

REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCILLORS' REPORTS



Report Reference C-22-15
Meeting Date 5th September 2022
Agenda Item 8
Prepared by Town Clerk

REPORT OF CLLR QUENTIN ABEL

I had the pleasure of representing Cheshire East and Knutsford welcoming the cultural attaché from The Japanese embassy, to the Tatton Park Japanese Garden. As chair of Tatton Board. This Japanese festival event and cultural exchange is a very worthwhile and was well attended. The beauty of the Japanese garden and the elements that it contains are very thoughtful and interesting and most importantly sustainable. There are lessons that we could learn from and develop in the model of Garden.

ROAD SERVICES SURFACES

I am sorry at this stage to report this is an ongoing issue. This is with particular regard to both Cranford Avenue and St John's Road. The ward councillors for Knutsford jointly asked for these roads to be repaired when given the opportunity by the late Brian Roberts.

We have a standards officer now Cheshire East appointed to look into these sorts of concerns. They are certainly is not of the standard that I was anticipating and hoping for, based on the amount of extra money being sourced to do long term repairs.

THE FLOOD TASK AND FINISH GROUP

This is a cross-party group. The work of which, I consider as environment and climate change champion for Cheshire East to be incredibly important. The remit should be changed to Water Management, for both flooding and draught prevention.

With the increased rate of climate change across the globe. We and Cheshire East need to be acting more intelligently. We need to cater for both increased reflow rainfall and for drought. So far, we have been lucky and have not really sustained a terrible flood situation. We have of course seen some effects of low rainfall. Nothing like the rest of the UK though.

With good management of water, we can look after this valuable resource for times of drought. And make the effects of heavy downpours easy to restrain and not cause flooding downstream from our catchment areas. This is so important for the maintenance of our carbon capture protection of our wildlife. And health and well-being of our population.

REPORT OF CLLR TONY DEAN

August is traditionally a blank month for local authorities, with no meetings except Planning Committee meetings. This is slowly changing and this year there was a meeting of my Environment and Communities Committee on August 4th and also other *ad hoc* meetings in August for items such as UU's proposed improvements to the sewage pumping station above the Moor, and the Town Centre Vitality Plan (which the Town Council has a pre-consultation briefing on)

In terms of the pumping station, UU have £11.2m to spend on making the sewage pumping station more sustainable in the future (a much reduced frequency of overflow into the Moor Pool). This work is required due to the increasing frequency and severity of storm level rainfall events. This was an initial meeting where they showed us various options which are being considered and asking for our early feedback. The work will involve burying a storm water storage tank and possibly other works that may help reduce the size of the tank required. No point in giving more detail at this stage as a favoured option has not been identified, and each option will have slightly different effects for the Town Council to consider. Watch this space.

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

The August agenda contained several items, but I will concentrate on the two that are of interest to the Town Council: Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), and Taxi Licensing Policy Update.

As you know, when a developer of a significant new housing project is granted permission, this comes with a requirement to pay both Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and also more specific Section 106 (s.106) payments. The former is a general payment calculated on the size of the development and split between CEC and the relevant Town or Parish Council, for spending on planned infrastructure projects in their area of responsibility. The current rule for s.106 payments, however, is that they have to be specific to the community's requirements for health and education provision as well as highways improvements, outdoor amenity areas etc. But these monies can only be raised for the proven extra need in each category created by that particular development alone.

The new SPD, which has been subject to two rounds of consultation, updates the Council's policies for agreeing these sums with developers, and they are then secured by individual contracts. Committee members complained about the lack of visibility of existing s.106 sums that had been agreed and contracted for new developments. Officers stated that the old manual records system for s.106 contracts had been replaced by a new digital system and that this information would now be much easier to access. Complaints were also made about the extreme time delays, once a development had been finished and the s.106 monies received, in getting any actual physical works done - e.g. play areas refurbished. Officers asked for known delayed projects to be listed and sent to them for a response - are there any significantly delayed Knutsford s.106 projects known to Town Councillors?

One other issue - the government has apparently flagged its intention to combine CIL and s.106 monies in future, which is intended to make the use of these developer contributions more flexible. This would be good if it does happen, but would need to be carefully monitored to ensure Knutsford developments' CIL/s.106 monies were spent as much as possible in the Knutsford area - once the currently individually contracted s.106 monies go into a joint pot with CIL then CEC might be able to spend Knutsford's s.106 monies in Crewe, as they can now with their portion of the CIL. This will depend on how the combination of funds is worked when and if it happens.

The main issue that Councillors have with taxi licensing in Cheshire East is the one that the Council can do nothing about - taxis coming in from outside Cheshire East and 'stealing' customers from our own licensed cabbies - often by illegally accepting customers who have not pre-booked. This is a national issue and no government seems willing to tackle it. Cheshire East in the meantime is tightening its security requirements and driver behaviour rules, but surprisingly intends to keep its three separate historical licensing zones (Macclesfield, Congleton, Crewe and Nantwich), each with their own slightly different pricing rules. This update to licensing policy has also had two full rounds of consultation.

REPORT OF CLLR STEWART GARDINER

ADULTS & HEALTH COMMITTEE

The Committee approved a pilot scheme was approved to assist pregnant women and other people in their household who smoke to give up. Although within Cheshire East our smoking levels are well below those for the nation at large, with regards to women who smoke during pregnancy our figures are well above the national average. The financial incentive will be paid in stages both across the pregnancy and early months of the child's life. Data suggests this scheme has worked well elsewhere within the UK and if the pilot is a success, it will be carried out across the Borough.

The Committee considered the roles, responsibilities and regulations of the Council with regards to the ICB which came into being in July and replaced the Clinical Commissioning Groups. I have continued to raise concerns about the ability of this new set up to be effective at a local level given both the size of the area covered by the new system and the power of the big cities in determining how money is allocated.

The Committee agreed to the closure of the Brocklehurst Dementia Day Care facility in Macclesfield with Services moving to the Mayfield Centre a short distance away where the facilities are better suited to the client group. This move reflects the wishes of the majority of service users and practices employed after lockdown.

CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE

I raised several points of concern regarding the Council's Performance Outturn Report, which I couldn't support because there were several issues which had not been appropriately addressed in report presented to the Committee.

The Committee considered the Council's Strategic Risk Policy and the Consultation Strategy. I raised a question about the level of diversity found within Cheshire East and how this was presented in the report. However the officer determined that diversity did not just related to issues pertaining to protected characteristics but to issues of rural v urban and the issues relating to different socio-economic groupings.

We also considered CEC's allocation of the Shared Prosperity Fund which is designed to replace EU funding that CEC could apply for.

FINANCE SUB COMMITTEE

The committee considered a report about the provisional Financial outturn for the year 2021/22, which showed the Council was in a positive position financially, helped in no small part to the

additional funding provided directly by Government during the pandemic. However there remains the issue of the reserves which, when the general reserve is taken in concert with the MTFs reserve is far above what is deemed appropriate.

The Committee also considered the financial aspects of CEC's allocation of the Shared Prosperity Fund.

There was consideration of the procurement procedures, including some confidential items.

The Committee discussed the Medium Financial Strategy to date, which showed a fairly positive position.

The Committee agreed the appointment of two new members to the Board of Orbitas – both members were from Wilmslow.

The Committee considered a report about the Council's Built Assets (which included holdings within Knutsford) and plans for potential disposal, but the precise details would wait, pending a review of the Council's post-Covid operational needs. Some of these matters were discussed in confidential session.

STRATEGIC PLANNING BOARD

The Strategic Planning Board has had two of its last three meetings cancelled owing to there being insufficient items being sufficiently advanced to allow them to be considered. This is likely to result in further delays in items coming forward in a timely manner.

COACH PARKING PROVISION

Following representations from Knutsford Heritage Centre concerning the availability of coach parking within Knutsford, I requested a meeting to discuss this with officers. The meeting was held on 31st August and attended by the Town Clerk and the heads of the Cheshire East Council Transport and Assets departments.

Officers agreed to investigate the conversion of the uncontrolled parking spaces within the bus station to create two coach parking bays. The idea of converting the unused bus stop on Canute Place to a third coach parking bay was also suggested. Officers undertook to investigate the council's title for the area to check there are no restrictions and to develop a proposal for the management of the parking spaces for consideration.