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## ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

31 January 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Edwards (Chair), Chace (Vice-Chair), Bicknell, P. English, Goodheart, Madeley, Worne, Brooks (Substitute for Huntley), McAuliffe (Substitute for Wallsgrove) and Stanley (Substitute for Needs)

Councillors Pendleton and Staniforth were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

### 633. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Huntley, Wallsgrove, Needs and Warr.

### 634. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Stanley declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 10 as a local resident.

Councillor Goodheart declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 9 due to his involvement with the Bognor Community Gardeners, and Agenda Item 11 as a Member of Bognor Regis Town Council and a Bognor resident.

Councillor English declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 10 as a local resident and Member of Felpham Parish Council.

Councillor Madeley declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 10 as a resident of Felpham.

Councillor Brooks declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 7 as a Member of Bognor Regis Town Council

Councillor Edwards declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 10 as a local resident

### 635. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2022 were approved by the Committee. These would be signed at the end of the meeting.

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636. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The Chair confirmed that there were no urgent matters for this meeting.

637. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that no questions had been submitted for this meeting.

638. COMMITTEE REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGETS 2023/2024

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Interim Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer presented the report to the Committee. She explained that the budgets from this Committee plus any growth bids would be considered at Policy and Finance Committee as part of the overall budget on 9 February 2023, before going on to Full Council on 1 March 2023 for approval. She highlighted that the budget had been prepared against a backdrop of a significant budget gap for 2023-24. Only the essential growth bids for 2023-24 had been put forward for the Committee to approve. She went through the growth bids listed in Appendix B, and then the main year on year changes, which were Combined Cleansing Contract; and Foreshores – cost of beach patrol service; Establishment; Grounds maintenance Contract Consumer Price Index inflation. The Committees Capital programme totalling £1.655m for 2023-24 was detailed in Appendix C, and was comprised of £1.4m Disabled Facilities Grants, which were all grant funded; and £255k for Play Areas.

Members then took part in a question-and-answer session and the following points were made:

- Clarification was sought on some of the figures. This was provided by the Interim Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer
- There was concern that the Disabled Grant had not risen, and it was not expected this would rise over the course of the next five years, despite inflation rapidly rising. It was suggested that a letter from the Council be written to lobby for a rise in this grant. The Chair offered support for this, and it was agreed this could be discussed after the meeting.
- Disappointment was expressed by some Members that there was nothing regarding beach access in the budget.
- Questions were asked regarding spending on the Sunken Gardens, whether any underspend would be rolled over, and if so could this be spent on additional elements to the project? The Interim Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer would look at the detail on this and supply a written reply to Members. The Chair explained that suggestions for additional projects could be brought to the Council by any Member and would be looked at on a case-by-case basis.

- Clarification was requested on the costs of operation of the car parks. The Interim Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer explained that the costs in the report were the direct costs to the Committee, however there were other corporate costs involved.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Bicknell and seconded by Councillor Chace.

The Committee

RESOLVED that

- 1) the 2023/24 Revenue Budget as illustrated in Appendix A of this report be agreed;
- 2) the list of uncommitted growth items as illustrated in Appendix B of this report be agreed;
- 3) the 2023/24 Capital Programme as illustrated in Appendix C of this report be agreed; and

RECOMMEND TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE that

- 4) the Revenue Budget for this Committee be included in the overall General Fund Budget when the Policy and Finance Committee considers the overall budgets at its meeting on 9 February 2023.

#### 639. VARIATION TO PARKING CHARGES

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Group Head of Technical Services presented the report to Committee. He explained that the Medium-Term Financial Plan considered at Policy and Finance Committee on 13 December 2022, recommended to Full Council the maximising of income including fees and charges, where possible, as part of the 2023-24 budget process. Car parking charges were discretionary and could be set by the Council in order to optimise its revenue in accordance with the Council's recently adopted Off-Street Parking Strategy, which set out that the Council would review the charges annually. The Strategy aimed to maximise the use of car parks in a way that supported the needs of businesses, workers, shoppers, commuters, and visitors, whilst looking to optimise yield from parking in line with the corporate charging principles. The costs, including the corporate support services, had increased, and it was therefore necessary to increase revenues. This was mainly due to the effects of inflation such as its impact on the national living wage and energy prices. Other cost factors were associated with the Council's move to reduce the carbon emissions from its parking service in line with its declared climate emergency and adopted carbon neutral strategy.

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The Group Head of Technical Services explained the proposals did not change the 2-hour free parking schemes that allowed parking in Fitzleet, Hothampton, and Lyon Street car parks in Bognor Regis and St. Martins, Anchor Springs and Manor House car parks in Littlehampton. The proposal did not include introducing charging to car parks which were currently free to users. The parking charges at the Fitzalan Pool car park in Arundel would also be unaffected.

Members then took part in a question-and-answer session and the following points were made:

- It was asked why consultation had not been carried out. The Group Head of Technical Services explained that the process for adopting fees had been looked at, and although historically the Council had undertaken a consultation process, there was no obligation to do this if there were no other amendments to the Parking Order. The chosen approach had been taken due to compressed timescales.
- It was noted that the current charges were not included in the report, so no comparison could be made between the current and proposed tariffs.
- There was a large range of different percentage increases, none less than 11%, which was arguably higher than inflation at present. The Group Head of Technical Services explained that they had carried out some benchmarking and the proposed fees were below the average for almost every tariff in comparable districts.
- Clarification was requested on some of the figures, which was provided by the Group Head of Technical Services
- It was asked whether additional income generated from a rise in car park charges could be used in other areas of the Council such as Wellbeing. The Group Head of Technical Services did not believe this to be the case.
- There was concern that it was unfair to try to reduce people's use of cars without improving public transport in the area. The Group Head of Technical Services explained that paragraph 14 of the report clarified that the report was not intended to encourage a shift away from private car use.
- One Member felt that the proposed increase in charges were not unreasonable in comparison to the many car parks that he used all around the country on a very regular basis.
- With the cost of upkeeping the car parks increasing, additional money to support the maintenance of these car parks was required.
- It was hoped some of the additional revenue would go towards additional electric charging points.
- Was Ringo available in all car parks? The Group Head of Technical Services confirmed this was the case.
- It was asked whether Fitzleet car park could be sold. The Group Head of Technical Services explained the Council was unable to do this.

Councillor Stanley proposed that debate on this Item be adjourned until the first meeting of the new municipal year, and in the meantime, Officers be instructed to carry out consultation prior to this meeting. This was seconded by Councillor Brooks.

Following a discussion, a vote was taken. With 5 Members voting for and 5 Members voting against, the Chair used his casting vote against, and the vote was declared LOST.

The substantive recommendation was then proposed by Councillor Madeley and seconded by Councillor English.

A recorded vote was requested. Those voting for were Councillors Bicknell, Chace, Edwards, English, Madeley, McAuliffe. Those voting against were Councillors Brooks and Stanley. Councillors Goodheart and Worne abstained from voting. The vote was therefore declared CARRIED.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That parking tariff option B be introduced with effect from 01 April 2023.

#### 640. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2023 - 2028

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Principal Environmental Health Officer presented the report to Committee. She explained that the report detailed the Council's third Empty Homes Strategy and the positive work that had been achieved in this area in the past 5 years. The Council was committed to playing its part in the national campaign to bring empty homes back into use. Since 2006 there had been a part time Empty Homes Officer and in April 2017 this was made full time. In addition, in 2022 a part time resource for a Technical Support Assistant was made available to work alongside the Empty Homes Officer. The Empty Homes Officer worked closely with colleagues within the Revenues and Benefits Team and monthly reports were received from Council tax records in terms of those properties that were recorded as empty, which were properties empty for more than 12 months, and did not include second homes or those properties going through probate.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer highlighted Paragraph 3.8 of the report, which identified the number of properties brought back into use as a direct result of the activity of the Empty Homes Officer.

The Empty Homes Strategy had three key stages which The Principal Environmental Health Officer went through and explained to the Committee. These were Engage; Encourage; and Enforce. The Empty Homes work had been recognised Nationally via the Empty Homes Network and received a number of awards.

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The Principal Environmental Health Officer highlighted the changes in the updated Empty Homes Strategy for 2023-2028. She explained the Empty Homes function had shown successful activity over the past two successive strategies spanning 10 years, but this continued to be an evolving and important area of work in bringing much needed empty homes back into use. Members were requested to support the adoption of the Empty Homes Strategy 2023 -2028.

Members then took part in a question-and-answer session and the following points were made:

- Members congratulated the Principal Environmental Health Officer and her team for achieving great results.
- There was concern that there would no longer be any action taken regarding properties empty for less than 12 months, whereas previously this was 6 months. The Principal Environmental Health Officer explained this had been changed because homes empty for less than 12 months were often due to factors such as the owners selling, or the property going through probate. Increasing this to 12 months meant Officers could focus resources more effectively.
- What was the target? The Principal Environmental Health Officer confirmed this was 50 for the current financial year, however they had so far achieved 74 and would be revising the target going forwards.
- Did the Council guarantee rent to landlords when they had arranged for tenants to be housed in these empty homes? The Principal Environmental Health Officer explained that the Council did not guarantee rents, however the Housing Options team worked closely with tenants to ensure their tenancy agreements were fulfilled, including the payment of rent.
- It was asked how people could inform the Empty Homes team if they were aware of empty properties in the area. The Principal Environmental Health Officer explained there was a form that could be submitted on the Arun District Council website, and there was also an email address displayed that people could use.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Stanley and seconded by Councillor Bicknell.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That committee adopt the Empty Homes Strategy 2023 – 2028.

641. PARKS AND GREENSPACES STRATEGY (PGS) - SCOPING REPORT

*[Councillor Goodheart redeclared his Personal Interest during this item]*

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Environmental Services & Strategy Manager introduced the Parks & Cemeteries Manager, who presented the report to Committee. He explained that following the adoption of the new Council Vision, the parks and greenspaces service had taken some time to reflect on how best to meet the relevant Vision themes, which were identified in the Committee report. They felt the drafting of a Parks and Greenspaces Strategy to be critical in setting a clear direction for how the service should be managed going forward. The strategy's principal focus was on Arun's own parks and greenspaces. This was important because it put more strategic focus on the value of parks and greenspaces already owned by Arun, thereby laying the blueprint for future management, maintenance and development of the service and its greenspace assets. They proposed to establish and consult on seven key strategic outcomes which were contained within an overall framework, illustrated in the Scoping Report. The strategy would review existing operations and management of the Parks and Greenspaces Service, as well as put in place the mechanisms needed to review how Arun's parks and greenspaces were used by the public and to implement any necessary changes to meet the outcomes. The strategy would develop practical actions and solutions to deliver the strategic outcomes.

The Parks & Cemeteries Manager explained it was proposed that future Service Delivery Plan indicators were set in place to monitor performance and delivery of the strategy. They would also look to external partners to monitor progress. There would be extensive consultation with valued stakeholders throughout this process, recognising the huge contributions volunteers, concessionaires and community groups had to offer. It was likely that a series of focus groups would then be arranged to determine how to deliver the strategic outcomes. They anticipated presenting a full draft to Committee within 18 months, and there was a draft timetable set out in paragraph 4.8 of the report. He explained that by having a clear strategy built around key outcomes, the service would be able to operate in a modern, dynamic and more engaging way than before. It would establish a more robust pathway to decision making, and it would bring Arun in line with peer authorities.

Members then took part in a question-and-answer session and the following points were made:

- Was there a way to get greenspace areas allocated on new developments sites, handed over to the Council to run, in order to prevent these being built on at future dates? The Group Head of Environment and Climate Change explained that the Council had been successful in the past when it came to keeping these as green spaces.
- Support was offered for this report and Members welcomed that Arun would be making the best use of parks and greenspaces.
- It was felt this was important to help protect wildlife and enhance biodiversity.
- It was asked whether this covered allotments, and whether abandoned allotments would be brought back into use again. The Parks & Cemeteries

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Manager explained that they did not cover allotments, however there was an opportunity to look at projects such as community orchards and community growing.

- There was concern over the use on page 67 of the wording of biodiversity net gain, which was something quite specific and was used in part of Planning legislation. The Parks & Cemeteries Manager gave an example of what they meant by this. The example was that where a new footpath was installed, the impact would be mitigated and understood in terms of biodiversity.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Chace and seconded by Councillor Bicknell.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the development and drafting of a Parks and Greenspaces Strategy as per methodology and structure set out in the scoping report, be approved.

642. KING GEORGE V PLAY AREA, FELPHAM

*[Councillor English redeclared his Personal Interest during this item]*

*[Councillor Stanley redeclared his Personal Interest during this item]*

*[Councillor Madeley redeclared her Personal Interest during this item]*

*[Councillor Edwards redeclared his Personal Interest during this item]*

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Principal Landscape and Projects Officer presented the report to Committee. She explained that the report set out proposals for the expenditure of section 106 funding provided as allocations to improve play facilities in Felpham. These were in addition to the play areas installed by the developer at Site 6. The play areas in Felpham had been reviewed and King George V play area had been identified as the most appropriate location for the funding to be spent. The report summarised the process and programme for the project which would start with understanding what type of equipment the public would like to see included. The recommendations sought approval to drawdown the funding, to award a construction contract for the value shown and to also adjust this sum should any additional funding become available.

Members then took part in a question-and-answer session and the following points were made:

- There was concern that the timescales to complete this project were too lengthy, and during this time the cost of materials may further increase. The Principal



Landscape and Projects Officer explained this was a conservative timescale and that if this could be brought forward it would be.

- There was a discussion as to what the playpark would look like after the project had been delivered, and whether there was a possibility to use some of the funding in other parks.
- It was asked whether consideration could be given to ensuring more parks across Arun had accessible swings for wheelchair users.
- Support was offered for improving King George V Park.
- It was asked whether the views of key stakeholders could be sought regarding what changes should be made. The Group Head of Environment and Climate Change confirmed the process would involve public engagement and they would also be working with the Parish Council.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor English and seconded by Councillor Edwards.

#### The Committee

##### RESOLVED that

- 1) the drawdown and expenditure of £67K Section 106 funding allocated from Land North of Felpham (FP/92/04) plus any other partnership funding that may be made available to carry out improvements at King George V play area in Felpham and deliver an objective from the Council's play strategy 2018-2028, be approved.
- 2) a procurement process be undertaken for a design and build contract and to enter into a contract for up to £67K (subject to recommendation 3 with the preferred bidder, in order to carry out play area improvements at King George V.
- 3) authority be delegated to Officers to increase the contract value at recommendation 2 should additional funding become available ahead of, during, or following the procurement process.

Before moving onto the next agenda items, the Chair, in line with the Constitution at Part 5, Rules of Procedure (Meetings) – Section 2 –Committee Procedure Rules, Rule 8 [Duration of Meeting] confirmed that the Council would need to adjourn at 9.00 pm unless a vote was undertaken to extend the length of the meeting by a further 30 minutes. The Chair asked for a show of hands to extend the meeting by this time to 9.30 pm, if needed, to ensure that all business on the agenda would be concluded. This was CARRIED.

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#### 643. BATHING WATER QUALITY

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Environmental Health Team Manager presented the report to Committee. He explained the report updated the Committee on the results of the bathing water classifications for 2022, and the actions being taken to identify and address the causes of the Poor bathing water classification for Bognor Regis Aldwick.

The Environmental Health Team Manager went onto explain that the Environment Agency (EA) carried out monitoring of the water quality of designated bathing waters (DBW) between May and September each year. DBW were given a classification of Excellent, Good, Sufficient or Poor based on water quality. Samples were taken by the EA and provided a point in time indication of the quality by looking for faecal indicator bacteria. There were a range of potential sources for those bacteria including sewage, livestock, birds and road drainage. The latest results were shown in the table to the report and were based on the last four years of samples. Four out of six of Arun's DBW maintained their previous classifications of Good or Excellent. Two of the locations had their classifications reduced. These were Bognor Regis Aldwick which had changed from Good to Poor and Bognor Regis East which had changed from Excellent to Good. The classifications would be displayed at each location during the next bathing season (May to September), with additional signage at Bognor Regis Aldwick advising against bathing. This enabled the community to make an informed choice about where and when to bathe. A working group had been established following classifications for 2022, involving staff from EA, Southern Water and the Council, to investigate the causes of the Poor bathing water classification for Bognor Regis Aldwick, and to agree an action plan to address these. This may include the Council using enforcement powers to address any wastewater misconnections identified. At present there was no clear linkage between the elevated sample results seen in 2022 and the operation of storm overflows for Bognor Regis Aldwick.

Councillor Stanley then proposed an amendment to the Officer recommendation as follows (additions have been shown in **bold**):

That the Environment Committee endorse staff, **and Ward Members for Aldwick East and Aldwick West**, participation in the Working Group, as an appropriate mechanism, to identify and address the causes of the reduced bathing water classification for Bognor Regis Aldwick.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Worne.

The Director of Growth advised against the amendment and explained that this was an operational matter, whereby Officers were engaging with Southern water and EA to find solutions. He suggested communication between the different agencies may not be so productive if Members participated in the Working Group, and reassured Members that the Committee would be kept fully updated. He pointed out that if Members were not satisfied with the progress once Officers had brought the updates

back to Committee, they would then have the opportunity to request Member participation on the Working Group.

Councillor Stanley confirmed he wished to proceed with the amendment and the Chair then invited debate on the amendment. The following points were raised:

- Some Members felt it would not be appropriate for Councillors to participate in the Working Group, and felt more progress could be made with Officers alone.
- It was asked whether the invitation should be extended to key stakeholders such as the agricultural sector. The Environmental Health Team Manager explained the EA had suggested the parties that should be involved, however he was happy to raise this with EA.
- Some Members felt it would be beneficial to have Members present at the Working Group meetings as they could feedback their views directly to the other agencies involved and directly represent the residents.
- The view was expressed that the Council should come together to tackle the problem, and that Member involvement would help with this.

A recorded vote on the amendment was requested. Those voting for were Councillors Brooks, Goodheart, McAuliffe, Stanley and Worne. Those voting against were Councillors Chace, Edwards and English. Councillors Bicknell and Madeley abstained from voting. The vote was therefore declared CARRIED

Turning to the substantive, the Chair invited questions from Members and the following points raised:

- It was asked whether Members could see the sampling figures. The Environmental Health Team Manager explained these figures were publicly available on the EA website.
- There was disappointment the Working Group did not cover Felpham as well, and it was hoped that any resolutions from the Working Group could also be employed at Felpham.

The substantive recommendation was Proposed by Councillor Stanley and Seconded by Councillor Worne.

#### The Committee

#### RESOLVED

That the Environment Committee endorse staff, and Ward Members for Aldwick East and Aldwick West, participation in the Working Group, as an appropriate mechanism, to identify and address the causes of the reduced bathing water classification for Bognor Regis Aldwick.

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644. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2022-2026 - QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2022 TO 31 DECEMBER 2022

The Chair confirmed that the report was an information paper with no recommendations for the Committee to consider.

There were no questions from Members.

Members then noted the report.

645. UPDATE FROM THE BEACH ACCESS WORKING PARTY (INFORMATION UPDATE)

The Chair of the Bognor Regis Beach Access Working Party gave an update to the Committee. She explained that the third Working Party meeting had taken place on 16 January 2023, where a presentation was provided by the Project Manager from Coastal Partners. The fourth meeting of the Working Party would take place on 06 February 2023.

The Chair then invited questions from Members. There was concern no budget had been put aside for this, and also that it had been a longer process than hoped.

The Committee noted the update.

646. OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no updates from Members regarding Outside Bodies.

647. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

(The meeting concluded at 9.20 pm)