



## **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE, SAFETY AND GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 2<sup>nd</sup> OCTOBER 2024**

**PRESENT:** Councillor M Couchman (Chair), Councillors L Wood, C Adams, M Clarke, B Price and N Statham

**CABINET:** Councillor David Foster  
Councillor Lewis Smith

The following officers were present: Anna Miller (Assistant Director – Growth & Regeneration), Alice Poulton (Future High Streets Fund Project Officer), Lara Rowe (Castle Museum and Archive Manager), Tracey Pointon (Legal Admin & Democratic Services Manager) and Leanne Costello (Senior Scrutiny and Democratic Services Officer)

### **43 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs M Bailey, L Clarke and J Oates.

Apologies were also received from Cllr M Clarke who would late to the meeting.

### **44 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2024 were approved as a correct record.

*(Moved by Councillor Lee Wood and seconded by Councillor N Statham)*

### **45 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

### **46 UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR**

The Chair provided an update in relation to the Nature Recovery Declaration heard by their Committee at the meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2024:

The question that was asked around the report stating that the Council should seek to manage at least 30% of their greenspace and wildlife – clarification around how big an area this was?

The Officer provided a response at the meeting however later confirmed that this was incorrect.

The following info is correct –

Total area of Tamworth Total land 3084 ha

Total area of TBC owned green spaces 501.549 ha (around 16% of the total area of Tamworth)

Total designated open space – 456.3404 ha (90% of the total, the rest is verges or strips of odd bits of land left unmanaged etc)

Total designated as nature reserves / SBI / LoGs 171.3671 ha (34% of the total)

Work is under way to map the remaining areas managed for nature ie areas left unmown under trees, historical hedges on playing fields etc.

#### **47 RESPONSES TO REPORTS OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE SAFETY & GROWTH COMMITTEE**

There were none.

#### **48 CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS REFERRED TO THE INFRASTRUCTURE SAFETY & GROWTH COMMITTEE FROM CABINET OR COUNCIL**

There were none.

#### **49 HERITAGE ENGAGEMENT CO-ORDINATOR REVIEW**

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Holder for People Services, Engagement and Leisure, the Assistant Growth and Regeneration and the Castle Museum and Archive Manager to provide the committee with an update on the range of activities and outcomes achieved for Tamworth's residents by the Heritage Engagement Co-ordinator post.

The Portfolio introduced the report highlighting some of the activity programmes that the Heritage Engagement Coordinator had developed since the post began in January before handing over to Officers who shared a video of some of the activities.

[Hand Crafted Heritage - A Community Project by Tamworth Castle - YouTube](#)

Officers highlighted that the post had enabled them to engage with a diverse range of the Community who may not usually have engaged with Tamworth's local Heritage. The grant funding for the post ends at the end of March 2025

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

1. Members congratulated the team and acknowledged the importance of bringing the heritage to the community, in particular the younger generation.
2. Members stated that they would encourage the Council to continue with the post even if grant funding did not continue.
3. Whether items made in workshops could be displayed around other areas of the Council, i.e. Assembly Rooms and the front desk if it reopens.
4. Acknowledged the importance of reaching vulnerable and isolated sections of the community and how this is not always quantifiable in money.

Resolved that the Committee:

noted the wide range of opportunities that have already been created by the establishment of the Heritage Engagement Co-ordinator (HEC) post and the UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) activity funding.

*(Moved by Councillor B Price and seconded by Councillor C Adams)*

The Chair thanked the Officers and Portfolio Holder and invited them to leave.

## **50 FHSF UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2024**

The Chair welcomed the Deputy Leader of the Council who is on the Future High Street Board, the Assistant Growth and Regeneration and Future High Street Fund Project Officer to provide an update on the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) programme of works.

The Deputy Leader introduced the report highlighting that they are seeing good progress on delivering the vision as the project transitions from design to implementation, before handing over to Officers who provided a summary of the report, highlighting that Nationwide's contractor had gone in to administration but that they had since appointed a new contractor and were expecting to be back on site in October.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

1. Further to the news that the contractors ISG had gone into administration the Committee were reassured that a new contractor had been appointed and asked if any ISG employees affected were to be employed under the new contractor?  
Officers confirmed that as this is Nationwide's contractor and that they have no direct engagement with them however this was something that they could check.
2. How likely it was that they would go over the spend deadlines?  
Officers confirmed that whilst works would go beyond the spends deadline of March 2025 they expect to have spent the Future High Street Grant funding by the deadline. There could be a small proportion remaining that would need to be spent highlighting that the project does not allow for funding to move across budgets and that this would likely sit within the Castle

Gateway/Market Street properties. If there were any potential delays these would need to be reported back to the department.

It was noted that works continuing beyond the March deadline were funded from other sources and not subject to the same deadlines.

3. Whether any communications were being put out to reassure the public around who ISG are and that there are no issues with the Council appointed contractors?

The Officer confirmed that they believed there were some communications being circulated for approval around Nationwide and ISG.

4. Were any delays expected like those seen with the bandstand due to unforeseen works?

Officers confirmed that investigation works have been carried out and so far nothing has been found to be of archaeological interest and so they do not envisage any major delays with delivering the project.

5. Some Members had attended an event at the college site and that it was a great addition to the town centre.
6. The Committee acknowledged the hard work of the team and the progress being made on the project.

Resolved that the Committee:

**noted the progress and challenges of the programme of works.**

*(Moved by Councillor L Wood and seconded by Councillor B Price)*

It was highlighted that an invitation to the Planning committee to a site visit around the back of the Nationwide building had also been extended to the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Clarke arrive at 18:27pm.

The Chair thanked the Officers and Portfolio Holder and invited them to leave.

## 51 MAINTENANCE OF ESTATES AND OPEN SPACES

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Sustainability, Recycling and Waste, the Assistant Director for Environment, Culture and Wellbeing and the Deputy Operations Manager, Street Scene, to provide a presentation around the maintenance of estates and open spaces within the borough.

The Assistant Director introduced the presentation highlighting the following –

- The team cover a range of services in addition to overseeing parks and open spaces as highlighted in the Powerpoint.
- The team is made up of 61 members of staff, and last year a three person react team was established to respond to enquiries received on a daily basis to avoid taking other Officers off planned maintenance jobs.
- The team work with the Assistant Director, Growth and Regeneration to look at the allocation of 106 monies.

- A breakdown of how much is received from the Housing Revenue Account and how this is distributed was included as requested by the Committee.
- Staffing was highlighted as a service risk (noting the team are currently close to a full team with a tree officer and that they are working on building resilience through multi-skilling within the team). Utilising technology was also identified, and they were looking at how they could utilise technology to improve efficiencies.
- Reporting routes were highlights and how these allow the team to track responses.
- Last year the team received 3224 service requests in addition to their day-to-day tasks.
- With regards to tree maintenance, it was confirmed that where there were trees that were dead, dying, diseased these would be removed and those likely to cause damage would be assessed. Some trees are owned by the County and some are covered by TPO's which can impact what work is done and how quickly. Where there is damage caused by weather the Council will react irrelevant of whose responsibility it is.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

1. Thanks to the Officers for providing some really useful context to how issues with tree are managed.
2. Whether there are any timescales for responding to reports around issues with trees?  
Officers confirmed that there are no timescales as it is very difficult to plan as every tree is different and workloads can change with one storm however that dead/dying/diseased or likely to cause damage are a priority and are dealt with as soon as they can. It was highlighted that tree works can only be carried out by someone qualified.
3. Members highlighted issues with trees particularly close to footpaths and that they have problems with getting the County Council to pick these up. Offices acknowledged this and confirmed that trees on major trunk routes, major footpaths and interlinking footpaths are mainly County trees however there is crossover on places close to roads/footpaths and these need to be checked, however if they are touch houses or low hanging the Council will go out and deal with them.  
Officers signposted Members to where jobs can be reported to Staffordshire County Council confirming that there are two different tree departments, highways and opens spaces.  
Officers confirmed that in circumstances where tree roots were damaging footpaths, if the Council or SCC were going to dig out roots that would kill or damage the tree then the tree would be removed, however a healthy tree would not be removed if the footpath could be repaired without damaging the tree.  
Where trees may be overhanging properties common law states that the Council does not need to prevent their trees, shrubs or bushes from growing into somebodies' property, they are also not allowed to enter private property to cut the trees, however the person whose property it is, is able to cut trees back (permission would be required where there is a

TPO in place). If climbing was required to carry out the work, then this would be done by the Council.

The Committee acknowledged that this area was not straight forward.

4. How Communications were used to report to residents how maintenance work was carried out?

Officers confirmed that there were starting the process of being more proactive on social media to show before and after works, and this could be used to remind residents how to report issues. It was highlighted that they are looking at putting together a comprehensive frequently asked questions for residents. Members acknowledged that this is a good idea but should be made more accessible than just on the internet.

Officers confirmed that they were engaging with the tenant's consultative group to have this in their newsletter and could also look to have hard copies at engagement points.

5. Clarification around systems used to identify information relating to trees and whether there was a centralised system.

It was confirmed that work was being done on streamlining data.

6. Whether more use of apprentices was being considered as this has proven successful?

It was confirmed that they have seen apprentices move successfully into regular employment.

7. The Committee highlighted that educating residents on what they were responsible for and what County were responsible for was important and a recommendation to Cabinet was proposed to look at how the Council inform the public of the services that the Council, SCC and Highways are responsible for.

Members also noted that it was important that children were educated on what the Council do and how much it costs them to pick up litter and what else that money could be spent on (I.e. play parks) to encourage them not to drop litter.

The Committee also acknowledged that Members also had a responsibility to inform residents.

8. Whether certain areas were a priority over other in terms of maintenance on open spaces?

Officers confirmed that there was not. Teams try to work effectively to move across the borough to complete cyclical maintenance for areas such as grass cutting and trimming hedges and shrubs however this can be disrupted by factors such as bird nesting season and the weather, an example was given of a very wet season where the usual mowing machine was unable to cope with the long wet grass so there was a delay due to needing to bring in other equipment.

9. Clarification around the collection of green waste such as grass cuttings and if they could collect green waste collected by residents after storms. It was confirmed that they do not collect grass cuttings, these would not be left on footpaths but if there was an issue then they can use a sweeper to move them.

It was confirmed that they could not collect from private land, but they could if it was Council land/green spaces.

10. Whether there were issues with staffing?

Officers confirmed that they were in a much better position staffing wise however if more maintenance was required that more staff/equipment would be required.

The Chair highlighted that following a visit to the depot it was discussed that a bank cutting machine would help the team and recommendation was proposed for Cabinet to investigate this.

11. Whether the Council and their suppliers use peat-free compost?

Officers confirmed that as part of their Nature Declaration they use peat-free compost when replenishing beds and are also working towards greater sustainability when planting.

12. Whether advertisements on roundabouts could be taken down where they are not currently providing an income?

Officers confirmed that they could take this away and check.

13. The Committee acknowledged the vast variety of important work that Street Scene carry out.

Councillor N Statham left the meeting at 19:38.

Resolved that the Committee made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. That the Council investigates how it could provide an educational programme to inform residents of the services that Tamworth Borough Council are responsible for and what the County are responsible for.

*(Moved by Councillor B Price and Seconded by Councillor L Wood)*

2. Investigate the purchase of a bank cutting machine.

*(Moved by Councillor M Clarke and seconded by Council C Adams).*

## **52 WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

There were no updates.

## **53 FORWARD PLAN**

The following items were requested from the Forward Plan –

Updated Asset Management Strategy – 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Food Waste Service – 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024

## **54 INFRASTRUCTURE SAFETY & GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN**

The Chair confirmed that the following items were planned for the next meeting

- Community safety Update
- Climate Change Update
- Joint Waste Service (Briefing Note)

It was highlighted that as there were no update to the Nature Recovery Declaration that the next update be in the new year.

The Committee acknowledged that they could not look at all of the items at the next meeting and it was agreed that the Chair would look at how the work could be managed after the meeting and come back to the Committee.

---

Chair