

Place Select Committee
Overview Meeting 2023
10 July 2023
Community Services, Environment and Culture

Context

Members are reminded of the Council's Vision that supports decision-making:

A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm where:

- This means the Borough will be a place where:
 - People live in cohesive and safe communities
 - People are supported and protected from harm
 - People live health lives

- This means that the Borough will have:
 - A growing economy
 - Improved education and skills development
 - Job creation and increased employment

- This means we will enjoy:
 - Great places to live and visit
 - Clean and green spaces
 - Rich cultural experiences

The Council plays its part in making sure this is achieved by being a Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve.

Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan was reported on a six-monthly basis to Executive Scrutiny Committee. Please see the link:

<http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=SCR>

Community Services, Environment and Culture Director – Reuben Kench

Relevant services include:

- Environment, Leisure & Green Infrastructure
- Community Services

Council Plan 2023-2026

The Council Plan sets out the aims and objectives for all services and is refreshed on an annual basis.

The key priorities for Community Services, Environment and Culture are attached at Appendix 1.

Emerging Issues

Service delivery is influenced by a range of internal and external factors that develop over time. Emerging challenges and opportunities are summarised as follows:

Environment, Leisure & Green Infrastructure – Priorities for the year ahead

Delivery of the Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Strategy actions

Good progress has been made to deliver actions in 2022/23, the need to advance the progress of the actions is ever increasing.

For the year ahead we will continue to set internal actions for service areas whilst monitoring and evaluation of progress against the baseline. In terms of the authority achieving Net Zero by 2032 we will be concentrating upon transport and our built assets; these two areas have the potential to significantly reduce our carbon emissions. Our fleet renewal program will require significant investment (as mentioned below) whilst reducing our asset base will result in reductions in liabilities.

We will continue to investigate alternative fuel sources and monitor the price gap associated with 'green' fuel sources, including HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil) as a direct replacement to power our heavier diesel vehicles. HVO is likely to be one of the most cost-effective ways of reducing our fleet carbon emissions.

Climate Coalitions

Four, supported climate coalitions were formed in 2023.

The coalitions are thematic, supported by SBC but independently chaired:

- Young people
- Creative sector
- Businesses
- Communities

In the forthcoming year we will be concentrating each of the coalitions to ensure the support and governance is appropriate, whilst encouraging each to develop a robust action plan for

future delivery. Each of these coalitions are vital to the Borough achieving the Government targets of Net Zero by 2050.

Nature Recovery

We will input to the preparation of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for the Tees Valley. This will form part of an England-wide system of spatial strategies that will establish priorities and map proposals to drive nature's recovery. It will also set out "nature-based solutions" to help address wider environmental problems like flooding and poor-quality water and contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Tees Valley Combined Authority is the "responsible authority" for the preparation of the LNRS, but the Council along with other members of the Tees Valley Nature Partnership have a key role to play in the development of the strategy and its delivery through action on the ground.

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) will support nature recovery through the planning system by ensuring that, from November 2023 onwards, habitats are in a better state for wildlife than they were before development. That uplift in value is to be measured in biodiversity units and work is on-going to determine the current value of a number of Council-owned habitats with a possible view to 'marketing' those sites to developers who may purchase biodiversity credits to mitigate for any habitat loss on their development sites. The Council can then use that income to improve the biodiversity value of that land and maintain it for a 30-year period. This approach has the combined benefit of helping to achieve nature recovery and facilitating development within the Borough.

Tackling home energy efficiency

The UK currently has some of the least energy efficient homes in Europe. Home energy upgrades could help households save between £400 and £700 a year on their energy bills at current prices whilst reducing their carbon impact. We will continue to look for additional grant funding whilst delivering the highly successful Warm Homes Healthy People Project [Warm Homes Healthy People - Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council](#).

Delivery of the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Space strategy actions

Following the Council adoption of the latest Playing Pitch and Outdoor Space Strategy we will be continuing to explore and secure grant funding opportunities to develop facilities and pitches. We will explore opportunities to improve pitch condition and quality whilst progressing Football Foundation Hub project capital grant funding for a central sports hub in Billingham.

Improving the management and engagement within our country parks and green spaces

The Stockton-on-Tees Green Infrastructure Strategy was developed and adopted in 2011 and now requires an update and refresh. The development of a robust green space strategy document will take place in 2023, which will provide a robust framework to steer our future management and engagement.

Encouraging greater commitment from communities will be a priority in the development and management in our Country Parks and green spaces. Management plans will be continued to be developed for all destination sites which will allow greater focus and improvements.

Delivering a large number of small scale capital projects to enhance greenspaces and play.

The team will continue to develop and deliver a large number of small-scale play and greenspace 'capital' projects utilising developer contributions. We will be continuing this

work whilst providing expert knowledge, guidance and challenge to the delivery of the large-scale developments.

Tree planting and woodland management

We will continue to expand our tree canopy cover but with the same ethos of planting the right tree in the right place, this ensures that future maintenance liabilities are kept to a minimum. We will be taking full advantage of the TVCA Woodland creation accelerator funding. An officer will be hosted by SBC and will concentrate upon opening up private land for tree planting, we will also continue to engage with communities and businesses to enable greater ownership of our trees and natural resources.

Billingham Beck

Although it pre-dated the current legislation on biodiversity net gain, developer contributions through an existing Section 106 Agreement are being used to part-fund a major habitat restoration project at Billingham Beck Valley Country Park. Due to be implemented in autumn/winter 2023/4 it will achieve a measurable uplift in the biodiversity value of the park.

Environment, Leisure & Green Infrastructure – Challenges and opportunities

Nature based solutions

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) will support nature recovery through the planning system by ensuring that, from November 2023 onwards, habitats are in a better state for wildlife than they were before development. This net gain can be effectively 'stacked' with other opportunities such as changing land use to mitigate for nutrients flowing into our watercourses. This combined funding will not only provide us with the ability to improve our habitats but also allow for greater carbon sequestration and flood alleviation measures.

Private sector investment

Increasingly private sector companies are showing an interest in investment opportunities utilising our assets. Careful consideration will need to be given to opportunities to invest in EV charging infrastructure, solar installations, battery technology and our green infrastructure. This could be a significant opportunity in terms of capital investment and continued upgrade of our assets.

EV charging infrastructure

With the prohibition of the sale of new private petrol and diesel vehicles on the horizon (2030), the race to improve our publicly accessible EV infrastructure is a significant challenge. For householder without off street parking, considering the switch to electric vehicles public infrastructure is essential. We are noticing an increasing demand without the necessary resources to deliver solutions.

In the move to decarbonise our fleet vehicles, infrastructure (and resources) will be needed to allow for electrification.

Funding for the maintenance of our parks and green spaces

Our country parks and play parks are a considerable asset to our residents, but also a significant liability in terms of maintenance and management. The gap between our liabilities and available revenue allocation is widening.

Play facilities will be subject to a scrutiny to review whether the current combination of larger destination/neighborhood sites and smaller local sites best meets local needs. In addition, all sites are subject to challenge relating to accessibility and play value, and our approach to both will be reviewed.

Funding for improving the efficiency of our assets

A regular check of funding sources is undertaken to improve the efficiency of our built assets. Upgrades to lighting, heating and insulation are needed to ensure that our energy is used efficiently reducing carbon and costs. Funding is usually a competitive process and therefore a challenge to identify, prepare and submit applications.

Community Services - Priorities for the year ahead

Continue programme of road and pavement maintenance and repairs

The current cost to replace Stockton's highway asset would be in excess of £1.7bn making it the most valuable asset the Council is responsible for. The Council receives approximately half the budget it needs to keep our assets (carriageways, footways, streetlights, bridges etc.) at a steady state. The highway asset is vital for the local economy and the residents' quality of life. Keeping Stockton moving is one of our key priorities and good quality highway infrastructure is essential for Stockton's economic prospects and resident's quality of life. Along with carrying out the delivery of our annual programme of road and pavement maintenance and repairs priority will be given to moving forward major maintenance schemes at Newport, Transporter and Billingham Beck bridges.

Pothole Fund Allocation 2023/24

In March Budget 2023, the Combined Authority was allocated just over £2m. Of this, Stockton has been allocated £561,149 of funding. Discussions have taken place between Strategic highway managers and Operational teams and priorities have been agreed to maximise the funding outcomes across the Borough. Working with external partners, areas have been agreed with some larger schemes being delivered by Tarmac and more routine repairs being delivered using existing internal Highways staff. Areas targeted will be aligned to those areas which are in greatest need of works and will be completed across the entire borough.

Deliver the major transport-related projects for Stockton

The Councils Highways, Transport and Design team will continue to support the delivery of a series of major transport-related projects such as Eaglescliffe Station improvements, Elton Interchange, and improvements along the A689 corridor. The successful delivery of these projects will help continue to grow the economy by facilitating development and creating jobs, improving accessibility to essential services and help tackle climate change by reducing congestion and encouraging the use of sustainable transport.

Support the Combined Authority and Bus Operators in delivering the agreed outcomes and objectives set out in the Tees Valley Enhanced Bus Partnership Plan and Scheme

Following the Covid pandemic the government continues to provide financial support to the bus sector to ensure the continued provision of services despite significantly reduced passenger numbers. This funding was intended to support the bus sectors return to financial sustainability however, due to the increasing costs of running bus services and reducing

patronage numbers, bus operators are making cuts to services. The Governments Bus Back Better national bus strategy required operators and transport authorities to publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and implement an Enhanced Partnership (EP) to be eligible for future funding to support bus provision. The TVCA have published the Tees Valley BSIP and entered into an enhanced partnership with operators. The Council will continue to work with the TVCA and Bus Operators in delivering the agreed outcomes and objectives set out in the Tees Valley BSIP, play an active part in the enhanced partnership and look to minimise the impact of bus service cuts to our residents.

Cemeteries Drainage Improvements Scheme

In 2022, the Council approved funding to support drainage improvement across Cemeteries at Durham Road and Thornaby. This work is necessary to alleviate an ongoing flooding problem around grave areas in the cemetery. As burial space increases the demands on current drainage has been exceeded this work will ensure that current and future burial space is fit for purpose and that family member visiting graves can do so safely and in a way that allows good ground conditions for all visitors. This work is complex and has been developed using assistance from specialist land advisor with extensive experience in this area.

The work is split into 3 Phases:

- Thornaby Phase 1 – Tender Return
- Thornaby Phase 2 – Tender Issue Stage
- Durham Road – Tender Issue Stage

The overall budget allocated for the works is £286,000. Once we have the completed tenders for the three phases, we will look at tendered return prices against identified capital budget and if within the available budget, works will be awarded. We hope to award all three phases and to complete works by the end of summer 2023

Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) Contract

The current HWRC, which is located on Haverton HILL Road, is a shared facility with Middlesbrough Borough Council and is managed on a 55%/45% split, with Stockton responsible for the higher 55% portion. The current contract with SUEZ expired in 2021 although there is a current extension until April 2024. Stockton, on behalf of both authorities have led on extending that contract several times and are in the process of one final contract extension taking us to April 2026; this will be the final extension at our current site due to SUEZ looking at alternative business opportunities for this land. A project group, consisting of officers from Community Services, Finance, Procurement and Inclusive Growth have been working on identifying land for a new HWRC. A formal bid has now been submitted on a preferred site and details can be shared in due course. The project group will need to use this year to finalise the purchase contract, undertake market engagement with potential bidders, for the design build and operate of a new HWRC, before undertaking the tender process. This is a significant piece of work which will ensure the Council meet its statutory duty in providing a HWRC for our residents.

Waste and Recycling

The next few years will be extremely challenging both in terms of significant increases in the disposal fee as well as nationally mandated waste changes. In April 2026, Stockton's current Tees Valley waste disposal contract, managed by SUEZ, will come to a natural end. A new

waste disposal contract, alongside 6 other regional local authorities (Stockton, Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, Newcastle and Durham) will be introduced, with the winning bidder taking responsibility for our waste from April 2026. The procurement for this new contract is coming to the final stages and the location of the new Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) development will be at the South Tees Development Corporation (STDC) in Redcar.

Due to the proposed increase in gate fees relating to waste disposal as part of the new contract, it becomes imperative that Stockton consider alternative ways in which recycling can be increased significantly in order to reduce the amount of waste that is disposed of via the waste contract.

Waste Strategy Consultations

The Environment Act 2021 became law in November 2021, introducing changes to waste collection so that recyclable household waste (which includes food waste) which must be 'collected separately from other household waste'. The legislation also states that food waste must be collected at least once weekly.

Stockton, along with the other Tees Valley Councils, have had notice from DEFRA that we will be eligible under transitional arrangements for a start date of April 2026 to introduce mandatory weekly food waste collections. Whilst the scheme launches nationally from April 2025, all TV LA's applied for (and received) approval to commence the service at the same time as the new waste contract commences in April 2026. This transitional arrangement is due to contractual penalties on our main waste disposal contract if the TV councils do not deliver an annual guaranteed minimum tonnage (180k tonnes pa), until the end of the contract.

Mandatory food waste collections do mean that we will need to review our overall waste collection model, as all best practice and national guidance suggests that weekly food waste collections do not deliver the desired outcomes with a weekly refuse collections service as participation rates would be minimal. The government will fund food waste under what they reference as 'New Burdens' funding for capital outlays, although we are awaiting details on how a secondary stream of funding for ongoing revenue costs will work.

Cemetery land

Following a previous Place Select Committee scrutiny review, it was recommended that a suitable piece of land for a proposed new cemetery due to the short timescale that we have for the Stockton Central/Western areas. Work has been ongoing with colleagues in Inclusive Growth to identify suitable land which will be secured and the facility delivered to align with current timescales. Durham Road Cemetery extension has a burial expectancy of around 7 years. There is no immediate issue with Billingham Cemetery as capacity stands at over 30 years and Thornaby Cemetery has over 70 years.

Grounds Maintenance

Whilst it is appropriate in many locations of the borough to maintain and cut grass on a regular basis (around 12 working days) there are many areas where we would encourage a more biodiverse or natural approach to management to encourage the enhancement of natural plants and species. This is a key element of our Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Strategy 2022-2032 and as a result work has begun on identifying areas which could be left uncut to promote the many natural benefits.

We have been adopting this approach in a range of locations across the borough for some years and, to illustrate, we tend to leave a natural wildlife corridor of around 1-2 metres where large open areas and field border onto residential properties as this strikes the correct balance between effective maintenance to allow the enjoyment of the open space, whilst attracting plants, insects and animals. A further piece of work will be conducted on future maintenance options in this area by colleagues in the Green Infrastructure Team.

Arboriculture

Some Members will be aware of the recent scrutiny review on Tree Asset Management which was led by the Crime and Disorder Committee. Officers will be working through the recommendations this year which include revising the current policy on tree management and understanding the potential threat of Ash Dieback, a fungus which damages the UK's native ash species.

Community Services – Challenges and opportunities

Support the delivery of the sustainable transport schemes contained within the TVCA's City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement programme for Stockton

The Government's City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) provides the main transport funding for sustainable transport measures in the Tees Valley. It aims to create a more consolidated and devolved model of transport funding and deliver significant improvements for users. The Government has allocated the Tees Valley Combined Authority £310m for the delivery of sustainable transport schemes between 2022 to 2027. The primary objective of these schemes will be to encourage the use of sustainable forms of transport such as rail, bus, walking and cycling. The Council will have to be appropriately resourced and focused to be able to deliver out on this ambitious programme of investment.

Climate Change

Climate Change will increase the amount of adverse weather events putting additional strain on our services and assets. Adverse weather will depreciate them quicker requiring further maintenance and an increase demand on our services with more flooding, extreme heat events and Winter Service demands. There will be an ever increasing need to help with the phasing out of petrol / diesel vehicles and the introduction of more electric and hydrogen vehicles, all the while, continuing to encourage more sustainable forms of transport such as buses, trains, cycling and walking. Progression & delivery of the Tees Tideland Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovation Project will also help mitigate some of the effects of flooding to residents along the River Tees.

Green Fleet Progress

Within Fleet Services, the options to tender for electrical vehicles in all vehicle procurement processes is now mainstream. The ability to purchase electric vehicles remain costly when compared to petrol and diesel vehicles and will clearly be a consideration for the Council in the years ahead, both in terms of the increase in cost per vehicle, as well as the infrastructure costs to support such a transition. There are however signs that the gap is narrowing month on month in the cost differential between diesel and electric variants.

The PV Project within Cowpen Depot has now been completed and electric produced/consumed is now being reviewed to understand impact on current cost of Electric Fleet. Whilst the technology involved in the larger Municipal fleet is still first generation, small vehicles are now readily available and are continuing to grow within our normal fleet turnover

as vehicles are replaced and the use of EV is economic over the life span then this is utilised as the preferred option. Currently we have 6 Full EV's and 3 Hybrid Vehicles across the fleet, including one of the first refuse collection vehicles to put into operational use in the UK.

APPENDIX 1 – COUNCIL PLAN - KEY PRIORITIES 2023-2024 - Community Services, Environment and Culture

A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed means that the Borough will have:

- a growing economy
- improved education and skills development
- job creation and increased employment

We have identified these key priorities for 2023 to 2024 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- advance our major transport-related projects including the Portrack Relief Road, Billingham and Eaglescliffe Station improvements, Elton Interchange, and improvements along the A689 corridor

A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive means we will enjoy:

- great places to live and visit
- clean and green spaces
- rich cultural experiences

We have identified these key priorities for 2023 to 2024 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- finalise the plans for improvements in Yarm, Preston Hall Museum & Grounds and cycleway infrastructure in line with the Levelling Up fund allocation
- continue the programme of road/pavement maintenance and repairs and deliver our City Regions Sustainable Transport programme schemes
- continue implementation of the Carbon Reduction and Environmental Sustainability Strategy action plan which includes coalitions with residents, businesses, and partners
- support the Combined Authority and Bus Operators in delivering the agreed outcomes set out in the Tees Valley Enhanced Bus Partnership Plan and Scheme
- Review waste collection and recycling collection arrangements as part of the scrutiny committee process as well as the Transformation Programme with the aim of increasing recycling rates across the borough and adhering to future government mandated changes in waste collection.