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## **Climate Change, Leisure and Housing Committee MINUTES**

**Of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, WD3 1RL, on Wednesday, 16 October 2024 from 7.31 pm - 10.01 pm.**

**Present:** Councillors

Steve Drury (Co-Chair), Chris Lloyd in the Chair, Jon Tankard (Co-Chair), Reena Ranger, Mike Sims, Cheryl Stungo, Stephen King, Philip Hearn (In place of Ciaran Reed), Raj Khiroya (In place of Anne Winter), Christopher Alley, Chris Mitchell

### **Officers in Attendance:**

Emma Sheridan, Associate Director for Environment  
Josh Sills, Head of Customer Experience  
Charlotte Gomes, Head of Leisure and Natural Infrastructure  
Alex Laurie, Principal Trees and Woodlands Officer  
Kelly Barnard, Leisure Assets Manager  
Jason Hagland, Strategic Housing Manager  
Shivani Dave, Partnerships Manager  
Joanna Hewitson, Climate Change & Sustainability Strategy Officer  
Ben Terry, Watersmeet General Manager  
Judy Simpson, Marketing & Campaigns Manager  
Anita Hibbs, Committee Officer

### **External in Attendance:**

Mark Leahy, Everyone Active  
John Sewell, Everyone Active

### **CCLHC8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anne Winter and Ciaran Reed, for whom Councillors Raj Khiroya and Philip Hearn substituted respectively.

The Chair noted that instead of one of the named substitutes, Councillor Philip Hearn, Councillor Christopher Alley was present. The Chair permitted Councillor Christopher Alley to remain for the duration of the meeting and speak, however he advised that Councillor Alley will not be able to vote on any of the items on the agenda.

### **CCLHC9 MINUTES**

The minutes of the Climate Change, Leisure and Housing Committee, held on 24 July 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **CCLHC10 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair announced that he had agreed to take Carpenters Wood and Pheasants & Solomons Wood Management Plans as urgent business so that the management plans could be implemented and the works therein commenced to avoid a delay in works commencing to the next meeting of the Committee in January 2025.

The Chair confirmed there was no other urgent business. In response to a question, the Chair clarified that he had been contacted in advance of the meeting about another prospective matter of urgent business but had not considered it to be urgent, and so it was not before the Committee for discussion during the meeting.

The Chair also stated that he intended to change the order of the agenda to bring forward agenda item 12.

### **CCLHC11 CARPENTERS WOOD AND PHEASANTS & SOLOMANS WOOD MANAGEMENT PLANS**

The Principal Trees and Woodlands Officer, introduced the report.

The Committee discussed the challenges of managing invasive species, particularly muntjac deer, and the risks of such species being present in urban areas. The Committee further discussed community engagement at the site, noting that a 'friends of' group assisted with site management.

In discussion on the contract values and proposal for delegated authority, officers clarified that the annual budget for routine tree maintenance was not sufficient to undertake the extensive plans proposed and that external funding was sought for use to undertake works at the site. In discussions on the need to take advantage of new funding opportunities promptly, officers clarified that, if obtained, any external funding would be available to the Director of Finance to be used for site works.

In response to questions on the report, officers confirmed that the Countryside Management Service was a part of Hertfordshire County Council and outlined their responsibilities.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Committee:

- i. Adopt the new 5 year Management Plan for Carpenters Wood
- ii. Adopt the new 5 year Management Plan for Pheasants and Solomans Wood
- iii. Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance to enter into a contract or funding agreement above the value of £25,000, subject to securing external funding to facilitate works to support the implementation of the Management Plans.

### **CCLHC12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **CCLHC13 BUDGET MANAGEMENT REPORT P3**

The Associate Director for Environment advised the Committee that the Budget Management report has already been reviewed and approved by the Policy and Resources Committee. As per standard procedure, the report is presented to the Service Committee for acknowledgment and for Members to provide any comments or feedback regarding its contents.

In response to a question raised regarding the corporate climate change budget that shows a significant expenditure, the officer responded by explaining that the minus figure indicates external funding received by the council, specifically from the social housing decarbonisation fund, which is being used to retrofit social homes.

Members inquired about the staffing situation in the Residential Housing & Environmental Health department, highlighting ongoing challenges in recruiting qualified personnel for the senior Housing Enforcement Officer position. The officer mentioned the national shortage of qualified officers and acknowledged previous reliance on interim staff. However, the officer advised that the position has now been filled permanently, resulting in the team being fully staffed with permanent members.

Members raised a question regarding a sum of £41,400 in the report, seeking clarity on whether this amount is recoverable from central government support. The officer outlined the Home Office funding received for participation in resettlement schemes, specifically highlighting support for two Afghan families under the ARAP and ACRS schemes.

**RESOLVED:**

That Members note and comment on the contents of the report.

**CCLHC14     WATERSMEET ANNUAL REVIEW**

The Watersmeet General Manager and Marketing & Campaigns Manager delivered a presentation highlighting key information on the following topics:

- Capital Projects
- Tenants and Partners
- Community Engagement
- Participation and Accessibility
- Sustainability and Environment
- Looking ahead – Challenges
- Looking ahead – Opportunities
- Looking ahead – Watersmeet turns 50

Before questions were allowed, the Chair stated that he wished to change the order of the remaining agenda items due to a Councillor feeling unwell.

Members raised questions regarding the financial performance and operational challenges of Watersmeet Theatre. They highlighted concerns about the venue's direct costs, which amount to approximately £60,000, and questioned whether the Committee should analyse the financial details further to identify potential revenue enhancements. The officer responded by providing context on the venue's income, noting a decrease in costs compared to the previous year, but emphasised the impact of rising utility costs and the adoption of the real living wage on operational expenses. The discussion also touched on income sources, primarily from ticket sales for live theatre events, and the limited market for specialised technical equipment. Members inquired about the frequency of detailed financial reports to the Committee, to which the officer explained that financial scrutiny is conducted through budget monitoring.

Further points were raised by Members, highlighting the theatre's £60,000 deficit due to low cinema ticket sales, suggesting that increasing cinema utilisation could help mitigate this issue. They emphasised the importance of promoting the cinema as a valuable venue while also questioning the selection of films shown, particularly noting that some recent offerings have not attracted audiences. The officer responded by acknowledging competition from local cinemas, at home streaming services and the challenges of programming films suitable for their demographic. The officer highlighted that the theatre can only secure film screenings 6 weeks after release due to film distributor conditions of minimum number of screenings in first 6 week release. The officer also mentioned the impact of recent industry strikes and the need to diversify film offerings to attract a broader audience, including younger viewers. The officer also emphasised the need to return to traditional marketing methods, particularly focusing on paper advertising in magazines. The officer noted that these strategies had previously yielded

positive results and are essential for reaching older demographics who may not engage with social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram.

In response to a question Members raised around the potential for enhancing local prosperity through partnerships with High Street venues, such as afternoon tea events and screenings of classic films that cater to families without competing with larger cinemas. Although the concept seems feasible, the officer acknowledged the challenges of implementing such collaborations fairly among different businesses. Despite previous efforts to foster these partnerships, progress has been slow, yet there is optimism about the possibilities for future cooperation.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Climate Change, Leisure and Housing Committee note the Watersmeet Annual Review 2023-2024.

**CCLHC15 CAPITAL GRANTS**

The Partnerships Manager outlined the report presented to the Committee regarding the allocation of £20,000 capital funding aimed at addressing health and wellbeing in the community.

The Chair advised that the Committee does not control the budget and is here to ask questions and provide updates rather than make decisions.

Members addressed the challenges faced by community members during the cost of living crisis, particularly the need for warm spaces and activities for individuals with learning difficulties. They emphasised the potential of the Council building to offer support by providing free or low-cost access to community groups. The officer shared insights from previous initiatives that aimed to create warm spaces, noting that while there was an initial attempt to open facilities like Leavesden Hive, the turnout was disappointingly low.

Members suggested utilising the Healthy Hubs as a platform for advertisement, highlighting their growing popularity. The officer confirmed the positive trend in visitor numbers and mentioned the upcoming Community Network Forums, which are part of a regular meeting cycle. They plan to promote the initiative through various channels, including social media, partnership newsletters, and local councillors once the meeting timetable is finalised.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Committee acknowledge the report and share comments relating to the recommendations listed above.

**CCLHC16 DRAFT SERVICE PLANS 2025-28**

The Partnerships Manager provided an introduction of the draft service plans, shared with the Committee for feedback, with a final version to be presented to Council in February along with the budget. The officer highlighted changes made to the service plan template for the current year, emphasising the publication of these plans on the website, which will include performance indicators and risk registers. A new link to the risk registers has been created within the service plans to ensure synchronisation and avoid duplication.

The Strategic Housing Manager provided a brief summary of the Housing and Residential Services plans.

Members raised concerns regarding the staggering need for social housing in the district. He questioned the availability of dwellings through the Thrive stock, specifically seeking data on the total number of dwellings, their availability percentage, and reasons for any properties being out of circulation, such as being unfit for habitation or sold. The officer acknowledged

the lack of immediate figures but committed to retrieving the necessary data. They discussed the process of acquiring affordable housing through development agreements and the distribution of properties via nominations agreements, emphasising the importance of understanding the stock management by housing associations.

The Chair requested that figures on the housing stock be circulated to the Committee after the meeting and be included in the minutes.

Members also raised questions about potential key performance indicators (KPIs) for home building and the responsibilities of the local authority in developing housing stock. The officer responded by outlining the role of Housing Services as a consultee on planning applications, with the aim to achieving an affordable housing provision on a site that suits the council's current housing needs. Also discussed, was the role of Environmental Health in assessing planning applications related to noise and lighting, emphasising the statutory obligations to investigate nuisances as defined by the Environmental Protection Act. The conversation also touched on the collaboration with Planning Policy to ensure adequate affordable housing is provided in the district.

The Associate Director for Environment advised that the Regulatory Services plan, which were previously divided between the two Service Committees but now sits entirely with General Public Services, Community Safety & Infrastructure Committee due to recent changes. The officer clarified that this topic is not open for discussion in the current Committee meeting and suggests that it is for informational purposes only.

The officer moved onto the next service plan; Customer Experience and advised that the Committee should concentrate solely on the items within the service plan that are pertinent to Watersmeet, indicating a targeted approach to evaluating customer service aspects relevant to the specific context.

The Head of Customer Experience provided a brief summary on Watersmeet of the Customer Experience service plan.

The Associate Director for Environment provided a brief summary of the Climate Change and Sustainability service plan.

Members of the Committee raised concerns regarding the district's ambitious carbon emissions reduction targets, highlighting a calculation of 6,635,000 kilotons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2018. The aim is to achieve a 48% reduction, bringing emissions down to 330,200 kilotons, but predictions suggest a further reduction to 260,000 kilotons by 2026. The officer acknowledged the ambitious nature of these goals but emphasised the importance of aiming high to achieve significant progress. A more detailed carbon trajectory report is being prepared, which will provide further insights for the Committee's consideration before the end of the current financial year.

The Head of Leisure and Natural Infrastructure provided a brief summary of the Leisure and Natural Infrastructure service plan.

Members raised questions about the maintenance of various land areas, particularly regarding Taylors Cut and the need for action on specific areas of land that haven't been actively managed. The officer responded by outlining plans for a district-wide green space action plan, which aims to consolidate individual management strategies for key sites into a comprehensive framework. This initiative will involve stakeholder input to ensure that all relevant land areas, managed and maintained by the Council are addressed and properly managed, including considerations for flood management.

The Partnerships Manager provided a brief summary of the health area of the Strategy & Partnerships service plan.

The Associate Director for Environment provided a brief summary of the Waste & Environment Protection service plan, advising the Committee that they will only need to consider the information in the report relevant to the cemeteries.

In response to a request for further information on the cemeteries, the officer mentioned Woodcock Hill, which is currently open for burials; a closed cemetery in Chorleywood, which is maintained for biodiversity and nature, while still being a site for family visits; and the Heritage Cemetery at Leavesden, known as East Lane Cemetery. Each cemetery serves distinct purposes, ranging from active burials to conservation and heritage.

Members raised concerns regarding traveller plots in cemeteries, highlighting that there have been no recent issues raised. However, it is noted that community tensions occasionally arise. Ongoing efforts are being made in collaboration with Gate Hearts to review cemetery regulations and seek compromises that would address the needs of all community members.

The officer further explained that the management of cemeteries, distinguishing between closed cemeteries, which are managed with a focus on nature, and active cemeteries like Woodcock Hill, which are maintained in a more formal manner. The officer emphasised the differences in management strategies based on whether burials are still taking place.

In response to a question whether there is a need to increase live cemetery stock due to an increasing population and changing preferences, the officer confirmed that cremation is becoming more popular and pointed out a national shortage of burial space, indicating that Woodcock Hill may eventually run out of capacity. The officer also advised that while there are requests for additional burial space in Butler's Wells, there are currently no suitable areas available for expansion, and this issue is not unique to their locality but is a broader national concern.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Committee comment on and/or request any amends to the draft service plans for 2025 – 2028. Final Service Plans will be agreed by Council alongside the budget.

#### **CCLHC17 CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN BI-ANNUAL UPDATE**

The Climate Change & Sustainability Strategy Officer provided an update on the progress made on the Climate Action Plan over the past six months, highlighting key achievements and challenges. Notable actions include the installation of solar panels, securing funding for a decarbonisation plan, and retrofitting homes for energy efficiency. The district's emissions have declined by 3%, with ongoing projects and community initiatives aimed at further reductions. Funding has been secured for various climate initiatives, with a focus on sustainability and community engagement.

Members expressed enthusiasm about the impressive funds raised for environmental initiatives, highlighting the success in utilising last year's budget. However, concerns were raised regarding Three Rivers District's greenhouse gas emissions, which have seen a dramatic decline since 2018 but require a significant reduction to meet future targets. The officer emphasised the district's ambition to achieve net zero emissions by 2045 and discussed the importance of transitioning from gas to electricity to take advantage of the upcoming decarbonisation of the national grid. The conversation also touched upon innovative projects, such as installing solar panels in car parks, to enhance renewable energy integration within the district.

Members further inquired about local planning policies aimed at enhancing sustainability in new builds. Members asked about the planning policy's role in the local plan, emphasising the importance of sustainable practices to combat climate change. The officer responded by detailing the collaboration with a specialist company, Edgars, which is helping to draft sustainability policies. They discussed the need for a holistic approach to future

developments, including tree planting initiatives and the challenges posed by national planning policies. The conversation also touched on the complexities surrounding tree preservation and the enforcement of anti-idling measures around schools.

Members of the Committee emphasises the need for public education regarding the benefits of trees, particularly in the context of urban development. They highlighted common misconceptions where trees are viewed negatively, often due to the influence of builders who advocate for their removal. Members pointed out the crucial advantages trees provide, such as shade during warmer summers and their ability to retain water, which can mitigate flooding effects, but also expressed concerns about the declining public perception of trees and the challenges faced in protecting them.

Members also inquired about external insulation, raising questions regarding educational efforts to promote its benefits and the availability of financial assistance for those unable to afford the costs. The officer responded by highlighting ongoing initiatives aimed at encouraging insulation uptake, particularly among low-income households. The officer also mentioned the challenges faced in reaching potential beneficiaries and the introduction of the Warm Homes grant, which offers substantial financial support for insulation and heat pumps to qualifying postcodes, regardless of income.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Committee note the progress made against the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Action Plan 2024 – 2027 and agree the forward direction of travel as outlined in this report.

**CCLHC18 FISHING SWIMS PROJECT - CONTRACT AWARD**

The Head of Leisure and Natural Infrastructure introduced the report, which seeks approval from the Committee to enter into a contract exceeding £25,000. The project in question has a budget of £100,000, funded by the UK Share Prosperity Fund.

Members raised a question about the sustainability of the fishing swim area in light of potential flooding and environmental reports. The officer responded by clarifying that the project involves a platform-based fishing swim, which will not be influenced by the ongoing hydrological study, allowing the project to proceed independently.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Committee agree the approval to award and enter into a contract with a chosen supplier, should a suitable tender be received, for upgrading the fishing swims at Batchworth Lake, Rickmansworth Aquadrome, as outlined in the report.

**CCLHC19 SOUTH OXHEY PLAYING FIELDS MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2029**

The Leisure Assets Manager introduced the report.

Members asked the officer a question about the status of the Village Green, to which the officer responded by advising that discussions are still ongoing and there are no new updates at this time.

A Member of the Committee expressed approval of the management plan and mentioned ongoing communication with the parish council. They are currently waiting for additional information from the open public space legal team regarding the village green status, indicating a collaborative effort to address community concerns.

Members expressed enthusiasm for the project and inquired about potential funding sources. The officer outlined various channels for funding, including collaborations with the Countryside

Management Service and grants from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, DEFRA, and the Rural Payments Agency.

Members expressed disappointment over the low response rate to a recent report, noting only ten responses received, and highlighted the area's unique assets and suggested the need for better promotion to increase public awareness and visitation. They proposed initiatives such as healthy walks and collaboration with local councils to enhance community engagement and attract more visitors to the region's historical sites.

The Chair emphasised the need for agreement on the work programme, suggesting that items related to the current meeting should be excluded from future agendas. Members raised a concern about the necessity of publishing documents online for public access before discussions. The Chair responded by reiterating the importance of filtering out current meeting items to streamline future work plans.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Committee:

- i. Adopt the new five year Management Plan for South Oxhey Playing Fields.
- ii. Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance to enter into a contract or funding agreement above the value of £25,000, subject to securing external funding to facilitate works to support the implementation of the Management Plans.

#### **CCLHC20 LEISURE FACILITIES MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT**

The Leisure Assets Manager introduced key personnel from Everyone Active, the management company overseeing the council's leisure venues since 2018. The officer advised that the report covering the contract year from April 2023 to March 2024, and John Sewell will provide further insights before a question-and-answer segment.

John Sewell outlined key initiatives and successes at William Penn Leisure Centre over the past year, focusing on decarbonisation efforts at the leisure centre, including the installation of pool covers, PIR sensors, and a new chemical dosing system. The speaker highlighted community outreach programs like the Happy Camps, which served 537 children, and various charity events. The presentation also touched on increasing participation levels at local leisure facilities, improvements in golf course conditions, and future plans for solar panel installations to enhance sustainability. The majority of activities are reaching pre-pandemic levels. The speakers emphasised the importance of community engagement and the ongoing efforts to promote health and fitness within the community.

Members congratulated the representatives from Everyone Active on their recent award.

The Committee raised concerns regarding high water levels, particularly around the golf course, and whether the leisure centre is doing any remedial work to prevent flooding.

John Sewell advised that in the past few months the focus was on working on the irrigation and where the water can be diverted. There is also further works planned around the golf course, including a path that has been installed so people can access the facility all year round, which has contributed greatly to the increase in usage of the facilities.

Officers also advised that it needs to be acknowledged that groundwater levels generally everywhere at the moment are significantly higher than they would be normally. It is a national problem, not an isolated incident at a particular golf course, or across the district as a whole.

Members also raised a question regarding parking at the facility, where there are concerns about the difficulties staff face in managing unauthorised vehicles. John Sewell responded by clarifying that while they have a tanner assistant, it is not available at the South Oxhey Leisure



Centre. The speaker also talked about measures taken to address the parking issue, including the installation of signs, marketing efforts to discourage improper parking, and the implementation of green travel plans.

In response to a question raised regarding financial interests in Woodside Leisure Centre, officers advised that it is owned by Watford Borough Council not Three Rivers District Council. Officers further clarified that while there is a continued interest in the services offered at Woodside, such as free swimming and gym memberships for residents, monitoring of attendance is managed by Watford Borough Council independently.

**RESOLVED:**

- i. That the 12-month work plan presented by Sports and Leisure Management is noted.
- ii. That the 12-month work plan presented by Sports and Leisure Management be made available as part of the minutes of the meeting.

**CCLHC21 MOTIONS**

The committee received a motion in accordance with procedure rules 11 and 37. The motion was moved by Councillor Chris Mitchell and seconded by Councillor Cheryl Stungo.

In accordance with procedure rule 11(10), the motion was altered prior to being formally moved thus:

‘To discuss at the 16 October 2024 meeting of the Climate Change, Leisure and Housing Committee the flood risks in Three Rivers District and what actions, if any, can be taken to mitigate these.’

Councillor Cheryl Stungo formally seconded the altered motion.

The Chair opened the discussion.

The Committee expressed its gratitude to officers for the works undertaken to managing flooding in the district. The Committee discussed a range of matters, including:

- The impact of climate change on the frequency and severity of flooding
- The need for communication between public bodies in managing flooding risks, and communication with the public
- Environment Agency advice to households on developing flood plans

In discussion, officers clarified that Hertfordshire County Council was the lead authority for flooding and that the Environment Agency was responsible for water management. Officers further advised that Three Rivers District Council actively engaged with community groups and other authorities to address flooding on a catchment basis, and that officers were involved in flooding meetings across the area and would ensure that members of the Council were kept abreast of developments and updates.

In response to a suggestion for an implementation of a pilot project focused on flood planning, the officer reiterated that the issue being discussed fell under the jurisdiction of the county council rather than the district council, emphasising a lack of resources to address the matter, but that officers and members continued to lobby the county council on the issue of flooding.

**CCLHC22 OTHER BUSINESS - IF APPROVED UNDER ITEM 3 ABOVE**

**CHAIR**