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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, 12 March 2025 from 7.30 pm - 9.52 pm.**

**Present:** Councillors

John Tankard, in the Chair  
Steve Drury (Co-Chair)  
Chris Lloyd (Co-Chair)  
Anne Winter  
Reena Ranger  
Mike Sims  
Cheryl Stungo  
Stephen King  
Oliver Cooper

**Officers in Attendance:**

Emma Sheridan, Associate Director for Environment  
Charlotte Gomes, Head of Leisure and Natural Infrastructure  
Joanna Hewitson, Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy Officer  
Anita Hibbs, Committee Officer  
Sally Riley, Finance Business Partner  
Josh Sills, Head of Customer Experience  
Adele Cassidy, Watersmeet Marketing Officer

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### **CCLH23/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ciaran Reed, substituting Councillor Oliver Cooper.

### **CCLH24/25 MINUTES**

The minutes of the Climate Change, Leisure and Housing Committee held on 16 October 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair of the meeting.

### **CCLH25/25 NOTICE OF URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of other business.

### **CCLH26/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **CCLH27/25 BUDGET MANAGEMENT REPORT P10**

The Finance Business Partner introduced the report.

Officers responded to questions raised by Members seeking clarification on the homelessness fund, specifically regarding the increase in nighttime lets. Officers explained that the Council owns 54 temporary accommodation units, and when these are filled, they must source additional temporary accommodations from external suppliers, referred to as nightly lets. The increase in income for the financial year is attributed to the higher number of nightly lets utilised. They further elaborated on the billing process for these accommodations, noting that while there are costs associated with nightly lets, the Council can reclaim the expenses billed to those in temporary accommodation. Members requested further clarification on how this process translates into income, to which officers offered to provide further information later.

Members raised concerns regarding the gas and water costs associated with Watersmeet Theatre and the playing fields. They inquired about the possibility of conducting business switching comparison to identify cheaper options. Members focused particularly on the financial implications and the future of the theatre. Officers provided historical context, noting that Watersmeet had a revenue cost to the council of circa. £60,000 in the 2023-24 financial year which was like 2015. In the years leading up to the covid pandemic Watersmeet costs to the council reduced significantly generating a net direct surplus for the two years prior to the pandemic. Despite now being back to pre-pandemic audience attendance figures of circa. 50,000 per year and the financial position continuing to improve year on year, the operating costs remain higher than pre-pandemic levels due mainly to increased utility costs and increases in staff wages. The financial position is expected to continue to improve going forward. Officers acknowledged the need to review utility costs and providers noting the costs are high nationally and internationally and expected to go up again but confirmed the council had recently switch water provider because of this review.

Members emphasised the importance of securing the future of the venue, facing a financial gap due to a tenant's departure. The proposed forming a working group to explore commercialisation strategies and work with officers to address this shortfall. Officers responded by noting that a new tenant agreement is in place, which will fill that income gap going forward, while acknowledging the challenges in filling such a specialised space. Members highlighted the ongoing efforts and investments made by the team at Council and Watersmeet to ensure the theatre's sustainability and success despite financial challenges. Members also emphasised the need for reviewing the venue's financial losses, and officers advised that while Watersmeet is currently operating at a loss, it is in a relatively strong position compared to similar venues nationally. The discussion also touched on the implications of special expenses charged to residents, and the need for a more equitable financial approach. Overall, Members expressed a commitment to finding solutions for the venue's financial challenges while acknowledging the hard work of those in its operations.

Members expressed a positive outlook on the reported increase in revenue from fines associated with fly tipping, and they inquired about how the Council can both increase revenue and reduce fly tipping simultaneously. Officers responded by explaining that the revenue comes from court cases and fixed penalty notices, with a report on fly tipping expected later in the year to provide more details.

The Committee noted the report.

RESOLVED:

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

## **CCLH28/25 CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

The Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy Officer provided an update on the report.

Mrs. Green spoke on the item; sharing her commitment to environmental conservation through daily litter picking and removal of waste from local areas and emphasised the need for greater Council involvement in protecting natural habitats and wildlife.

Officers acknowledged her efforts and suggested connecting with a local initiative aimed at recycling plastics collected from rivers.

Members discussed the financial savings achieved from the William Penn solar scheme, but which falls short of the anticipated £25,000 annual savings, and sought clarification on whether the savings are ramping up as expected. Officers reassured that the current sunny weather has positively impacted savings and emphasised the need to wait for a full year to assess the overall performance. The conversation also touched on the importance of carbon offsetting strategies to reduce CO2 emissions, with Members highlighting the urgency of advancing this work. Officers acknowledged the challenges faced in developing strategies due to lack of clear government mandates but expressed their commitment to collaborating with partners to address these challenges. The Committee also discussed potential collaboration with other councils to enhance offsetting efforts.

The Committee noted the report.

RESOLVED:

That:

The Climate Change, Leisure and Housing Committee note the progress being made towards the delivery of the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy 2024-2027, and support officers to continue their progress in accordance with the Action Plan.

#### **CCLH29/25 SOLAR CAR PARK CANOPIES AND COMMUNITY FUNDING FEASIBILITY STUDY OUTCOMES AND REPORT**

The Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy Officer introduced the report.

Members raised concerns about the high capital costs and long break-even periods for these projects, questioning their viability given the uncertainty of future technology and potential changes in local authority status.

Councillor Anne Winter left the meeting at 20:50 and returned at 20:52.

Officers responded indicating that while the project appear technically feasible, further financial analysis is needed to determine their viability, and no commitments have been made. The conversation also touched on the complexities of the business cases, potential grants, and the importance of not becoming overly committed to these projects without clear financial justification. Members expressed scepticism regarding the cost estimates provided by the National Wealth Fund and emphasised the need for caution in pursuing these initiatives.

Councillor Chris Lloyd moved the recommendation as set out in the report.

On being put to the committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being by general assent.

RESOLVED:

that Members agree to:

- i. Officers pursuing the development of business cases for solar canopies at William Penn Leisure Centre car park and the Rose Garden car park, utilising a blend of grant funding, and internal budgets.

- ii. Note that the Feasibility Study detailed in Attachment 2 will be shared with the GSENGH, and neighbouring authorities in Hertfordshire.

## **CCLH30/25 RICKMANSWORTH AQUADROME PROJECT UPDATE REPORT**

The Head of Leisure and Natural Infrastructure introduced the report.

Mr. Harding spoke on the item; raising concerns about the Aquadrome path being closed for over a year due to safety concerns, with no evidence provided by Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) to support this closure, and the maintenance of existing hydrological assets, which TRDC deemed unfit for purpose. The speaker called for transparency regarding the criteria used to assess the woodland path's safety and timeline for the hydrological report and called for immediate action to restore the woodland path and improve maintenance in the area.

The Associate Director for Environment provided an update on the Aquadrome path, stating that the hydrological work had been awarded to JBA Consulting in February 2024. The officer highlighted significant erosion issues affecting the river channel, the potential presence of asbestos, and noted that the existing infrastructure, including sluices and culverts, is outdated and blocked, leading to disrupted sediment transport and habitat connectivity. The officer emphasised the importance of expert judgment in managing river channels, stating that decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. Following risk assessments, the closure of the public path was deemed necessary due to safety concerns related to erosion and flooding. The officer explained that the decision to keep the path closed had been made to protect public safety and the integrity of the wetland ecosystem, which is crucial for managing water levels, and confirmed that the closure of the path aligns with the Council's risk management strategy.

Members addressed the ongoing issues regarding the pathway safety and the delays in receiving the necessary reports from the Environmental Agency (EA) to allow the completion of the hydrological assessments. They highlighted the confusion among the public regarding the different classes of pathways managed by the Council and emphasised the need for a pragmatic approach to restore public confidence. They expressed concerns over the state of the pathways, the children's play area, and the overall management of the site. Officers responded by acknowledging the frustrations surrounding the EA timeline for the updated flood modelling and explained the legal distinctions affecting the pathway closures – namely a public right of way managed by Hertfordshire County Council and one without any designation. Officers affirmed the Council's commitment to improving the site and securing significant funding for necessary investments as outlined within the committee report.

Members sought clarification on the legal advice received concerning the reopening of the public right of way, emphasising the need for scrutiny over how delegated powers have been used by Council officers. Officers clarified those decisions regarding public right of way fall under the jurisdiction of the county council and not the committee. The conversation also touched on the existence of a petition related to the path closure, which did not receive the necessary numbers required to be presented to committee, the responsibilities of health and safety, and the specific delegations being requested for accepting lottery funding and then securing contracts to spend the funding.

In response to a question raised regarding the alleged repurposing of the Aquadrome bridge, officers responded by stating that this was in fact not true, and no repurposing will take place.

Councillor Steve Drury moved the recommendation as set out in the report.

On being put to the committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being by general assent.

RESOLVED:

- i. To note the content of the report.
- ii. Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance, in agreement with the Lead Member, to enter into a contract or funding agreement above the value of £25,000, subject to securing external funding in order that external funds were awarded for the Aquadrome Programme can be accepted by the Council
- iii. Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance, in agreement with the Lead Member, to enter into contracts above the value of £25,000 for works procured under the councils procurement and contracts procedure rules relating to those secured external bids.

### **CCLH31/25 PLAY SPACE STRATEGY 2025 - 2030**

The Head of Leisure and Natural Infrastructure introduced the report.

Members emphasised the importance of increasing adult participation in survey in the future, suggesting that physical presence during consultations may yield better results than online surveys. Officers acknowledged the challenges of engaging a wide audience but highlighted that children are the primary users of play areas. For specific play space projects, consultation will be delivered using a variety of online and in person methods, as was completed for Eastbury and Ebury play areas. The conversation also touched on specific issues such as delays in equipment installation, the importance of inclusive play, and the impact of longer grass policies on children's play opportunities. Officers reassured that play spaces are exempt from the alternative grass management regime. Officers also highlighted that the strategy outlines how play spaces will be inclusive, following the PiPA Wheel and that children shared the importance of bringing nature into their play and the opportunities long grass can bring to imaginative play. Officers also highlighted the play equipment due to be installed Eastbury will be carried out in a timely manner to ensure value for money for the council.

Members also raised some concerns about funding disparities and the impact of policy decisions on play opportunities for children in the community, in relation to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) applications. Officers reassured Members that they do and will work in partnership with other organisations as the strategy outlines and support them in their CIL applications if they wish to come forward, as they did with the recent Sarratt CIL application for improving their play facilities.

Members raised some concerns about the the grassland management at the Aquadrome and the impact on recreation, Officers highlighted the importance of developing a site master plan in consultation with the community. If successful, this will be completed as part of the Development Phase of the National Lottery Heritage Funded project. However, Officers emphasised that the Aquadrome is a nature reserve first and foremost, rather than just a recreation area.

Members raised concerns about the maintenance obligations of play areas funded by parish councils, questioning the continuity of these obligations when upgrades or refurbishments are due. Officers responded advising that they would need to review previous agreements to be able to provide the information later.

Councillor Jon Tankard moved the recommendation as set out in the report.

On being put to the committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being by general assent.

RESOLVED:

- i. To approve the Three Rivers Play Space Strategy 2025 – 2030.

- ii. To approve the updated Capital Programme for the period of this strategy and beyond (2025/26 – 2044/45) as detailed at Appendix C and within Appendix A.
- iii. To give delegated authority to the Director of Finance to enter into a contract or funding agreement above the value of £25,000 for the play space capital programme, subject to capital budget confirmation as part of the medium-term financial planning process.
- iv. To agree to the use of S106 funding to be used for the play space projects outlined in Appendix C, subject to the agreement from the legal team at the appropriate time.

### **CCLH32/25 WATERSMEET 50 YEARS**

The Head of Customer Experience introduced the presentation, and the Watersmeet Marketing Officer presented the slides.

Members raised questions regarding the attendance of two film events, noting that the actual turnout exceeded expectations: with 50 attendees for one movie, and 31 for the other. Concerns were raised about the affordability of tickets, and the need for better promotional strategies to attract more attendees. Furthermore, Members commented that the figures suggest that technical staff are being compensated below the real living wage, which could hinder attracting skilled workers. Officers clarified that the figures were estimates and responded by discussing the balance between commercialisation approach and community focus, mentioning the support from local volunteers, the donation of £5,000 from the Friends of Watersmeet, and the importance of word-of-mouth marketing. Furthermore, Members discussed how they could support the venue and attending events.

Councillor Chris Lloyd moved the recommendation as set out in the report.

On being put to the committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being by general assent.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Climate Change, Leisure and Housing Committee note the Watersmeet Anniversary summary of detail for 2025.

### **CCLH33/25 HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2023-2028 - ACTION PLAN - YEAR ONE REVIEW**

The Strategic Housing Manager introduced the report.

Members inquired about the frequency of housing surveys and the impact of delayed homelessness prevention projects. Officers responded by highlighting that the Council have a statutory duty to prevent and relieve homelessness and this was being delivered at a high level, citing successful outcomes from the previous year, including 145 of the 472 homelessness applications received in the past year by the council being prevented, representing a 31% success rate in the prevention of homelessness. Officers also informed members that positive feedback on the council's performance in this area had been received from MHCLG.

Officers confirmed that these two projects were intended to go above and beyond our statutory duty to prevent and relieve homelessness and, despite delays in two specific projects aimed at further assistance, officers reassured members that significant progress has been made, and these projects will be delivered within the year.

Members emphasised the need for effective collaboration to prevent evictions. Officers responded to this to confirm that whilst a protocol has not yet been agreed with the Registered Providers within the district, this does not mean that successful partnership work is not undertaken with them and confirmed that the council consistently work in partnership with the Registered Providers in the district on a number of projects.

Councillor Steve Drury moved the recommendation as set out in the report, seconded by Councillor Chris Lloyd.

On being put to the committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being by general assent.

Resolved:

That the Committee to review and note the Year One Review of the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028 Action Plan.

### **CCLH34/25 WORK PROGRAMME**

Members requested various items to be added to the Committee's work programme, including Budget Monitoring P3, P6 and P10, but not P8, as officers clarified that P8 does not come to this committee; it is part of budget setting. Furthermore, the following items were also requested to be added on the work programme:

- Everyone Active presentation
- Watersmeet presentation
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Aquadrome update
- Housing and Homelessness update

Officers clarified that the Everyone Active item is scheduled for the July 2025 Committee, and the Citizens Advice Bureau item sits under the other service committee.

It was suggested that as the Watersmeet annual review presentation historically comes to the October committee, it be scheduled for the October 2025 Committee, and Members discuss with officers in advance what additional items they would like included in the presentation.

Members suggested that the Aquadrome update should be scheduled before or after the Aquadrome steering group meeting, and at least every six months.

In addition, Members requested an update on the Housing and Homelessness item on the work programme every six months as there were concerns regarding the performance of registered providers. In response, officers raised concerns about the Committee's ability to make decisions, versus merely scrutinising service delivery, and suggested consulting the constitution for clarity on the Committee's responsibility.

Members also requested a desire to be updated on any issues that may arise in the meantime, and items that are not suitable for this Committee could be discussed in Member briefings with the relevant officers.

A final point was raised regarding the installation of the air source heat pump at the Council office; despite significant reduction in carbon emissions, the initial year saw an increase in electricity costs due to international price fluctuations and changes in building usage. Officers confirmed that savings are now beginning to show in the second year and offered to provide further details from the report.

RESOLVED:

To receive the Committee's Work programme.

**CCLH35/25 OTHER BUSINESS - IF APPROVED UNDER ITEM 3 ABOVE**

There were no items of other business.

**CHAIR**