
- It was noted that a survey conducted by Imperial College London (*Integrating Green and Blue Spaces into our Cities – Making it Happen*) had highlighted some barriers to provision of blue and green infrastructure, including a lack of compulsory standards for local authorities to have a minimum amount of blue and green infrastructure in new or existing development.

Councillor Mullins

- The amount of open and green spaces within the borough was acknowledged, including parks and recreation grounds, football pitches, play space and allotments. These were in addition to the other recreational facilities such as K2 Crawley, The Hawth and community centres.

- It was important to maintain the use not only for individuals' health and wellbeing (particularly during this current lockdown period), but also the environment and the climate to ensure everyone benefited.

RESOLVED

That Panel Members thanked all witnesses for their attendance and contribution. The presentations had been most interesting and informative.

4. General Updates & Information

The Chair updated Panel Members that the previously cancelled meetings could be rescheduled.

March - commercial and business
April - domestic buildings/residential

It was proposed that the next two meetings be scheduled for 6.30pm.
Thursday 10 September
Monday 12 October

These would be dependent on officer and witness availability.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Climate Change Scrutiny Panel concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.12 pm

K L Jaggard (Chair)