

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

LOCAL COMMITTEE (SURREY HEATH)

DATE: Thursday 3 October 2019

LEAD OFFICER: Nicola Thornton-Bryar, Partnership Committee Officer

SUBJECT: Environmental Commitment

DIVISION: All



SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

Surrey County Council debated and agreed a Motion on their environmental commitment at their meeting on 9 July 2019.

The Local Committee (Surrey Heath) is asked to note the motions and how these may affect the work of the Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Local Committee (Surrey Heath) is asked to note and endorse the report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The report contains details of the County Councils commitments and the Surrey Heath Local Committee is asked to note the detail.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 1.1 The Local Committee (Surrey Heath) is keen to embrace the environmental issues that are important to its residents.
- 1.2 Surrey County Council debated 3 motions at its meeting in July 2019. Some of these motions and resolutions will impact on the work of this Committee and members need to be aware of the intention of the County Council.
- 1.3 The 3 motions were around Climate Change, Trees and Managing verges and the Surrey Heath Local Committee is asked to note the commitments made.

2. DETAILS:

Climate Change

The Prime Minister announced that the UK will eradicate its net contribution to climate change by 2050. The UK is the first country in the G7 to legislate for long-term climate targets, and already leads the world in tackling climate change. The announcement provides a significant opportunity to increase energy efficiency, improve resilience and deliver a greener, healthier society.

The target of net zero emissions will be being enshrined in law in the future and will need to be responded to. The Committee on Climate Change forecasts significant benefits to public health and savings to the NHS from better air quality and less noise pollution, as well as improved biodiversity.

The UK is on track to become the first G7 country to legislate for net zero emissions, with other major economies expected to follow suit. Young people will have the chance to shape the future climate policy through the Youth Steering Group, set up by DCMS and led by the British Youth Council, who will advise Government on priorities for environmental action and give a view on progress to date against existing commitments on climate, waste and recycling, and biodiversity loss.

Surrey County Council therefore resolved to:

1. Commit to working closely with the Government, the Environment Agency, Borough & District colleagues, local businesses, residents and other partners in meeting the ambitious target.
2. Deliver a strategy in 2019/20 involving a task group that clearly outlines how they plan to deliver the target including actions that will be taken.
3. Write to the government asking them to confirm what support will be made available to local authorities to help achieve this goal.
4. Declare a 'Climate Emergency', and commit actions to support businesses and all local authorities in their work to tackle climate change by providing a strong unified voice for councils in lobbying for support to address this emergency, and share best practice across all councils.

Trees

Trees are important in slowing the pace of climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen into the air, as well as providing a habitat for wildlife. Trees make a valuable contribution to the environment in towns including shading and cooling, pollution and noise mitigation, as well speeding up floodwater drainage and improving the quality of our street scene.

Central Government pledged in 2018 to plant 11 million new trees by 2050, including in towns and urban areas, together with the appointment of a national Tree Champion with a remit to make this happen.

In support of the national campaign to increase the number of trees being planted, particularly in towns, Surrey County Council therefore:

- I. Called for a review of Surrey County Council's current policies on, and attitude towards, the planting of trees in urban areas with a view to introducing a more proactive policy, which looks to increase the number and regularity of trees planted;
- II. Called for the new strategy to include providing opportunities to educate children in understanding the benefits of trees and to get involved in tree planting;
- III. Recommends closer partnership working with Borough and District Councils, and landowners seeking sites for new tree planting; and
- IV. Recommends that Surrey Highways take advantage of any outside funding to assist with costs, including any Borough and District schemes that enable residents and community groups to fund the planting and future maintenance of trees.

Managing Verges for Wildlife

Surrey County Council is responsible for managing highway verges and related highway owned land. This includes the cutting of verges and the use of weed killer. The way in which it manages this land has an impact on wildlife and amenity.

Surrey's highway verges being cut several times each year means verges may be cut before many wildflower plants have had a chance to flower. Wildflowers need to be available for insects when in flower and to be left long enough to have seeded before being cut. Cutting regimes should be timed to allow wildflower verges to self-perpetuate and improve the wildlife value of verges.

9 out of the 11 Districts and Boroughs manage highway verge cutting and since last year the minimum number of cuts suggested by the County Council has reduced from 7 in urban areas to 4.

Surrey County Council noted that its contracts for management of its highway verges include the use of Glyphosate weed killer. However, the County Council has a legal obligation to treat and contain some injurious weeds, such as Japanese knotweed, in the most effective manner. Other councils, including Croydon and Lewis, have committed to be pesticide free, the latter successfully adopting weed killer-free alternatives after six months of trials.

Surrey County Council therefore agreed to work with the Districts and Boroughs to:

- a. Produce a pollinator action plan for the next contract period,
- b. Review and reduce the frequency of highway verge cuts where it is both safe and desirable to do so,
- c. Assist in the management of verges and timings of cuts to promote wildlife habitats.
- d. Communicate to residents via their website and social media the reasons for the changes to the frequency of the cuts, explaining the benefits this can have on the wildlife habitat; and
- e. To trial more environmentally friendly alternatives on the highway and review outcomes after one full cycle use, and then look to reduce the use of glyphosate based on the results of these trials if cost effective to do so.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 8.1 The Local Committee is asked to note the agreed actions of the County Council.

Contact Officer: Nicola Thornton-Bryar, Partnership Committee Officer (Surrey Heath and Woking)

Sources/background papers: Surrey County Council papers – July 2019
