

Minutes of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Walsall Council House

Thursday, 11 April 2024 at 6.00p.m.

Committee Members present: Councillor M Follows (Chair)
Councillor P Bott
Councillor S Cheema
Councillor A Hicken
Councillor P Kaur
Councillor R Larden
Councillor M Ward
Councillor J Whitehouse

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Bird – Leader of the Council
Councillor G Flint – Wellbeing, Leisure and Public Spaces

Officers present: Katie Moreton - Director of Place and Environment
Philippa Venables – Director of Regeneration and Economy
Nicola Byrne – Principal Transport Planner
Alison Ives – Head of Planning and Building Control
Liz Stuffins – Group Manager for Healthy Spaces
Matt Powis – Senior Democratic Services Officer

62. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Allen and Gill.

63. **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions.

64. **Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

65. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the items set out in the private part of the agenda for the reasons set out therein and Section 100A of the Local Government Act, 1972.

66. Minutes

A copy of the Minutes of the meeting held on the 27 February 2024 was submitted. [annexed]

Resolved

That, the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2024 copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

67. Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark – Progress Update.

The Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing, Leisure and Public Spaces presented an update on the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark. [annexed]

The Black Country Geopark was an initiative that aimed to celebrate and protect geological, cultural, and industrial heritage of the region. The Geopark spanned four local authority areas including Dudley, Sandwell, Wolverhampton as well as Walsall. It was noted that the park contributes to the regeneration and sustainability of the wider Black Country by promoting tourism, social inclusion, and environmental awareness.

The Geopark was assessed by UNESCO representative in 2023 and completed the verification assessment. The main recommendations from the assessment were to develop a wider Black Country tourism strategy and to develop Black Country Geopark branded products.

A question and answer session took place and following on, the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- The Black Country was famous for manufacturing products, which were shipped across the globe. There was a suggestion that all products made within the Black Country should have an origin badge similar to 'Made in Britain' badges on packaging.
- There was a discussion on the number of products made within the Black Country.
- It was felt that a heritage magazine or collection booklet was needed to categorise all the Borough's cultural assets.
- Preparations were underway for the Walsall Arboretum's 150th Anniversary which included events to promote the Borough's rich heritage.
- Difficulty remained in respect of obtaining the funding from across the Black Country authorities to fund three staffing positions to promote the Geopark. In this respect, the Leader of the Council requested that an

application be submitted to the West Midlands Combined Authority to fund any shortfalls.

- There was a request that the Committee receive an update on the progress of the Geopark in the next municipal year.

It was moved by Councillor Ward and seconded by Councillor Hicken and it was unanimously agreed that the Council explore branding options specifically for products and services made within the Black Country.

Resolved:

(1) That, the progress update in respect of the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark be noted.

(2) That, the Council explore branding options specifically for products and services made within the Black Country.

68. Electric Vehicle Chargepoint Strategy

The Director of Place and Environment presented an overview of the Council's Electric Vehicle Chargepoint Strategy. [annexed]

The Council's Electric Vehicle Chargepoint Strategy aimed to support the transition to low carbon transport by increasing the availability and accessibility of public electric vehicle charging infrastructure in the Borough. This included installing charge points in various locations, including residential streets, car parks and workplaces. The strategy also outlines how the Council monitors and evaluate the impact of the charge points on air quality, carbon emissions, and user satisfaction.

A question and answer session took place and following on, the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- There were concerns about location of electric charging stations in the Borough particularly in areas of large on-street parking.
- West Midlands Combined Authority was working with local authorities to identify suitable charging point locations.
- A Member suggested the installation of electric charging points on Council car parks and other Council assets such as leisure centres.
- There was a suggestion that a review be carried out on smaller green spaces to ascertain whether electric charging points would be suitable.
- The Council was committed to future proofing street designs to include electric charging networks but also the potential for hydrogen.
- There was a need to balance parking provision and providing adequate greenspace.
- The Council had already a number of responses to the consultation and analysis of responses would take place within the coming months.

- There was a suggestion for the Council to commercialise proximity to the M6 Motorway and provide electric charging stations to maximise use from commuters.
- Concerns remained regarding the recycling of electric car batteries.
- Legislation and market forces would eventually resolve issues relating to electric car battery recycling.
- There were concerns about weight restrictions on bridges and Council owned car parks as electric vehicles were usually heavier than conventional combustion cars. In response, the Director of Place and Environment confirmed that bridges were usually equipped to handle 7.5 tonne vehicles unless otherwise stated, which would be sufficient for electric vehicles. The Saddlers Centre Multi-storey car park was operated by the Council and there were no current concerns regarding its weight capacity to handle current vehicle weight standards.

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance.

Resolved:

That, the Council's Electric Vehicle Chargepoint Strategy be noted.

69. Areas of focus – 2023/24 and Forward Plans

The Committee noted the proposed areas of focus for the remaining meetings of the municipal year. [annexed]

Resolved

That, forward plans be noted.

70. Recommendations Tracker

The Senior Democratic Services Officer updated Members on the recommendations from previous meetings of the Committee. [annexed]

Resolved:

That the progress on recommendations from the previous meeting be noted.

71. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting would be determined by Annual Council in May 2024.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.11p.m

Signed:

Date: