

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 11 February 2020

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair), Doug Bainbridge, Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Teresa Callaghan and Loraine Rossati.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.10pm

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

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Sandra Barr, Jim Brown, Dave Cullen and Jody Hanafin.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES 20 NOVEMBER 2019**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Economy Select Committee held on 20 November 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

At this juncture, the Chair advised the Committee that there despite the Council having continued dialogue with a number of options being considered, there was no further update in relation to the support for Post Office provision in the Old Town. Any updates would be brought to this Committee as soon as they were available.

3 **UPDATE ON PREVIOUS REVIEW INTO MAINTENANCE OF TREES HEDGES & SHRUB BEDS**

Members received an update on the recommendations agreed by this Committee in relation to the 2015 scrutiny review into the Maintenance of Trees, Hedges and Shrub Beds.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Sarah Mead to the meeting who advised that she was in attendance for this item to raise concerns on behalf of a number of local residents with concerns on this matter.

Members raised the following issues:

- In relation to shrub beds, officers advised that following a full survey of the shrub beds on Council land, the Council was ahead of its planned schedule

and many improvements had been made to shrub beds across the Town. In response to a request, Officers agreed to send Councillor Mitchell the survey results for the Longmeadow area;

- Members were disappointed to learn that no work had yet been undertaken on the promotion of gardening services to those residents unable to maintain their own gardens. Officers advised that this would be reviewed including as part of the Council's Commercial Strategy. Members also suggested contact with the voluntary sector as part of this review.

Councillor Sarah Mead's concerns included the seeming lack of response by the Council to residents where there were concerns about overhanging and potential nuisance or even danger being caused by trees; the problems caused by certain types of trees eg sycamores, in relation to leaf drops and flooding issues; the blocking of light from trees and the half pruning of shrubs and hedges.

In response, Officers informed Members that due to limited resources they had to make judgements to respond to what requests were considered reasonable and in the main to address safety issues, on top of the routine maintenance undertaken by the Team. A review of the Policy would be undertaken in due course.

- In respect of volunteering, the programme of Green Space volunteering activities was continuing and viewed as a success by all.
- Officers agreed to take up the issue of breaches of tenancy agreements in regards to trees and specifically the planting of leylandii trees, to find out how this issue is monitored by Housing colleagues and what can be done to help tenants who inherit the problem and have the prohibitive cost of their removal.
- In relation to Licences to Occupy, Members noted that although the new system had been in place for a while and the process had been simplified, officers would be undertaking a review of possible gaps and risks that had been identified.
- Members were pleased to see the wide range of species of trees that had been planted throughout the Town in recent years. In response to a question, officers advised that a number of native tree species such as holly, maple, birch etc were also planted. The challenge for the team was to plant the right size and type of tree in the appropriate location.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the update be noted;
2. That a further progress report be added to the work programme and brought back to this Committee in 6 months' time.

4 **REVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES**

The Scrutiny Officer gave Members an update on the review of local neighbourhood centres and presented a report with some background information for the review.

It was noted that the first site visits by officers and Members had been made to Symonds Green and The Oval Community Centres. The next visits to the Neighbourhood Centre buildings included Oaks Cross and would end up back at the Oval and would help Members to gather evidence for the Review.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR