

SOUTHEND ON SEA CITY COUNCIL

Place Scrutiny Committee

11th September 2024

QUESTION 1 - From Tricia Cowdrey to Councillor Hyde (Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment & Waste)

I was honoured to be able to ask a question at the Place Scrutiny Committee meeting on 17th June in relation to the excellent motion on protecting our urban trees, which made a number of helpful recommendations and which was passed by full Council.

It may well be that the multiple nature of my questioning caused some confusion for the portfolio holder, as unfortunately the question was not answered.

May I ask very clearly this evening when the moratorium on tree felling will commence and when the alternative methodology toolkit to align with best practice will be implemented?

RESPONSE:

When a motion is passed at a full Council meeting, it does not automatically become policy. Instead, it is sent to the relevant cabinet member, who can either bring it to the cabinet or refer it to a working party for further discussion. The cabinet member decides whether or not to act on the motion.

For this motion it was included in the working party agenda for March 19, 2024. During that meeting, attendees, including the motion proposer, discussed enhancing the tree policy. The subsequent decision of the previous cabinet member was to not change the policy.

I agree with this decision, as unlike many other authorities which choose to fell for other reasons, Southend's tree policy is already set that only essential felling is done. This means via exemptions under

the Environment Act 2021, i.e. when a tree is dead, dangerous, diseased, is causing an obstruction under the Equality Act, or there is planning permission to remove it. It is part of our legal obligations to remove trees in these instances, so a moratorium would not be permissible.

Further, to determine whether a tree does need to be felled under these conditions, all trees are extensively inspected by our in-house expert arboriculture team, who have the appropriate qualifications and over a century of experience between them. This team are passionate about retaining trees, and so I have more confidence that their recommendations will save more trees than if we were to use a crude computer toolbox.

Going forward I am dedicated to expanding our tree canopy, by refocusing efforts on tackling the causes of the loss of mature trees. Prevention is more effective than simply revising removal policies.

QUESTION 2 - From Kay Mitchell to Councillor Cowan (Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Corporate Strategy)

The budget papers published in February 2023 included greening of the High Street that is listed under General Fund Schemes subject to viable business cases. It was an initiative in the theme of 'A city rising to the climate change challenge' which included helping absorb CO2 and filter urban pollution.

There is no sign of any such significant greening of the High Street that would with large tree planters as an example, certainly improve air quality and cooling, while also improving the look of the High Street and make it an attractive space to spend more time.

A consultation was undertaken by the council on what I would consider a very limited version of greening the High Street in the form of pop-up parks.

That closed on the 16th November 2023, and the website indicates discussions are still ongoing regarding a way forward.

Could the portfolio holder confirm if there is now funding or investment for greening the High Street and when discussions are expected to conclude, or if new plans are in place?

RESPONSE:

Thank you for your question, Ms Mitchell. We are progressing the intention to green the High Street and are considering funding options. Early costings for the pop-up parks designs do not represent enough financial or social value to this administration to proceed at this time so we are now exploring alternative options that will fulfil our criteria of enhancing the street scene, improving amenities, and tackling heat stress. We hope to bring a cabinet paper forward this civic year with identified funding.

QUESTION 3 - Mr Matt Whitby to Councillor Hyde (Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Waste)

Why does the council not report graffiti to the police as criminal damage?

RESPONSE:

If evidence which could lead to a prosecution is presented to the Council, we consider this and raise with the police where appropriate.

When the Council receives reports of graffiti, we raise these directly with our contractor to have it removed.

If you, or other members of the public have strong evidence or footage of criminal being done which could identify the perpetrators and support.

QUESTION 4 - From Mr Webb to Councillor Collins (Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets & Resources)

In 2023 during September/October, a high-volume rainfall fell on the Westcliff library roof. In 1960, Edwardian grade listed 2 building flat roofs could not cope. Furthermore, the heavy rainfall and rainwater came from the roof into the library. Assessment of the roof was carried out and a report was issued that the roof needed to be repaired.

As we are fast approaching winter from September to December more rain will come. When will the roof be fixed and are there finances in the budget 2024 – 2025 for the roof to be fixed?

RESPONSE:

Westcliff Library suffered internal damage due to water ingress in Summer 2022. A detailed survey was undertaken of the roof which recommended a number of initial repairs to prevent further leaks alongside works to outlets and gulleys and the installation of 'leaf guards'. These works were completed in September 2022. Further works were undertaken in May 2023. These works addressed the issues identified within the survey report.

The Council values its Library buildings and allocates funding for end-of-life replacement across its operational estate through its Property Refurbishment Programme with projects prioritised based upon Condition Surveys. The replacement of the roof at Westcliff Library will be addressed through this programme with works currently forecast to be undertaken in 2025.

QUESTION 5 - From Cllr David Garston to Cllr Robinson (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Major Projects and Regulatory Services)

Recently, there have been a number of well attended summer events in Priory Park where very loud music has caused annoyance to residents in neighbouring streets.

The loud music has lasted for several hours.

Could the Portfolio Holder please advise what inspection if any takes place whilst these outdoor events are taking place?

They are prestige events which are good for the city, however noise volume does need to be monitored.

RESPONSE:

All large events are taken to the Council's Safety Advisory Group where advice is given on controlling noise. However, once an application is made Regulatory Services will require a noise management plan from the organisers. This document details where the stages are situated and how the organiser is going to control noise. Regulatory Services will also check on previous events and may modify the hours which the noise is expected e.g. stopping the music at an earlier time. The organiser must notify surrounding residents of the event and give a contact number for them to report if nuisance is being experienced.

The organiser is always required to monitor the noise and ensure that it is within the criteria that have been agreed with the Council. Compliance with the noise management plan will be a condition of the licence. Following the event a post-event report is required.

The Council issues a permit for events on its land, and it is made clear on this permit that the Council has a right to cancel or not permit an event in the future.

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