

CABINET – 28 MARCH 2023**PROCEDURAL MATTERS****Public Questions:****Question (1): James King**

Residents in my local community, in the vicinity of the County Council's main office, Woodhatch Place, have suffered the poor road surface of the A217, Woodhatch Road and Prices Lane junction, just a few hundred yards from here, for many years.

Recently it has become worse than ever, and the road markings are no longer visible. This has caused several accidents and many near misses. Patch repairs haven't worked and are breaking up, the surface is hazardous to cyclists, motorcyclists, car users and other vehicles, and the missing markings lead to drivers not being able to safely navigate the busy junction even at low speed, unless they happen to be familiar with it.

This is one of the main access routes to Reigate Town Centre, on a popular route for commuters and users of Gatwick Airport, and near to Reigate's only state secondary school, with lots of students crossing the junction as pedestrians to get to school.

What plans do the County Council have for making this junction safe in the short term, by properly resurfacing and remarking the junction?

Reply:

Surrey Highways are aware of the poor condition of Cockshot Hill and the Woodhatch junction and a full resurfacing scheme has been planned, however road space has not been available due to works planned by UK Power Networks to carry out a high voltage cable replacement along the A217 and through the junction. The resurfacing works were also being planned to co-ordinate with longer term plans to carry out a large-scale improvement of the junction in conjunction with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.

Given the ever-deteriorating condition of the road surface of the junction and the longer-term timescales of the junction improvement works, we are carrying out some large patches of surfacing as an interim measure in Woodhatch Road and Prices Lane on Friday 24th March.

Our highway teams are liaising with UK Power Networks to determine the timescales of their works and have requested that the preliminary works for their high voltage cable replacement – i.e. putting in the ducts in the road for the cables to eventually pass through - are carried out in this location as soon as possible so that we can get the full junction resurfaced as soon as possible without it needing to be dug up again at a later stage.

Kevin Deanus
Cabinet Member for Highways and Community Resilience
28 March 2023

Question (2): John Oliver

When introducing the Greener Futures Climate Change Delivery Plan 2021-2025 at the 26 October 2021 Cabinet meeting, Councillor Heath said, quite reasonably, “We have to put a plan down to get focus and get delivery, and the plan will move”.

Eighteen months on, much has, indeed, moved.

Given the very latest IPCC report, what additional steps will the Council be taking to review and reinforce its Greener Futures Climate Change Delivery Plan 2021-25, and the targets within the Plan, as a result of the IPCC report, to ensure that Surrey is “doing its bit” towards mitigating the effects of climate change and to prevent the calamity of reaching over 1.5° of warming?

Reply:

An annual Climate Change progress review has been set up to understand progress, challenges and make recommendations to ensure implementation is on track to meet emissions targets set by Surrey. The first assessment was carried out in 2022 – see attached report which showed the county emissions had fallen by 17% (result mostly due to COVID) which was in line with Climate Change Delivery Plan trajectory to meet its net zero target by 2050.

However, our assessment of progress within Surrey recognises that, in order to sustain and increase the rate of change, more action from national and local government, residents' businesses and other public sector bodies is needed. The latest IPCC report has confirmed again the importance and urgency of the situation. The following recommendations, designed to increase the scale and pace of activity, are being delivered within available council resources:

- Significantly increasing meaningful collaboration with Government, Communities, Businesses, the not-for-profit sector.
- Stronger and more focused collective engagement with communities and residents at the centre and lobbying to recognise and support the role of local government in tackling climate change.
- A greater focus on supporting all residents and businesses to save energy, reduce energy costs and have easier access to affordable, low carbon energy.
- Greater priority to be placed on accelerating local renewable energy generation for example new projects such as rent-a-roof solar PV schemes on schools, community buildings and commercial property that reduce up-front energy costs.
- More targeted initiatives and mechanisms to develop a step change in net zero investment.
- An updated financial strategy, that focuses on new funding mechanisms to lessen the huge funding gap that prevents local authorities to meet net zero targets, will be developed by the end of the year.

Cabinet Progress report for Climate Change Delivery Plan

https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s89446/Cabinet%20Report%20-%20climate%20change%20delivery%20plan%20assessment_final%20draft.pdf

Climate Change Whole Programme Assessment report

<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s89447/ANNEX%201-%20CLIMATE%20CHANGE%20WHOLE%20PROGRAMME%20ASSESSMENT.pdf>

SCC 2030 Corporate Programme Assessment

<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s89448/ANNEX%202-%20SCC%202030%20CORPORATE%20PROGRAMME%20ASSESSMENT.pdf>

Marisa Heath

Cabinet Member for Environment

28 March 2023

Question (3): Jenny Desoutter

In the last few weeks, we have witnessed disastrous ash dieback felling operations at Sheepleas SSSI, destroying swathes of habitat of the protected hazel dormouse, and potentially killing many of the dormice, in contravention of wildlife legislation. This has resulted in a police investigation.

Large sections of the understory including birch, hazel, spindle, holly, dog rose, willow and field maple have been clear-felled, not thinned as stated in the Felling Licence, and long-standing dormouse boxes destroyed. SCC's "Briefing" of 6th March acknowledges that loss of woodland will have "a significant impact on biodiversity."

Given the assurances the Council gave at previous meetings, that only trees posing a danger would be felled, and that appropriate surveys would identify and protect vulnerable species, please can the Council:

- explain how has this happened;
- explain what risk assessments were carried out that resulted in choosing this drastic course of action;
- explain how SCC will meet the recently Extended Biodiversity Duty which includes, at Section 40 of the revised NERC act, a requirement to enhance biodiversity alongside conservation?
- And will the Council now pause its felling activity to respect the bird-nesting season and allow a thorough review and consultation before more harm is done?

Reply:

We know how invaluable trees and woodlands are, contributing to the county landscape and bringing numerous benefits to residents and wildlife. We also know how sad it is to see a tree come down and how destructive felling work can appear

when it is first carried out, so we only undertake tree felling where it is absolutely necessary.

We have a responsibility to manage trees which could pose a safety risk to people or property. Ash Dieback (ADB) is considered the most significant disease to affect the United Kingdom's tree population since Dutch Elm Disease in the 1960's and 1970's. It is expected to cause the decline and death of over 90% of ash trees in England. Sadly, the disease has advanced considerably due to the extreme climatic conditions we have experienced in the last few years. Ash die back begins with leaf loss and crown reduction and eventually causes the tree to die. As the disease takes hold, the tree becomes brittle, unstable and unpredictable, posing a danger to site users.

The trees at Sheeples were surveyed by qualified arboriculturists for ash die back disease last summer and thousands of trees were found to be at serious risk of failing and causing harm to visitors. Many were already falling onto paths as shown in the picture below. Across the Council's Countryside Estate over 30,000 trees were found to be diseased and posing a risk to safety.



Ash dieback at Sheeples, Summer 2022

Recognising how protected and valuable Sheeples is to nature, the Council commissioned a full ecological survey which was carried out by Surrey Wildlife Trust Ecological Services and a detailed felling licence was obtained from the Forestry Commission. Consent for the works to begin was subsequently provided by Natural England who visited the site prior to works commencing and to inform their consent. Close consultation with local ecological groups, including a range of species experts on dormice, bats and birds, has also been ongoing throughout. Information such as the location of dormice boxes was received to support the exclusion of certain areas from works. A range of mitigation measures were put in place and contractors were

recruited based on their experience of working in sensitive areas. Unavoidably, a small number of hazel and other tree species would need to be removed to facilitate access to failing ash trees, but these would be carefully selected. The routes for vehicles to access the site would be kept to a minimum to reduce disturbance.

Works commenced in late January, with a qualified Ecologist overseeing works and providing directions to contractors on site. Officers became concerned about affecting hibernating dormice after they were notified about an unmapped dormouse box being found amongst felled woodland. Advice from Surrey Wildlife Trust Ecology Services was immediately sought on this unforeseen issue, and the Council referred itself to Surrey's Rural Police team.

All relevant documentation has been supplied to Surrey Rural Police and we are participating fully in their investigation. We have integrated recommendations from Surrey Dormouse Group's report on the incident and continue to take advice from Natural England on the need for any further licences and measures to mitigate and limit any impact on nature, and both how and when work will recommence to secure the safety of visitors.

Natural England confirmed the Council was acting in accordance with the SSSI consent provided by them, however, after close working with Surrey Wildlife Trust and local ecological groups, the methodology for recording site-based decisions has been updated. This will be critiqued by all interested parties at a days' workshop on the 20th of April 2023.

We are aware Surrey residents will notice the changes in landscape that ADB management will bring about and they will want to see us respond, manage the risks but also ensure that we do all we can to repair the loss as soon as we possibly can. This is a challenging time for the Council, as well as many other land owning organisations and private individuals. The Council is endeavouring to proactively manage the issue of the declining ash population and the associated tree risk management, health and safety issues and potential reputational risks this brings, whilst also focusing on the recovery phase. The recovery phase will include assessing genetic tolerances within the ash population, retaining them where possible, restocking with suitable alternative species that provide similar ecological benefits where appropriate, or identify alternatives which improve the biodiversity of each area.

At Sheepleas, we acknowledge that the extent of tree removal will have an impact upon the biodiversity of the site. We are in the process of preparing an Ecology Mitigation and Enhancement Plan (EMMP). The purpose of the EMMP is to:

1. Minimise (as far as possible) adverse impacts upon protected species and flora;
2. Facilitate site restoration via habitat replacement (subject to agreement by Natural England and Forestry Commission); and

3. Provide enhancements for the site for various protected species and habitats to maximise the biodiversity value of the site in the long term.

The measures we are currently exploring include:

- Replacement shrub planting (hazel and other UK shrub species of value for dormouse, birds and other species);
- Additional dormouse boxes – to provide additional breeding sites for dormouse;
- Creation of brush piles to benefit invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, hedgehog;
- Bird and bat boxes to be installed on mature (non-ash) trees;
- Honeysuckle planting (a favoured food source and nesting material for dormouse);
- Expanding hazel coppice management at Sheepleas to benefit biodiversity.

The replanting and habitat restoration plan will be co-designed and co-delivered by a group of national and local experts. Monitoring visits will be undertaken yearly by a qualified ecologist and management plan updated where necessary to ensure the habitat successfully regenerates and meets the objectives of the EMMP.

We are proud that Surrey is the country's most wooded county, and Surrey County Council has planted over 380,000 trees over the last three years as part of our commitment to plant 1.2m more trees in the county by 2030.

If you would to be part of our discussions on the methodology statement or design and delivery of the EMMP please contact treefelling@surreycc.gov.uk

Marisa Heath
Cabinet Member for Environment
28 March 2023

Question (4): Robert Whitcombe

Fetcham Residents Association (FRA) only saw the following document "*Mole Valley Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) - Early Engagement Workshop 2B - External Stakeholders 28 July 2022*" after the consultation had finished and therefore has not provided any feedback.

FRA understands that substantial Draft LCWIP Reports have now been completed and that the Draft LCWIP for Mole Valley was shared with MVDC and SCC Councillors in January 2023, but has not been made public. The intentions of SCC with respect to further stakeholder engagement and community feedback, on these important plans that promote "Active Travel", are not known. Fetcham and FRA missed out on early engagement in 2022, yet local communities have particular knowledge of their footpath and cycleway requirements.

Is it not time that these Draft Plans, which are of great community interest, are shared with Parish Councils, Residents Associations and the public for feedback; can a mechanism be established as soon as possible for FRA to engage with SCC and their

Consultants to comment on what is proposed and what is missing for Fetcham village's connectivity? (N.B. The same may apply to all SCC Districts).

Reply:

The Mole Valley LCWIP is yet to be formally signed off by both Councils. The LCWIP report will be published once signed off, which is due to be taken forward to MVDC Cabinet for decision after the May election period. Public consultation on the proposed scheme plans will be undertaken during the next phase of this work, which is programmed to be completed by the end of 2023/24.

The LCWIP for Mole Valley has followed the prescribed Department for Transport (DfT) process to develop the network of active travel cycle routes and core walking zones. This is part of a wider programme of work to develop LCWIPs for all Surrey districts and borough, being undertaken by Surrey County Council in partnership with area local councils. Early engagement with key stakeholders has been undertaken to help inform the development of these plans which included a series of online workshops. In addition, public comments have been captured through the Commonplace engagement platform that is available on the Surrey County Council website 'cycling and walking' pages. Fetcham Residents Association were invited to an initial stakeholder workshop held on 4 July 2022. A second workshop was held on 28 July 2022 to discuss the more detailed plans, with opportunity for stakeholders to comment further. Fetcham Residents Association were invited to both of these engagement workshops but did not attend. The information slides pack was also distributed prior to the workshop with opportunity for comments from those that could not attend the meeting. This engagement with stakeholders has provided valuable local feedback and input into the development of these early stage plans. This was explained during the workshops as an early engagement exercise and does not replace the public consultation that is planned to follow.

The LCWIP scheme plans completed to date are at an early concept stage and the proposed plan will still require further consultation when specific cycling and walking infrastructure is proposed and taken through feasibility and detailed design stages. Public consultation on the proposed schemes that are identified within the LCWIP will be undertaken once the Mole Valley LCWIP moves into this next stage of design/development, which is currently programmed to be completed by the end of 2023/24. Consultation responses will be used to inform and refine the scheme plans before they are taken forward to delivery, subject to securing the necessary funding.

Matt Furniss
Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth
28 March 2023

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