

COUNCIL – 29th October 2020

Questions from Councillors

Question 1 from Councillor Collins to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning

Question

Earlier this month, the UK had its wettest day on record, with enough rain falling to more than fill Loch Ness. Data shows Saturday 3 October, was the wettest day in records dating back to 1891.

I ask the Council to confirm that The Climate Change Emergency declared by this Council on 17th September 2019, remains a high priority for action and that as a coastal town, we must be alert to the consequences of not being proactive to make changes to our use of carbon based products and demonstrate leadership in our Town.

What actions are the Council taking?

Answer

The Council is currently drafting a series of long-term strategies that firmly embed and integrate both climate mitigation and adaptation into our decision-making process. These include:

- Climate Resilience and Urban Greening Strategy 2021-2025;
- Net Zero Strategy 2021-2025;
- Waste Strategy;
- Local Transport Plan;
- Local Plan.

As a result of the Climate Change Emergency and to support our Climate Emergency Declaration, which was signed in Autumn 2019, the Council has drawn up a Green City Action Plan. It presents an exciting opportunity for Southend to deliver upon its ambitions to become a 'Green City' prioritising five key areas to address the issues namely,

- Climate Leadership and Strategic Approach;
- Pathway to Net Zero Carbon;
- Building Climate Resilience across Southend;

- Future Generations, and
- Building Partnerships to Establish a Green City.

The Green City Action Plan will be published in early 2021. We are one of the few local authorities in England that has committed to publishing an annual Sustainability Report. It provides an update on the progress that we have made over the past 12 months. A copy of the 2018-2019 Report can be viewed on the following link:

https://www.southend.gov.uk/downloads/file/4676/low_carbon_energy_and_sustainability_annual_report.

The new National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy (FCERM) for England was launched in the summer of 2020. Its long-term vision is to achieve a nation ready for, and resilient to, flooding and coastal change.

This resilience is key and is the corner stone of all flood & coastal schemes going forward. This includes developing the authorities Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) Policy. The Council is also undertaking a catchment study in partnership with the Environment Agency, Anglian Water and Essex County Council. This will look to deliver a reduced flood risk from the brook to the surrounding roads and properties.

The New Local Plan will also take on board the aim and objectives of the new FCERM strategy. The Council's Local Flood Risk Management Plan and Surface Water Management Plan will be updated in 2021/22 as well as collaborating with the Environment Agency to update their National Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs).

Some of the key projects now underway are:

- SPONGE-concentrating on sustainable drainage solutions;
- SARRC- using nature-based solutions to protect our shorelines from sea level rise and support flood risk management;
- Remedy Smart Local Energy Solutions Design - creating a pathway for a new localised energy system targeting decarbonisation and substantial cost reductions for households;
- Cool Towns and Nature Smart cities - examining issues around heat stress and using Green Infrastructure to mitigate the extremes of climate change and improve health and well-being.

These are just some of the 60 plus projects currently being pursued working with a variety of partners both locally and internationally (France Netherlands and Belgium).

We have recently secured further funding to provide four schools with an urban greening programme (Interreg France (Channel) England programme), which will help deliver greener infrastructure on selected school sites in Southend. Supporting our schools is a priority action for the Green City Action Plan.

We were the first local authority in the UK to become a Founding Local Authority Partner to Better Planet Schools. It is an initiative led by the Young People's Trust for the Environment and provides completely free learning and education materials to primary schools in Southend. Each participating school has saved at least 12% of its energy use through their involvement in the programme. With the average school's energy bill being £31,000 per annum this has resulted in significant carbon and financial savings for our borough's primary schools.

This is a continually evolving task and commitment being made across all the various disciplines of the Council and will involve all parts of our communities ages and demographics.

Question 2 from Councillor Dent to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning

Question

Can the cabinet member for Environment & Planning tell me whether there has been an increase in fly-tipping during the COVID pandemic and what measures are in place to track down those responsible and bring them to justice?

Answer

| Number of Flytipping reports received by Veolia | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| Month | 2019 | 2020 |
| March | 409 | 355 |
| April | 445 | 294 |
| May | 402 | 409 |
| June | 347 | 608 |
| July | 381 | 621 |
| August | 447 | 546 |
| Total | 2,431 | 2,833 |

There has been an increase in the number of cases reported to our contractor, Veolia, as shown in the table above. It should be noted that most reports received are not genuine 'fly-tipping' incidents, rather residents presenting waste early, late or incorrectly, which may generate reports from their neighbours. The Environmental Care Team relies on evidence either being found within the waste or provision of a witness statement if the incident is observed by a neighbour. Where no evidence or witness statement is available the alleged culprits are usually written to, to reminding them it is an offence. Recent action to raise awareness and educate residents includes a new live web page, and an animation and leaflet that will be launched in the near future. There has also been an increase in engagement with both residents and businesses in line with the current Environmental Enforcement Policy. A further communications programme is being finalised at the moment and includes the use of a fly-tipping 'Council Aware' sticker for genuine incidents.

Question 3 from Councillor Dent to the Cabinet Member for Customer Contact and Community Safety

Question

Some two weeks ago, the MP for Luton North, Sarah Owen, led a very important and moving debate in Westminster Hall on the worrying rise of racism against Chinese and East Asian Communities since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Southend has a small, but significant, East Asian community. Can the cabinet member for Community Safety tell me whether there has been a recorded increase in hate crimes against them since the pandemic began, and what if any measures and initiatives there are in place locally to address this concerning national trend?

Answer

From March – September 2020 Essex Police have recorded 299 hate crimes occurring in Southend. 169 (56%) of these hate crimes is related to East Asian Heritage¹. The national concerns temporarily appeared locally in March (18 investigations) and April (13 investigations) 2020. This was explicitly tied to Covid-19.

East Asian heritage hate crime has increased by 75% (43 investigations) compared to the same period previous year. The increase is largely due to the increase in recording hate crime over the late spring and early summer months.

Essex Police engaged with local community leaders and Southend Council, promoting the different methods of reporting this crime type. Essex Police continue to monitor this concern.

Overall Hate Crime (including all victims heritage) year-on-year (October 2019- September 2020 compared to same period previous) has increased by 5%. A notable increase was seen during June and July 2020, however this was most likely due to an increase in recording hate crime, neighbour-on-neighbour disputes due to the national lockdown restrictions and It might also be suggested the increase is due to targeted awareness. Currently local Hate Crime is on trend with its seasonal expectations.

Hate crime remains a priority for Southend Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and is discussed at a monthly multi-agency community action group (CAG), problem solving any challenges that may be arising. A dedicated hate crime policing team has been developed to tackle this crime type. This is the only team of its kind across Essex. Training has been given to create Hate Crime Ambassadors, who provide advice to and signpost victims to report hate crime through a hate crime reporting centre (HIRC). Southend has 6 Hate Crime Reporting Centres, including Southend-on-Sea Borough Council. There are 15 hate crime ambassadors at Southend-on-Sea Borough Council.

An updated delivery plan for the Essex Hate Crime Action Plan 2018-2021 was launched this month (October). The delivery plans actions fall into the following 5 themes;

1. Understanding hate crime
2. Preventing hate crime
3. Increasing the reporting of hate crime
4. Increasing access to support for victims
5. Improving the operational response to hate crime

Community safety has met with Essex Police and Victim Support Services to discuss the actions needed to be taken to achieve the above 5 themes.

National Hate Crime Awareness week was hosted between 10th and 17th October 2020. Community Safety and Hate Crime Ambassadors were actively involved in promoting awareness and contributing to social media posts. Community safety officers also wore the national hate crime awareness t-shirt. Victim support released an information pack which encouraged both public and practitioners to report hate crime to the service. A county wide film was produced and released, with partners across the county answering commonly asked questions about hate crime. Southend Police released a media statement regarding the work achieved by their dedicated hate crime team – Op Quartz.

Question 4 from Councillor Aylen to the Cabinet Member for Business, Culture and Tourism

Question

Will the cabinet holder for property explain if Southend council owns any property or land at Garons Park including the leisure and tennis centre and Garons Golf course?

Answer

The freehold to the Leisure and Tennis Centre is owned by the Council, although some of the outside courts and parking areas are leased in from Garon Trust.

The Council also hold the freehold for the facilities to the south of the leisure centre; the athletics track and club, the soft play business, the sports and social club, the redgra pitch and the associated parking areas.

The land and pitches, and the football changing rooms at the Youth Commemoration Ground are also held by the Council but as trustees of the Youth Commemoration Ground.

The Golf Course and associated sports and leisure facilities north of the leisure Centre including the cricket pavilion and pitches are owned by the Garons Trust.

Question 5 from Councillor Aylen to the Cabinet Member for Business, Culture and Tourism

With trip advisor placing Belfairs park as one of the top ten places to visit in Essex would the cabinet holder for parks be prepared to invest in Belfairs park , repair the many broken fences maintain existing footpaths and signage and look to restoring the gardens of the park to similar standards as priory park, South church park , marine gardens leigh, cliff gardens southend , southchurch hall, Chalkwell park, prittlewell square, and the list goes on that leaves Belfair as the very poor cousin?

Answer

The fact that many of the Towns Parks and Green Spaces, and the attractions within them, received high praise on Trip Advisor and Google, is acknowledged and shows the enjoyment these facilities bring to our citizens and visitors and the strength of feeling they have about them by placing a comment.

Belfairs Park is one of the boroughs most visited parks and received a Green Flag award, along with six other parks in the town this year.

Most of the Towns Parks have something different to offer and for many, it is the woodland and naturalised areas that they enjoy about Belfairs Park and comment on.

Over the last decade, Belfairs Park has seen the largest investment in improvements of all Parks within Southend-on-Sea with over £1.5 million invested by the Council and external funders, enabling the building of the Belfairs Woodland Centre, replacement sports drainage on the golf course, new signage, new overflow parking area, children's play equipment and other enhancements.

Belfairs Park is not a poor cousin to other parks in the town, with high maintenance of facilities, such as the golf course, requiring ongoing Council funding.

We are all aware of the financial pressures facing the Council and the need for repair budgets to be targeted at those elements with the greatest benefit to health, wellbeing and safety for the whole Borough.

Concerning the points raised about fences, paths and signage, work on all these items has taken place in the Belfairs Park over the last year. However, as with all Parks in the Town, the works are prioritised and therefore it will be the case that a broken fence may not be repaired as the risk associated with the damage is minimal and the resources need to be targeted towards a more urgent repair.

To place additional financial pressures on the Council at this time by introducing high-maintenance floral displays in the gardens at Belfairs Park or to invest capital funding in recreating the formal garden area which was re-landscaped in the 1950s, would be inappropriate.

It is important that our Parks and Green Spaces meet the changing needs of our citizens, support biodiversity and adapt to the changing climate. Therefore they will need to continue to evolve and change.

The passion for the environment and the increasing importance local citizen's place on the Towns parks and green spaces has seen an increased interest in volunteering and friends groups. We have a number of successful groups run by volunteers such as those at Southchurch Hall Gardens and Leigh Library gardens. If Cllr Aylen would like to set up such a group I can confirm that officers will provide the necessary guidance.