
Climate Change, Leisure and Housing Committee MINUTES

**Of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on
Wednesday, 24 July 2024 from 7.30 - 8.14 pm**

Present: Councillors Chris Lloyd (Chair)

Steve Drury (Co-Chair), Stephen King, Reena Ranger, Ciaran Reed, Cheryl Stungo and
Jon Tankard (Co-Chair), Sarah Nelmes, Christopher Alley and Tony Humphreys.

Also in Attendance:

Councillor Narinder Sian

Officers in Attendance:

Charlotte Gomes, Head of Leisure and Natural Infrastructure.
Jess Hodges, Natural Infrastructure Programme Manager
Sharon Keenlyside, Interim Senior Democratic Services Officer

External in Attendance:

Vishal Patel, Petitioner

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors Mike Sims, Tom Smith and Anne Winter. Councillors Christopher Alley, Tony Humphreys and Sarah Nelmes were present as substitutes.

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair of the meeting.

3 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items of other business.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

5 TO RECEIVE A PETITION UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 18

The Committee were asked to receive a petition under Council Procedure Rule 18, which requested the restoration of a recreational area at South Oxhey Playing Fields. The petition had been signed by 126 residents.

Vishal Patel, who raised the petition on behalf of the residents, presented the petition and made the following points:

- That Three Rivers District Council consider the re-instatement of an area for recreational cricket on the playing fields at South Oxhey.
- It would be considered recreational cricket for the community and as such, a tennis ball may be used and there could be any number of players, with a minimum of 6.
- A good number of players were using the facilities in the Summer, mostly on Sundays or in the evening. The petition was mainly about the community and giving everyone the chance to play cricket.
- The options suggested at meetings with the Council and Councillors were not workable, such as using removable mats. There were currently concrete blocks on the field used by members to play cricket.

The Chairs verbal and written response to the petition was as follows:

“Thank you for coming to address the Climate Change, Leisure and Housing Committee. Thank you for your questions at Full Council. I have known South Oxhey Playing Fields since childhood. After the Full Council meeting, I spoke to Councillors who live and represent South Oxhey on Three Rivers District Council.

As has been previously advised to the petitioner on several occasions both publicly and privately, the council holds no records of a cricket pitch or cricket facilities in South Oxhey Playing Fields nor of any use formal or otherwise of the location for organised cricket. There is, therefore, nothing to reinstate.

Extensive, transparent and open, public consultation has taken place in relation to the South Oxhey Playing Fields over the past few years. A public consultation on the refurbishment of the outdoor leisure facilities was undertaken in May and June of 2022 with over 500 responses with a further consultation of detailed design taking place in September/October 2022. As a result of that public consultation significant investment was made in facilities and that investment has been very well received by the local community.

Following this further public consultation has taken place with regard to the Green Space Action Plan for South Oxhey playing fields in October 2023 and again in April/ May of this year, 2024. The consultation was widely publicised by the Council and the results of this, together with the proposed Green Space action plan for the site will come to this committee later this municipal year.

This council is, and repeatedly demonstrates that it is committed to meeting the needs of its communities but we recognise and acknowledge that we must do so responsibly and within our means. In relation to our parks, open spaces and leisure provision we are a council that has not cut these services despite the budget challenges local government has and continues to face and we have a strong track record of securing external funding to support our ambitions including with the recent improvements at South Oxhey Playing Fields. As a council, we do, however, recognise that this requires a balance and as such we continue to strive to ensure that we balance the amenity needs and priorities of our communities with the ecological needs and requirements of our natural environment.

Officers have made more than reasonable attempts to offer the petitioner alternative solutions in this matter including the introduction of cricket markings on the new multi-use games area at south Oxhey for the petitioners, but they have not accepted any of them.

Several years ago, when I was Chair of Three Rivers District Council, I attended a Cricket competition at Merchant Taylors School organised by the Sri Lankan community who had hired the facilities.

I am working with other cricket clubs in Three Rivers due to the challenges they have faced with the weather.

Thank you for coming to the Committee. If you want to discuss again any of the suggestions that officers had originally proposed, I am sure that they will be happy to do so”.

6 THE BURY GROUNDS BIODIVERSITY PROJECT

Jess Hodges, Natural Infrastructure Programme Manager, presented the report, which provided an overview and context for the proposed Bury Grounds project which included: river restoration, access improvements, habitat enhancements and the protection of heritage on the site.

The Lead Member for Sustainability and Climate Change fully supported the scheme and explained to the Committee that the project aimed to open dark, dense areas and create more biodiversity. The path would be upgraded to make it a good space in and out of the town centre and would give residents access to open quiet space. It would add social value as well as biodiversity.

A Member asked why the intention was to bid for Batchworth Community Council (BCC) CIL funding when it was Three Rivers land and Three Rivers had its own CIL pot. Charlotte Gomes, Head of Leisure and Natural Infrastructure, explained that officers were originally approached by a BCC Councillor about The Bury. They had identified a funding pot that could be applied for and the Natural Infrastructure Programme Manager applied to the Landfill Community Fund, managed by Groundworks. BCC continued to be involved as part of this work and during this time, BCC identified that they were able to contribute by using their Parish CIL funding. An application was submitted through BCC and they earmarked £27,000 which had now been through their Council process.

A Member commented that it would be helpful to have a menu for each pot of funding and what it related to.

Members asked about the history of the land and how it came into disrepair. Officers explained that it was originally part of the manor house and was handed over to the Council in the 1990's. Historic mapping showed that the area was once grazed. Natural succession had taken over to natural woodland and monoculture.

A Member enquired about the involvement of the Environment Agency (EA) and whether Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), the local lead flood authority, would be involved. Officers explained that the river was classed as 'main river channel' and EA was the responsible body. The main concern of EA is to make sure that the work did not impact the flood risk. The Council may need to consult with HCC due to the proximity of the highway.

A Member asked when the original money from the Colne Valley Trust was applied for and would it have been possible to have applied for more money had the work been completed sooner?

Officers explained that it was not applied for from Colne Valley Trust but rather Groundwork South. It was applied for on 10 October 2023. Following acceptance, the project was given 18 months to spend the grant. The work was seasonal, with Autumn/Winter being the most responsible time to do it, so it had to be done in the Autumn of 2024. Therefore, it would not have been possible to apply for further funding and as it turned out, the project received much larger funding than originally applied for.

A District Councillor informed the Committee that there was a formal sunken garden within the area. Officers were unaware of this and asked for further information.

A Member asked if a baseline survey was being carried out. Officers explained that they would be using the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Baseline Study.

Officers commented that when volunteering opportunities became available, they would be shared on social media platforms via Communications Team and the project had the support of HCC Countryside Management Service Volunteer Scheme.

A Member enquired as to whether the pathway would be accessible for the disabled and was informed by officers that the pathway would be made as accessible as possible. At present it was a muddy bog and had a very steep area. It was definitely something that was being looked at.

The Committee Members thanked officers for all their work.

Councillor Tankard proposed to move the recommendation and Councillor Nelmes seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: that the Climate Change, Leisure and Housing Committee:

Agree to progress the implementation of the fully funded parts of the project as outlined at point 2.7.1 - 2.7.6 (River Improvements) and 2.7.7 - 2.7.9 (Habitat Enhancements) and to progress those identified at points 2.7.10 - 2.7.12 (Access improvements) and 2.7.13 - 2.7.14 (protecting the heritage) subject to securing external funding.

7 WORK PROGRAMME

Officers informed the Committee that the Play Area Strategy was likely to be delayed until January or March.

A Member highlighted concerns about the condition of the play area at Oulton Way and officers asked for the information to be sent to them for review.

A Member requested that the Everyone Active annual presentation was shared before the Committee meeting in case of technical problems on the night. Officers informed the Committee that this year, there would be a written report rather than a presentation.

Officers requested that if anyone had evidence that there was formerly a cricket pitch on South Oxhey playing field, to please send it to them.

CHAIR