

**Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 24
May 2016**

Present: Simon Tagg (Chairman)

Attendance

David Brookes (Vice-
Chairman)
Ian Hollinshead
Kevin Jackson
Geoff Martin

Sheree Peale
Paul Woodhead
Mike Worthington
Candice Yeomans

Apologies: Len Bloomer, Mark Deaville, Mike Lawrence and Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf

PART ONE

1. Declarations of Interest

Mr Paul Woodhead declared an interest in minute number 4 in his capacity as “OurstoEnjoy” campaign organiser.

Mr Geoff Martin declared an interest in minute number 5 as an ex-haulier.

2. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 4 March 2016

RESOLVED- That the minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 4 March 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

3. Flood Risk Management

The Cabinet Member for Communities and the Environment informed Members that Staffordshire County Council had three key roles within flood risk management: as a Category 1 Emergency Responder (Civil Contingencies Act 2004) with the responsibility to assess the risk of, and plan for, emergencies; as a Highways Authority; and as a Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) responsible for preparing a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy.

The County Council worked closely with a number of partners, including the Environment Agency, who carried out forecasting and warning, managed flood risk from main rivers and had an operational role on these watercourses. District and Borough Council’s were also Category 1 Responders with a key role in emergency preparedness, response and recovery at a district and borough level. They had a specific role in evacuation and should have plans in place to provide temporary accommodation. Water companies were another key partner who responded to and sought to alleviate flooding from the sewer network.

Members received details of local key considerations around Leekbrook in Staffordshire Moorlands and around Burton-upon-Trent. Burton-upon-Trent had relatively flat land in the Trent Valley and extensive areas of the town were within the floodplain. In contrast Leekbrook had a relatively steep Pennine catchment that responded rapidly to intense rainfall. Pockets for potential flooding were also found around the County.

Members received details of the work undertaken before, during and after any flood to minimise impact and maximise recovery.

Work continued in partnership with the Environment Agency and the Staffordshire Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) to improve preparedness for severe flood events and Members received details of the work undertaken. In addition to this Members were informed that it would be beneficial to host a Staffordshire Flood Summit involving key partners.

Whilst Members felt the concept of a flood summit was good in principle, it would need to have clear outcomes. Members also raised concerns over the potential cost of such an event and they were assured that the costs would be kept low and the event organised in consultation with the Portfolio Holder. It was suggested that engaging the public in the summit would be beneficial as well as informing the public of the issues pertinent to Staffordshire. Whilst it may be difficult to make this a completely public event consideration could be given to how the public could engage with the summit. The possibility of webcasting was put forward, with the public being able to forward their comments on the issues under debate. Members were also informed that the summit could consider issues of communication, co-ordinated working between agencies and address lessons learned from previous flooding incidents.

Flood defence schemes were funding from either local levy or directly from Central Government through the Environment Agency. There was a complicated formula to consider the cost benefit of each proposed scheme, with a six year rolling programme for considering flood defence schemes. Schemes were prioritised, with those preventing flooding of homes prioritised over businesses, and with farm land being a lower priority again. Staffordshire currently had 13 schemes under consideration.

Gully emptying was an area of concern for the Select Committee. A comprehensive review of Staffordshire gullies had been undertaken over the last two to three years. Staffordshire had over 190,000 individual gullies and the review had helped identify those that required more frequent emptying due to silt deposits, and those that could be emptied more infrequently. Members were also concerned that surface road dressing exacerbated the issue, suggesting that 25% of chippings were washed into the drains. However the general highways drainage system was not designed to cope with severe flood water and therefore during intense rainfall flooding may occur irrespective of the gully emptying programme. In cases of a flash flood the sheer volume of water could block the gully and create flooding.

Clarification was given on the term "100 year flood event", which referred to there being a 100 chance per year of there being a severe flood. The Select Committee were also informed that the Environment Agency were giving consideration to whether this ratio was still appropriate.

As a preventative measure it was suggested that both the Government and the Environment Agency work with farmers and landowners to allow dredging of drains and rivers. Concern was that rivers had been allowed to silt up for some time and this aggravated the likelihood of flooding. The maintenance of drainage was the responsibility of the individual landowner. However Members heard that in some instances farmers and landowners were encouraged to slightly block their drains as part of the "Slow the flow" flood defence scheme. In the case of severe rainfall this scheme expected the partially blocked drains to slow the water and reduce flood damage downstream. A similar scheme was being introduced on the river Dove, where fish stocks were also being improved.

Communication was a key area of concern shared by Members. Whilst Members understood there were a number of agencies responsible for differing water courses, it was unhelpful for members of the public to be passed from one agency to another when raising a concern. The Flood Line helped address this, giving a single contact point for registering concerns. This could be an area for further consideration at the proposed flood summit.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the preparedness of the County Council for a severe flood event be noted;
- b) the next steps the County Council are taking to further improve preparedness for a severe event are supported, with emphasis placed on the importance of gully emptying and effective communication with local members on the programme of work; and
- c) the proposal to host a Staffordshire Flood Summit be supported, stressing the need for the summit to be outcome focussed and giving consideration to public involvement.

4. Countryside Estate Review - Part Two

The Select Committee had previously scrutinised the Countryside Estate Management Review at their meetings of 18 December 2014, 4 September and 12 October 2015. A small group of Select Committee members had also visited the Countryside Estate sites during August 2015 to help inform scrutiny of the Review.

At their meeting of 21 October 2015 Cabinet agreed to consult more widely on four preferred options:

- A. retain under council management and seek opportunities to increase income from existing sites by working with volunteers, community, third sector and private parties;
- B. Transfer management on a site-by-site basis to local community or voluntary sector groups such as parish councils. This option could see parish councils, local community or voluntary sector groups maintaining and managing the use of the site, running events and deciding on wildlife management;
- C. Establish a partnership of landowners and/or other organisations with similar aspirations to work with us to manage and maintain one or a cluster of sites and develop appropriate and approved income generating facilities; and
- D. Establish a not for profit trading company or charitable organisation to run and develop parts of the estate.

The twelve week public consultation closed on 24 January 2016. 555 people took part in the consultation and Members received details of the consultation responses. 77% of respondents agreed with Option A, which largely reflected the existing in-house management arrangement but placed more emphasis on reducing operational costs.

Members were informed that the general consensus amongst respondents was that national charitable organisations and local community groups were preferable groups to become involved with the management of the estate. 138 respondents, including individuals, groups, third sector and private organisations had registered interest through the consultation process in working with the County Council to manage the Countryside Estate.

It was accepted that there was no one solution that would be suitable for the whole of the Estate and that differing parks would require differing solutions whilst being mindful of the ecology in the area.

Some disappointment was expressed by Select Committee Members around the interpretation of the consultation responses and the lack of a full SWOT analysis (Appendix 3) being included in the report.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth informed the Select Committee that there were a lot of smaller sites, particularly in the north of the county, where there was local community interest in taking ownership of the maintenance of sites. An example of this was Apedale. He also stated that there was no plan to sell either the Chasewater or Marquis Drive sites.

The report referred to possible transfer of county council assets as a consequence of review site changes and Members asked for clarification of what these assets would be. This referred to such assets as benches, tools and equipment that were specific to particular sites.

The Select Committee were aware of the funding constraints across the council and the need to ensure value for money and how to maximise the council's assets. They were aware that different solutions would be appropriate for different sites but felt that local interest groups and specifically the Local Members would be best placed to ensure the right solution for the right site. This could be done through Local Member Priority Meetings. They also requested that no delegated decision should be taken on any site without informing key stakeholders and the general public. The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth gave this assurance.

The Select Committee also noted that in some instances introducing car parking charges could be counter productive as people may use the surrounding area to park to avoid charges, potentially blocking access routes. Local Members would have the local knowledge to help inform decision making on such issues.

Members also asked that a correction be made to paragraph 9 in the report to show that 12,000 people signed the petition, of which 7000 were Staffordshire residents. The petition related to the selling of green spaces in Staffordshire not just Cannock Chase as the report suggested.

Members asked for clarification over a reference to Greenway Bank, Churnet Valley, and a community group referred to as LLP. Living Landscape Partnership (LLP) was made up of a number of stakeholders, including the county council and the National Trust. Members shared concerns over capacity and accountability if such a disparate group was given the management of Greenway Bank. They were informed that there would be a need for such an organisation to come together more formally to ensure they were fit for purpose going forward.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) a copy of the full SWOT analysis be forwarded to the Select Committee;
- b) the proposed approach for developing the detailed management arrangements and selecting the most appropriate partner or partners for each countryside site be supported with the proviso that:
 - further consideration of larger sites be brought back to the Select Committee for pre-decision scrutiny;
 - local members and local member groups are engaged in discussions regarding the future of smaller sites, for example via Local Member Priority Meetings;
- c) the Scheme of Delegation extract within the report for selecting the preferred partner(s) and managing arrangements for each countryside estate be supported with the above proviso; and
- d) the Chairman write to the Cabinet Member giving the Committee's feedback.

5. Working Together to address the impact of Heavy Goods Vehicles/HCVs on roads in Staffordshire

At its meeting of 24 July 2015 the Select Committee had agreed to undertake a review to investigate the impact of heavy good vehicles on roads in Staffordshire. This had been prompted by the submission to Council of two petitions from residents in Yoxall and Kings Bromley demanding a weight restriction of 7.5 tonnes on the A515 and auxiliary roads between Stubby Lane, Draycott-in-the-Clay through to Yoxall and Kings Bromley to Wood End Lane. The scope of the working group had been broadened to consider the impact of heavy goods vehicles on roads across Staffordshire.

Members were informed of a correction to the report at point 6.2.7 which currently referred to a survey undertaken by Mr Warren Bradley. The survey had in fact been undertaken by a fellow resident but was supported by Mr Bradley.

The Chairman thanked all those who had given evidence to the working group and to the Members and Officers involved.

The Select Committee considered the working group's report and recommendations and endorsed its submission to the Cabinet Member.

RESOLVED – That the final report of the Working Together to Address the impact of Heavy Goods Vehicles on roads in Staffordshire Working group be endorsed for

submission to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, for an Executive response.

6. Executive response to Infrastructure+ - scrutiny of governance and reporting arrangements to Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee

At their meeting of 17 December 2015 the Select Committee had considered the final report of the Working Group on Infrastructure+ - Scrutiny of Governance and reporting arrangements to the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee. Members now received the Executive response to the working group report and recommendations.

The eight recommendations were accepted by the Cabinet Member and the Select Committee received details of progress in implementing these. In particular Members discussed recommendations 3 to 5 which considered how information could better be shared with local members around a range of activities such as gully emptying and highways improvements. An electronic tool was being developed for Members to access planned work programmes that would allow them to find up to date and accurate information quickly and independently, giving them the tools they needed to be more responsive to public enquiries.

With regard to recommendation 7, that a request be made to Staffordshire Borough and District Council Planning Officers asking them to publish highways (planning) responses, whilst this request could be made it was not possible to dictate how the County Council's response was reported by them. Members asked that a copy of each full response letter be forwarded to local members to ensure they were aware of any conditions the County Council may have included.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) the formal Cabinet Member response to the working group's recommendations be received;
- b) progress outlined within the action plan be welcomed; and
- c) progress on the action plan and implementation of the agreed recommendations be monitored by the select Committee on a six monthly exception basis, until the recommendations have been fully implemented.

7. Work Programme

The Select Committee received a copy of their 2015/16 and proposed 2016/17 work programmes.

Members were asked to note the change to the July Select Committee date, from 11 July to 26 July at 2.00pm. This meeting would consider items on Elective Home Education, Post 16 participation and the Shugborough Estate sub-leases for the Walled Garden and Museum Collection.

Following the evident public interest in the changes to Lichfield Library and the future of the Friary Building, Members asked that this be included on their work programme.

RESOLVED – That the 2016/17 work programme be agreed.

Chairman