

Runnymede Borough Council

Environment and Sustainability Committee

Wednesday, 20 November 2024 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors D Whyte (Chair), S Ringham (Vice-Chair), T Gates, M Harnden, J Hulley, S Lewis, K Rowsell, S Saise-Marshall, C Parry (In place of P Gahir) and M Williams (In place of R Milstead).

Members of the Committee absent: Councillors P Gahir and R Milstead.

In attendance: Councillors I Mullens, M Smith, P Snow and S Whyte.

14 Changes to Committee Membership

To record that Councillor M Williams substituted for Councillor R Milstead and Councillor C Parry substituted for Councillor P Gahir.

15 Councillor Jonathan Wilson

The Chairman wished to thank the late Councillor Jonathan Wilson for all his work relating to the Environment and Sustainability Committee. Councillor Wilson was a former Chair, Vice-Chair and Member of this Committee and had done an excellent job, and would be sadly missed.

16 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2024 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

17 Apologies for absence

No apologies for absence were received.

18 Declarations of interest

Agenda item 10 - Councillor D Whyte and Councillor J Hulley both declared an interest. They both rented an RBC managed allotment. They both withdrew from the meeting for this item.

19 Parking Overview

At the meeting in June 2024 the Committee asked Officers to bring a comprehensive overview of parking services to this Committee.

Officers gave Members a comprehensive overview of parking services, which included the background to parking, the current position, parking operations and key initiatives.

It was noted that recent improvements at the Borough car parks included new pay and display machines. It was hoped that the ANPR installations would be completed by the end of March next year. Officers would then be looking at more prepayment options and the potential use of QR codes.

It was noted that Officers aimed to make parking equitable, fair and consistent for all residents.

20 **Parking Fees and Charges Review**

The Committee was asked to approve a number of changes to the current charges in the Council's car parks.

It was reported that the Council faced a significant financial challenge, with a projected budget deficit of £4.1 million by 2026/27. To address this shortfall, the medium term financial strategy set out the Council's strategy to developing its approach in terms of efficiency, income and savings, as the deficit needed to be addressed by 2027/28.

When setting fees and charges it was vital to ensure that there was a balance between recovering the cost of running services and ensuring our charges were affordable.

Runnymede managed 27 off-street car parks, with free motorcycle parking as well as disabled parking spaces at each location.

Officers reported that prior to the Covid pandemic, parking income was relatively high at £636kpa and as such the Council could afford to offer free parking in relation to its open space car parks. However, this income had reduced over the past four years with a budget of £474k set for the 2024/25 financial year.

During 2024/25, the Council invested heavily in upgrading and implementing new pay and display machines and Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) to improve customer experience and protect Council income. Fees were increased from April 2024 for the first time in five years to ensure parking services remained self-financing.

The Committee was advised that it had become apparent that over 55% of the Council's car parks were being subsidised by revenue from fee-paying car parks.

Benchmarking with other Surrey Authorities showed that Runnymede costs were comparable across the county and a modest increase of 0.05 and 0.10 for Out of Town and Town Centre car parks would bring in an additional revenue of approximately £90k pa whilst remaining affordable when compared to neighbouring authorities.

Officers advised the Committee that several neighbouring authorities also charged for both evening and overnight stays at a fixed fee of between £2.00 and £7.00 depending on the length of stay. This charge helped to reduce the ongoing operational costs of lighting and maintenance and was particularly successful in barrier ANPR car parks where payment on exit was mandatory.

To ensure consistency, all seven open space car parks would be included in the Council's Off-Street Parking Orders. A recreational charge was therefore proposed. This would allow for three hours of free parking for leisure and recreational use, followed by a nominal fee of £2.80.

Officers were also proposing to add a new section to the Off-Street Parking Orders that allowed for a temporary waiver of car parking charges to support specific annual community events. This waiver would be granted at the discretion of the Council and would be subject to conditions.

Officers had been in discussion with Surrey County Council regarding how Runnymede could best support their local street improvement scheme, whilst also addressing the administrative challenges of offering limited parking permits equivalent to the number of on-

street spaces removed.

Officers were asked to clarify to the Committee, details of the amount spent/remaining in the parking reserve fund. Officers advised members that the parking reserve has reduced to £100k following the investment in pay and display and ANPR with £30k set aside for electrical surveys for EV project.

Some members of the Committee felt very strongly that the increase at Cooper's Hill car park and the impact it would have on the local football and tennis clubs was unacceptable. Officers advised the Committee that they had been in dialogue with both the football and tennis club and support would be given to community days. However, car parking needed to be self-supporting and could not be supported from public funds.

A member of the Committee stressed that she felt some members of the Committee were behaving appallingly to both Officers and other Members during this meeting and wanted this minuted, they stressed that all Councillors should work for all residents. She would love to be in a position not to put charges up but sadly this wasn't an option due to the Council's current financial position.

Some Members of the Committee strongly felt that 3 hours free parking at Coopers Hill would have a detrimental impact on the Manorcroft Junior Football Club in particular. Whilst matches only lasted 90 minutes, the children needed to arrive some time before the match and would be there some time after.

It was suggested that the Football Club and/or the Tennis Club may wish to submit a petition to the Council, thereby giving them the opportunity to show their dissatisfaction democratically.

There was a discussion regarding parking in the vicinity of the Chertsey library and it was suggested that all Council car parks within 150m of a library should have 30 minutes free parking, and a motion was put forward to this effect.

A named vote was requested on the motion, and voting was as follows:

In favour: Councillors J Hulley, S Lewis, S Saise-Marshall (3)

Against: Councillors D Whyte, S Ringham, C Parry, T Gates, M Harnden, M Williams, K Rowsell (7)

Abstentions: None

The proposed motion fell.

With regard to parking at Coopers Hill Car Park it was suggested that an increase from 3 to 4 hours free parking at the car park would be more acceptable, and an amendment was put forward to this effect.

The amendment was subject to a named vote as follows:

In favour: Councillors J Hulley, S Lewis, S Saise-Marshall (3)

Against: Councillors D Whyte, S Ringham, C Parry, T Gates, M Harnden, M Williams, K Rowsell (7)

Abstentions: None

The proposed amendment fell.

A named vote was requested on each of the Resolutions from 1 – 8 and voting was as follows:

- 1) In favour:- Councillors D Whyte, S Ringham, C Parry, T Gates, M Harnden, M Williams, K Rowsell (7)
 Against:- Councillors J Hulley, S Lewis, S Saise-Marshall (3)
 Abstentions: None
- 2) In favour:- Councillors D Whyte, S Ringham, C Parry, T Gates, M Harnden, M Williams, K Rowsell (7)
 Against:- Councillors J Hulley, S Lewis, S Saise-Marshall (3)
 Abstentions: None
- 3) In favour:- Councillors D Whyte, S Ringham, C Parry, T Gates, M Harnden, M Williams, K Rowsell (7)
 Against:- Councillors J Hulley, S Lewis, S Saise-Marshall (3)
 Abstentions: None
- 4) In favour:- Councillors D Whyte, S Ringham, C Parry, T Gates, M Harnden, M Williams, K Rowsell (7)
 Against:- Councillors J Hulley, S Lewis, S Saise-Marshall (3)
 Abstentions: None
- 5) In favour: Councillors D Whyte, S Ringham, C Parry, T Gates, M Harnden, J Hulley, S Lewis, M Williams, K Rowsell, S Saise-Marshall (10)
 Against:- None
 Abstentions: None
- 6) In favour:- Councillors D Whyte, S Ringham, C Parry, T Gates, M Harnden, M Williams, K Rowsell (7)
 Against:- Councillors J Hulley, S Lewis, S Saise-Marshall (3)
 Abstentions: None
- 7) In favour: Councillors D Whyte, S Ringham, C Parry, T Gates, M Harnden, J Hulley, S Lewis, M Williams, K Rowsell, S Saise-Marshall (10)
 Against:- None
 Abstentions: None
- 8) In favour: Councillors D Whyte, S Ringham, C Parry, T Gates, M Harnden, J Hulley, S Lewis, M Williams, K Rowsell, S Saise-Marshall (10)

Against:- None

Abstentions: None

Resolved that the following changes be approved:

- 1) modest fee increases of £0.05 (Out of Town) and £0.10 (Town)
- 2) introduction of recreational charging at open space car parks of £2.80 after 3 hours
- 3) introduction a new charging structure which includes 30-minutes free parking at Pooley Green and Egham Library to support SCC Cycling and Infrastructure projects,
- 4) flat evening (£2) and overnight (£3) parking fees,
- 5) New procedures for granting temporary waiver of parking charges to support community events subject to costs being contained within budgets.
- 6) an increase of £30 (OFT) & £60(T) for annual permits,
- 7) standardisation of parking orders in terms of return and waiting times,
- 8) a thorough review of permits to introduce more flexible options.

21 **Street Trading in the Borough**

The Committee was asked to recommend to Full Council following consultation, to rescind The Broadway, New Haw as a consent street and remove the ability of street traders to apply to operate in the area.

At the June meeting of this Committee a report regarding the future of the Council's sole consent street in the borough, which was a small section of The Broadway, New Haw was discussed. The Committee resolved to recommend to Full Council a consultation regarding removing its status as a consent street. Full Council subsequently approved this recommendation at its meeting on 18 July 2024.

That consultation took place throughout August and the responses received from Surrey Police and Surrey County Council reaffirmed Officers' belief that The Broadway should be re-designated as a prohibited street.

This issue had come to light as there had been a slight upturn in enquiries and applications to trade at The Broadway over the past 12 months, and it became apparent that when processing those applications, that they were likely to be met with a blanket rejection from those we are required to consult with due to various concerns including litter, parking and antisocial behaviour.

If removed this would result in Runnymede having three licenced streets in the borough, which would allow markets to take place. The remaining streets in the borough would continue to be designated as prohibited streets. If approved by Full Council, there were still some tasks to complete. Therefore, this would come into effect on 10 February 2025.

Resolved that:

Environment and Sustainability Committee recommend to Full Council that;

- 1) All previous resolutions of the Council made pursuant to paragraph 2 of schedule 4 of the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1982 (the Act) be hereby revoked
- 2) Pursuant to Paragraph 2 of Schedule 4 to the Act, that as from the date when this resolution takes effect, all areas of land within the Borough of Runnymede which are "streets" within the definition of that term contained in Paragraph 1 of Schedule

4 to the Act shall be designated as prohibited streets with the exception of any streets referred to in resolution 3 below

- 3) The parts of streets set out below be designated as Consent Streets or Licence Streets, as defined in Schedule 4 to the Act:

Consent Streets

- None

Licence Streets

- High Street, Egham
Station Road North, Egham
Guildford Street, Chertsey
With effect from 10 February 2025.

22 **Proposal to review HMO options**

The Committee was advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee at its meeting on 28 March 2024 requested that the following activities be reviewed by the Environment and Sustainability Committee;

- 1) A review to consider if there was sufficient evidence to implement an additional HMO licensing scheme in the borough to include non-licenable HMOs
- 2) Introduction of new HMO licensing conditions on the following themes which would apply to existing and additionally licensed HMO's
 - a) Bins and waste management
 - b) Garden Maintenance
 - c) ASB and nuisance behaviour
- 3) To review HMO licensing fees

Officers advised the Committee that after careful consideration they had concluded the following:

- The evidence gathered, on analysis, did not meet the three evidential tests required for implementation of an additional licensing scheme as set out in the Housing Act 2004
- Existing powers and processes were available to tackle ASB, nuisance behaviour, waste management and garden maintenance issues. The use of the existing powers would deliver more targeted, effective and efficient results.

The Housing Act 2004 sections 56 and 57 contained three evidential tests that must be reviewed before any designation could be made;

Test one – The authority must consider that a significant proportion of the HMOs of that description in the area were managed sufficiently ineffectively as to give rise, or to be likely to give rise, to one or more particular problems either for those occupying the HMOs or for members of the public. (Section 56 (2)).

Test two – The authority must not make a particular designation under section 56 unless they had considered whether there were any other courses of action available to them (of whatever nature) that might provide an effective method of dealing with the problem or

problems in question, (section 57(4)(a)).

Test three – The authority must not make a particular designation under section 56 unless they considered that making the designation would significantly assist them to deal with the problem or problems (whether or not they take any other course of action as well) (section 57(4)(b))

The Committee was advised that having analysed the data with respect to introducing an additional HMO licensing scheme. Officers had not found the evidence to support the introduction of a scheme.

The Committee was in support of this approach with an additional recommendation for HMOs to be kept under review and an update brought back to this Committee again in 12 months.

Resolved that:

The Committee does not progress the introduction of an additional HMO licensing scheme to include non-licensable HMOs where there are two or more separate households, because none of the three evidential tests prescribed in the Housing Act 2004 are met; and

The Committee does not approve the introduction of new HMO licensing conditions because existing powers and processes are available to tackle ASB, nuisance behaviour, waste management and garden maintenance issues. The use of existing powers will deliver a more targeted, effective and efficient results.

The Committee notes that the approach to evidencing nuisance arising from HMOs in the borough, and the strategic approach to dealing with cases of nuisance associated with HMOs, will be kept under review by the Head of Environmental Services and following consultation with key councillors of Egham Town, Englefield Green East and Englefield Green West wards, those most affected by HMOs an update will be brought to Committee again in 12 months.

23 **Future Council Meadow Management Policy**

Following a question from Members of this Committee in January 2024, Officers within Open Space Development were asked to consider options for a future Meadow Policy for the borough.

Within Runnymede, there were two main ways in which the meadows were managed: traditional hay cutting and the cut and collect method using flail attachments to tractors. Both of which were currently carried out using external contractors. This was due to the fact that this was a substantial piece of work which required expensive specialist equipment, and it only took place a few weeks a year.

There were currently 14 designated meadow sites in the borough of varying size and location type. Hay cutting was only practical where the site was large enough. There were only two meadows in Runnymede which were currently practical: Chertsey Meads and Runnymede Meadows, although others could be added.

Currently, the majority of sites were in poor ecological condition due to inappropriate maintenance and were largely dominated by undesirable ruderal weeds including nettles, thistles and docks. Chertsey Meads, Hare Hill, Homewood Park and Thorpe Green were in better condition and had greater restoration potential.

The Committee was advised that when discussing opportunities with Natural England, it had been identified that the Council could apply for funding from the Countryside Stewardship scheme. This funding was paid to landowners who undertook environmentally beneficial approaches to management of their land. These discussions had resulted in an indicative £60,000 that could be realised by the Council to support delivery of a Meadow Management Policy.

Officers had identified five sites that would be considered appropriate for stewardship; Chertsey Meads, Homewood Park, Thorpe Green, Hare Hill and Bourne Meadows.

Entering into a Countryside Stewardship or Sustainable Farming Incentive agreement would secure funding for an initial five-year period, but it was implied that funding would continue beyond this initial period (subject to central government policy).

The Committee was given four options to consider:

- Option 1 – Do nothing and turn all meadows (non-hay cut) to amenity grassland
- Option 2 – Bring all grassland management in-house
- Option 3 – Contract out all meadow cutting operations
- Option 4 – Bring cut and collect operation in-house but contract out hay operation

The Committee was advised that Officers considered either Option 3 or Option 4 was the most viable way forward for the Council, with Option 3 being the preferred choice.

Some members were keen for Officers to pursue Option 4 now, but this wasn't fully supported by all of the Committee. It was noted that the option to bring all operations in house (as in Option 4) could be reviewed towards the end of year 2 of the contract. This would enable Officers to collect information as to how the process worked and likely costs.

Officers recommended to the Committee an initial direction via an external contractor which in turn would provide Officers the time and opportunity to consider future in-house management options.

The Committee was pleased to receive the report and welcomed the boost to biodiversity the policy would bring.

Resolved that:

Members note the proposed direction for a future corporate Meadow Management Policy as detailed subject to approval by the Community Services Committee; and

The procurement of an external contractor for an initial term of three years with an option for extension for a further 2 years be approved; and

If the value of the tender returns exceeds the budgetary provision a report will be brought back to Members of this Committee

24 **Environment and Sustainability Proposed Fees and Charges 2025/26**

The Committee was asked to consider the proposed fees and charges as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

The Council faced a significant financial challenge, with a projected budget deficit of £4.1 million by 2027/28. To address this shortfall, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy sets out

the Council's approach to achieving financial sustainability including the delivery of savings, efficiencies and income generation.

While the setting of the fees and charges needs to be considered within the overall financial context of the Council, there were many factors affecting their determination. For some charges, a full cost recovery basis may be appropriate thereby ensuring that service users pay the full cost of the service they received, while for others the Council may choose to subsidise services to residents to support the aims of the Council such as for health and wellbeing.

Officers had been developing a standardised template to enable identification of the level of subsidy provided for each chargeable service. This would require further refinement over the next 6 – 9 months, to fully support fee setting for 2026/27.

Whilst the Council's constitution placed initial fee setting with each service committee, it also provided delegated authority to Officers to alter fees, charges and prices without reference to a committee, in order to respond to market conditions, new needs, changes in tax rates etc.

Some members of the Committee were dissatisfied with some of the increases particularly in relation to the use of football pitches and bowling greens.

Officers advised the Committee that currently some of the discretionary services fees did not cover the cost of delivering the service. Subsidizing these services was considered a fair rationale for increasing charges. This would ensure the Council could protect services going forward.

Resolved that:

The proposed fees and charges as set out in the report be approved effective from the dates set out in the appendix or as soon as practical thereafter.

25 **Exclusion of press and public**

Resolved that:

The press and public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following report under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the report in question would be likely to involve disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

26 **Depot Options Appraisal**

The Committee was asked to consider four options for the future refurbishment of the Council's depot.

Officers advised the Committee that having considered all the relevant factors the preferred option was to refurbish the building opposite the Depot to accommodate staff who delivered the Depot's key administrative functions. Additionally, a modular building would be installed on the existing Depot site to provide welfare facilities for operational staff.

The asset known as the Ford Road Depot was a council owned site delivering statutory waste provisions. At present, 19 Environmental Services staff worked from the main depot offices, with 3 Community Services staff working from an adjoining annex. This was in addition to the 26 collection operatives and 22 street care operatives who worked out of the site.

Over the years, the depot has evolved to deliver other services for the borough. The services presently delivered from the site included waste and recycling collection, vehicle maintenance, street cleansing, grounds maintenance, and fleet management. Community transport was also based on the site, as was meals at home, plus storage for various other teams including CCTV and elections. A new fuel management system was installed in April 2024 and the fuel tank cleaned and refurbished. The tank was currently used to store and supply HVO fuel for the Council's fleet.

In June 2022, a report was taken to the Corporate Management Committee to release a capital estimate for the procurement of the works contract for the commencement of refurbishment and upgrade of the Ford Road Depot prior to grounds maintenance and green spaces services being relocated and delivered in-house.

Following a procurement exercise a comprehensive feasibility study took place. The surveys took longer than anticipated due to their complexity and the need for specialised professional services, as well as consultations with key staff. The survey results confirmed that the building had exceeded its economical lifespan and lacked the capacity to be future proofed to meet carbon net zero goals.

The four options considered were:

Option 1: Move administrative employees to the nearby former St. John Ambulance Site, Ford Road, Chertsey and provide fit for purpose modular buildings on the existing site to accommodate welfare facilities for operational employees, to include WC's, showers, and canteen area.

While the surveys were being undertaken by external consultants, the Council was advised by their tenants, St. John's Ambulance, who were in the building opposite the Depot, that they no longer required the building. Noting that the surveys had revealed the Depot office space and welfare facilities were at end of life, Officers considered this to be an opportunity for this asset to provide a possible location for the main offices of the depot. Appropriate surveys of the St. John's Ambulance building identified that the building could be used for office purposes but was not sufficient to house all the welfare requirements of the service currently based at the Depot. In order to address this, it was proposed that a small modular building is located on the existing site, with office-based employees being relocated to the property St. Johns Ambulance vacated.

It was noted that limited interest had been shown for occupation of the site vacated by St. Johns Ambulance with most interest coming from charitable organisations seeking peppercorn rents.

By moving office-based staff into the site vacated by St. Johns Ambulance it would bring new life to the building, update it and address issues that would have to be resolved even if the Council sought to re-let it as a commercial asset.

Option 2: 2 x Modular Buildings on existing site

The modular buildings would be leased for a 5-year period to give the Council flexibility. It was proposed that modular buildings would be stacked and placed on the former scout hut site with expansion, if so required. The provision of modular buildings for employees who remained at the depot throughout the working day, had been carefully considered. Whilst Option 2 required a reduced capital outlay this was not preferred by existing staff who worked at the depot.

Option 3: Complete Refurbishment

Option 3 was a high-cost option at a time when the Council was focused on achieving efficiencies and savings, and may not, therefore, be compatible with the existing Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Option 4: Demolition and Rebuild

In alignment with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy approved by Full Council in October, this option was not financially viable in the short or medium term.

The Committee was supportive of Option 1.

Resolved that:

The Committee approve Option 1 for the works at the depot.

The Committee request that Corporate Management Committee approve the capital estimate required to deliver the essential maintenance works vital to the day-to-day operation of the Depot site, including (replacement of fences, landscaping, partial resurfacing, CCTV and external lighting, repairs to external drainage, repairs to retaining wall)

Once referred, the Corporate Management Committee;

Consider whether it wishes to recommend to the Council the approval of the capital estimate required to deliver the Environment and Sustainability Committee's preferred option.

Once referred, the Council considers and agrees;

Whether it wishes to approve the Environmental and Sustainability Committee's preferred option for the Depot works.

Whether it wishes to approve the capital estimate required to deliver the Depot works (following consideration or the recommendation of the Corporate Management Committee)

(The meeting ended at 10.49 pm.)

Chair