

CABINET – 26 JULY 2022**PROCEDURAL MATTERS****Public Questions****Question (1): Malcolm Robertson**

The Charlton Lane incinerator is said to have restarted on the 25th June 2021. Since that time it has operated sporadically, although it is said to have completed 60 days continuous operation pre Christmas 2021. I believe the incinerator has now completed a further 90 day operation.

I am very grateful for the Cabinet Member for Property and Waste's response to me in May in which she told me that Suez would be measuring fuel use as part of its performance testing at 4000 and 8000 hours. As the 4000 hour performance target must now have passed, may I ask you to provide details of the gasoil used during that period, together with the amount of waste incinerated during that same time?

Reply:

Based on the information provided by Suez, the gasifier processed 13,447 tonnes of refuse-derived fuel during the period 1 January 2022 to 31 May 2022. During the same period 83,733 gallons of gasoil were used by the plant and 4,134 MWh of electricity was exported to the local grid, which is enough to power 2659 homes during the period 1 January 2022 to 31 May 2022.

As the plant is now operational, SUEZ is working to optimise the performance of the gasification facility and reduce the use of support fuel. Support fuel is primarily used in the gasification process in order to maintain temperature during start up, ensuring that the temperature is stable and at the correct level to safely introduce waste as the primary fuel. Support fuel is also used on shut down, again to control the temperature and ensure emissions are kept well within permitted levels. SUEZ have identified a number of changes that will reduce fuel oil usage and which will be implemented for the next gasifier run planned to commence at the beginning of August.

Natalie Bramhall
Cabinet Member for Property and Waste
26 July 2022

Question (2): Jenny Desoutter

In response to the twin crises of Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss that threaten both humanity and our planet, Surrey County Council has adopted a comprehensive strategy to address Climate Change, but there is a perception that little so far is being done to address Surrey's dramatic loss of Biodiversity, despite the shocking fact that in Surrey one third of all species are either lost or in decline. Ironically, public enthusiasm for nature is adding to the urgency, creating increasing pressure on habitats so that Biodiversity loss is happening incrementally and unnoticed day and

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night by a thousand tiny, casual, unintentional cuts. There is no time to lose. But fortunately, having recently taken back control of the Countryside Estate, SCC have a massive opportunity in their hands to take action and make a difference. I understand that following recruitment of a team to implement the Climate Change Delivery Plan, and subsequent to the retirement earlier this year of the County Ecologist, SCC are currently in process of recruiting a post of Natural Environment Strategic Lead. Given the urgency of the need, and in light of SCC's responsibilities as a 28G authority, can SCC please state:

If and when the Council will give equal priority, supported by equivalent resources in terms of both funding and crucially by an adequate team of personnel with appropriate ecological expertise to support the new Lead, to setting out and implementing a clear, up to date 'Biodiversity Action Plan for Surrey' to complement the Climate Change Delivery Plan; and in particular so as to ensure that the two plans are closely linked, and that, for example, the impacts of initiatives such as the planting of trees in this most wooded County are considered also in context of impacts on Biodiversity, and that no unnecessary actions (whether or not legally requiring an EIA) are taken which might cause further accidental loss of fragile Biodiversity in its Countryside Estate?

Reply:

We know a high-quality natural environment is vital to us all in Surrey. From our back gardens and streets to our rivers and protected heathlands and ancient woodlands – a stable and functioning natural environment is fundamental to our health and economy, and well as delivery of our climate change targets. To deliver this outcome, we must be joined up in addressing two key and equally important challenges of climate change, as well as the loss of habitats and species.

In addition to compliance with our statutory duties for biodiversity, our Climate Change Delivery Plan, approved in 2021, integrates biodiversity and climate change under the 'Grow Back Greener' programme. This includes the Council working with communities and boroughs and districts to develop a Land Management Framework and a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Surrey, to embed a climate resilient, low carbon and high biodiversity approach across our estate and major infrastructure programmes and delivery of target initiatives, such as tree planting.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy, a partnership strategy, is being developed with Surrey local authorities, landowners, local groups and the Surrey Nature Partnership will involve the production of a clear spatial framework with a statutory basis under the Environment Act, to inform land use decisions and channel investment into local priorities for nature recovery. By consolidating and communicating our shared priorities, the strategy will help restore links between fragmented habitats and support landowners and developers to design, build and operate, for nature. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy builds on the firm foundations of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas developed by the Surrey Nature Partnership in the past decade, and the preceding Biodiversity Action Plan for Surrey. With new delivery mechanisms by way of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain in the planning system and new agri-environment financial incentives, there will be clear routes for implementation of the strategy.

In support of the Nature Recovery Strategy, the Council is developing a new Land Management Policy for its own land and is currently identifying areas across all its land

holdings for further habitat creation and enhancement. For example, this year it has stopped mowing to create six hectares of new meadow at operational sites and is working with its farming tenants to look at managing farmland for nature. The Council is also recruiting an Ecologist to ensure all works on the Countryside Estate and public rights of way minimise any disruption to nature and liaise directly with local conservation groups to deliver opportunities for biodiversity enhancement.

The Council, with the AONB, is also facilitating the distribution of the 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' fund which supports farmers to deliver positive biodiversity and climate outcomes in the Surrey Hills AONB.

On major infrastructure, we are working closely with the Environment Agency on River Thames Scheme to ensure that infrastructure for flood protection also not only protects existing biodiversity, but also creates new habitats and connections across the landscape. For nature conservation and public access in the countryside, the Council co-ordinates volunteers to restore and maintain sites through three Countryside Management Partnerships. Alongside this, the Council has recently supported the purchase of Tice's Meadow near Farnham, where a former quarry has been restored to provide a lake and reedbeds for migratory birds. The purchase will ensure the site is protected for nature conservation purposes

Tree planting in Surrey is also supporting delivery of our biodiversity priorities. For example, by planting native hedgerows and planting more street trees, both of which can provide connectivity between wildlife habitats and have valuable benefits to communities. Also, the Council sources trees for planting solely from UK nurseries, ensuring high bio-security standards. The council takes a "right tree in the right place" approach meaning that areas such as chalk grassland sites or heathland areas, are not subject to tree planting initiatives.

To support this work, the Council has already recruited an additional post to focus on land use management and is currently recruiting for a Natural Environment Strategic Lead. The Council is also developing additional ecological expertise within our Natural Capital and Countryside Estate site management teams, this includes woodland management, an estate ecologist, as well as increasing training for existing staff in ecology and conservation to mainstream nature recovery. The Council is working with the Surrey Nature Partnership including the Wildlife Trust, to draw on the extensive local knowledge and experience across the public and third sector and ensure that ecology and biodiversity are embedded into all relevant Council decisions.

There is still much to do, but significant steps have been made to lay the foundations for meaningful nature recovery in Surrey.

Marisa Heath
Cabinet Member for Environment
26 July 2022

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