

**STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE**  
**MINUTES**

**Date:** Tuesday 21 October 2014

**Time:** 6.00 p.m.

**Place:** Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Stevenage SG1 1HN

**Present:** Councillors: J Hollywell, P Bibby, D Bainbridge, L Bell, L Briscoe, J Brown, C Saunders, G Snell and P Stuart.

**Also Present:** Councillor J Gardner (Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration), Oliver Waring -Tree Officer, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council – Critical Friend, Lee Myers - Head of Environmental Services, Paul Seaby - Services Manager Street Scene & Amenities, Julia Hill - Environmental Performance & Development Manager, Cristian Pinter - Arboriculture and Conservation Manager and Audley Philips - Tenancy & Income Manager

**Start/End Time:** Start Time: 18.00 hrs.  
Ended: 19.50 hrs.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor E Connolly.

There were no declarations of interests.

**2. MINUTES – 7 OCTOBER 2014**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee held on 7 October 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**3. INTERVIEWS FOR THE REVIEW OF THE MAINTENANCE OF TREES, HEDGES AND SHRUB BEDS**

The Chair welcomed the critical friend, Oliver Waring, Tree Officer, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and interviewees to the meeting.

The critical friend informed the meeting that his authority presently had a team of 4 personnel, 1 full time and 3 part time staff managing their tree stock and an agency

agreement with regards to the trees and shrubs on Herts County land. He advised that the borough had over 49,000 trees of various species and the older and mature trees were sited mostly in the woodland area.

Oliver Waring indicated that Welwyn Hatfield endeavours, where possible, to replace trees that had been removed over the years through house building programmes or health and safety concerns with trees of different species and although financial constraints had resulted in cuts to its day to day services, it employed a proactive approach with tree and shrub management.

Members were concerned that other type of amenity land besides that owned by HRA were not being well maintained, and enquired about the possibility of the operational teams being used in both areas. In response the Services Manager, Street Scene and Amenities acknowledged advantages especially in terms of economies of scale, but advised that the current separation of the service between the HRA and the General Fund existed from the period when the housing service was separated from the Council via the arms-length management organisation and the individual Service Level Agreements (SLA) that were agreed. Officers noted that the SLA would need to be renegotiated as there was a possibility that either the HRA or the General Fund could subsidise the other.

With regards to the state of the shrub beds, the meeting was informed that after the completion of a survey around the town, a decision would be taken on whether to remove or retain them in certain areas. Members were advised that when new developments were being built, due consideration was given to whether there was any need for shrub beds in those new locations as different areas required different solutions. A suggestion that ward councillors be consulted before planting any shrubs around housing schemes was noted.

In response to a question on the frequency of maintenance around play areas, Members were informed that each park was inspected at least twice a week, however 20 sites had already been identified as hot spot areas and were also visited on the weekends. Members were informed that this was not an exhaustive list and was constantly reviewed and Officers welcomed any incident to be reported and that sites could therefore move on and off the hotspot list.

The Arboriculture Officer acknowledged the loss of half the trees around the town in the last 50 years through development, the removal of dead or diseased trees, its proximity to residents' properties and highway safety issues. Any planting scheme designed by the Council would include a variety of tree species as certain trees species were more prone to pest and diseases as it was essential to spread the risk to the tree stock by diversifying the species of replacement trees.

In response to a suggestion about extending the group of Green Space volunteers to include young people, the Head of Environmental Services advised that this would require supervision by SBC Officers as there were issues around duty of care. However there could be an opportunity for the campaigns officer to promote this through the Waste Management Eco Schools visits.

Members were informed that although there were a number of parks in town that had tarmac paths, providing a network of tarmac footpaths in the woodland area would not be affordable. However Officers were looking at producing a leaflet promoting the woodland paths that were accessible via wheelchairs etc.

In response to a number of questions, the Tenancy & Income Manager advised that tenants were encouraged to maintain areas of amenity but that there was active promotion regarding licences to occupy land. A suggestion that tenants be informed of how much they pay on service charges was noted.

The Chair advised the meeting that following the responses received, a report including draft recommendations would be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder, SBC Officers, the critical friend and Members for their input into the review.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That findings and draft recommendations arising from the review be considered at the next meeting.
2. That Officers continue the discussion regarding the renegotiation of SLA between HRA and General Fund so that the service could be rationalised without one side subsidising the other.

#### **4 URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None

#### **5. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Not required.

#### **6. URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

#### **CHAIR**