

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 19 November 2019 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor E Adam (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors O Milburn, B Avery, A Batey, D Bell, L Brown, J Carr, B Coult, R Crute, S Dunn, T Henderson, J Higgins, R Manchester, I McLean and M Wilson

Co-opted Member:

Mrs P Holding

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Hawley, P Howell, C Kay, P Sexton and A Simpson.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor T Henderson substituted for Councillor P Howell.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Dunn declared an interest in the undermentioned Woodlands report as his division was part of the Urban Tree Regeneration Scheme and Coxhoe Parish Council had taken on a woodland.

4 Any Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

5 Street Lighting

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that

provided Members with an overview of the Street Lighting Energy Reduction Project (SLERP) (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Mr B Buckley, Strategic Highways Manager and Mr D Hubbard, Street Lighting Manager were in attendance to deliver a presentation that provided the following information:

- Introduction
- Street Lighting Policy
- Scope – Phase 1
- Timetable – Phase 1
- Financial Performance
- Benefits
- Key Issues – removals
- Key Issues – LED Retrofits
- Phase 2
- Phase 2 Scope
- Phase 2 Delivery
- Phase 2 – Projected Outcome

Members were advised that the SLERP took place from 2013 to March 2019. The project was procured in collaboration with regional procurement of street lights and delivery of the project was in house using Durham County Council Street Lighting Team with support from contractors.

Retrofit of the street lights started in June 2013 and the policy was updated in November 2013 to accommodate the project. Originally the project intended to remove 7000 street lights but following a desk top study this figure was revised. A Road Safety Auditor checked all removals and lights were only removed where it was safe to do so.

The first phase of the project took six years to complete. The project was well managed, and the actual costs were just a little short of the original business case. The net revenue savings were incorporated into the Council's medium term financial plan savings.

The Strategic Highways Manager advised members that LED street lighting had a much longer life span than low and high pressure sodium street lighting and therefore the maintenance costs are much reduced.

Members were advised of the key issues raised during phase one that included concerns raised via town and parish councils in relation to removal of lights. An example was given of a location in Weardale where it had been proposed to remove a light, local councils highlighted that where the light was situated next to a bus stop. The Road Safety Auditor reassessed the location and while the bus stop was

not an official bus stop mini buses picked up and set down children in that location – the light remained in situ.

Other complaints related to lighting levels in communities, colleagues went to the location with a light metre and the levels were checked and reported back as being within the correct level.

Following the presentation, Councillor Avery asked if there were any improvements on the intensity of the light.

The Strategic Highways Manager responded that they continued to meet British standards.

Councillor Avery then raised concerns of lighting in areas of A167 at Ferryhill to Chilton and Ferryhill to Thinford and where lighting had been removed between Croxdale and Cock o' the North Roundabout and advised that he had received complaints from road users.

The Strategic Highways Manager responded that they had appointed an independent road safety auditor to look at the lights that was well documented. The auditor had been out to conflict areas and crossing points to assess the areas and advised that local town and parish councils had service level agreements to keep lighting columns.

Mr D Hubbard, Street Lighting Manager, indicated that a number of parishes had ten year agreements and that another assessment would be undertaken at the end of the agreement.

Councillor Avery indicated that there were areas on estates where better lighting was needed in places such as pathways between streets and that he intended funding a light in this area.

The Strategic Highways Manager advised that some members had used their budgets to fund improved lighting on estates such as pathways between properties.

Councillor Higgins asked why some columns had more LED lights than others and why were industrial estates lit better than some streets.

Members were advised that some fittings had more LEDs than others to meet British standards, they were not aware of industrial estates been lit higher than the minimum standard. Lighting Columns on industrial estates were higher, and the roads were wider so it could just be a perception of being better lit.

In response to a question from Councillor Dunn, Members were advised that the pay back was over 12 years for phase one.

Councillor Dunn then asked what the difference was between heritage style lights and those in the Environmental Zone E1. The Street Lighting Manager advised that stringent checks were carried out in relation to those in the E1 zone because this was an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) the illumination was not reflected upwards to preserve the dark sky whereas heritage style lights the light was reflected upwards.

Councillor Dunn then referred to the street lighting energy reduction project which he found a success and the environment impact was excellent with benefits to areas such as the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with dark skies designation and the improvement in the quality of light was also fantastic. He asked if the dimming of the lights had commenced.

Officers responded that the dimming was in force which was hardly noticeable but created energy savings. A meeting had taken place on site at Framwellgate Moor to show the dimming of the lights and nobody could tell the difference.

The Chair confirmed that he was in attendance at this site meeting and you could not tell the difference.

Councillor Dunn referred to Appendix 1 of the report and climate change implications that he was pleased to see in the report. He asked that future reports show the risk implications and also quantify the impact on carbon emissions. The Chair responded that climate change would be included in all reports coming forward.

Councillor Henderson asked when work would start in the Teesdale area to retrofit lights. He also mentioned the plans for an astronomical observatory to be built at Grassholme and the need for planned lighting installations to help reduce light pollution and preserve dark skies status.

The Street Lighting Manager responded that they would be looking at Teesdale in the second year of the project.

Councillor Coult referred to the table at paragraph 42 of the report that showed the number of existing units and those that had been retrofit and asked why the remaining units could not be changed.

The Street Lighting Manager responded that this was to do with the type of fitting that meant that they could not obtain an LED light, so the problem was manufacture led. As they were going through the project there could be more advances with technology so they may be able to change more lights to LED in the future. Members were also advised that the weight of the lantern meant that some columns were not suitable and could not take the weight of an LED lantern, but the weight of the LED lanterns was reducing, so as time passes changing to retrofit may be

possible. Members were advised that all lighting columns were tested for weight and windage.

The Chair suggested that if the issue was viewed from an environmental point of view could a business case be put forward to change all columns not be replaced so that the lights could be changed to LED.

The Street Lighting Manager responded that it was linked to the column replacement programme and had replaced 1000 columns over three years and if a column had come to the end of its life then it would be changed. Members were advised that a report would be considered by Cabinet at a future date in relation to the age of the lighting stock but this would be a capital investment.

The Chair asked if bollards and street signs were included in the retrofit.

The Street Lighting Manager stated that there was a capital cost of replacing bollards which were only guaranteed for 4/5 years, so the savings were not financially viable. However, any damaged bollards would be replaced with LEDs.

Councillor Dunn referred to paragraph 42 of the report that indicated there were 1037 non-LED lights in conjunction with column replacement programme and asked if the 5,000 lights were still to be replaced and if this was due to the type of column and if they would remain after phase two.

The Street Lighting Manager confirmed that was correct and added that the 5000 still to be replaced was because of the type of column and not because of the condition of the column. The Street Lighting Manager continued that a number of the columns belonged to the Northern Power Grid (NPG) and that a number required new control boxes that cost up to £1000 each to be replaced.

Councillor Dunn asked if there was scope to negotiate a programme to make the change more viable as he was sure they would also be committed to carbon reduction.

Officers responded that they had a joint user agreement for lights on NPG poles but they could be asked to remove the lights from the poles, which had been done in some areas. They did work closely with the NPG, but more and more cables were now underground.

Councillor Avery mentioned of a fatal road collision within his division and asked if lights would be staying in that area. The Strategic Highways Manager advised that if the lights had been replaced, they would not be removed.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their report and presentation which was very informative.

Resolved: That the report and presentation be noted.

6 Woodlands

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and the Corporate Director of Transformation and Partnerships that provided Members with an overview of woodlands in County Durham (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Ms S Mullinger, the Landscape Delivery Officer was in attendance to present the report and circulated a copy of the Durham Woodland Revival leaflet.

Members were advised that delivery of the Durham Woodland Revival Programme had commenced. Funding had been received from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and they had started to put woodland estates into management. The programme would run for 4 years to restore and reconnect woodlands.

Around 60 ha of new woodland would be created at Frankland, West Cornforth and Thornley that would be planted up and managed by the Woodland Trust and would be fully accessible.

Members were provided with details of the 'Urban Tree Fund' that was an outcome following Sheffield City Council's tree removal scheme. A minimum project of £1 million was required with match funding of 75%, 50% of which could be labour costs, so they had submitted an application. The Landscape Delivery Officer provided members with information of possible locations. They had been advised that the grant application was successful, however the offers had later been withdrawn temporarily while spot checks were carried out. Applicant's would be advised later this week if their application had been successful, they were confident that their bid would remain but there were time constraints and the work had to be complete by April 2020. Procurement was awarded subject to funding to help advance the project and it was hoped that tree planting would be complete January/February 2020.

In relation to management of Durham County Council's Woodlands teams Members learned that all officers were now in Environment Service within the Regeneration and Local Services service grouping. An audit of the woodlands created by the Authority was carried out that indicated since 2000 there had been 500 hectares planted. In relation to hedgerows, there had been enough to stretch from Durham to Nottingham. The Landscape Delivery Officer confirmed that woodlands in County Durham were in a good position in that they all had management plans and woodlands groups were capable to manage sites.

Woodland planting would contribute towards achieving carbon neutral targets.

The Chair thanked the Officer for a lot of interesting information and a lot of positives were to come from the work. The Chair asked if the Officer could give members an idea of the size represented by 60 hectares (ha) and what was the area of the largest area of the newly created woodlands.

The Landscape Delivery Officer responded that 60 ha was equivalent to approximately 40 football pitches. The largest woodland was Thornley at 34 ha, then two slightly smaller areas of woodland but significant woodlands.

Councillor Batey referred to the areas identified as part of the Urban Tree Challenge for woodland and asked if local members would be consulted on the proposals.

The Landscape Delivery Officer responded that they had a short period of time to pull together the application and confirmed that local members would be consulted once the grant was awarded.

Councillor Avery congratulated the Landscape Delivery Officer on a magnificent scheme and advised that the Woodland Trust had taken control of woodlands in his Division, but they had problems with people riding off road bikes through the woodland and had installed security gates to combat this issue. Councillor Avery then asked if the area of new woodland at West Cornforth was on reclamation land.

The Landscape Delivery Officer advised that the service used whatever land it could to create new woodlands, but some areas do not have enough top soil to create new woodlands.

Councillor Dunn indicated that 60 ha was not a large area and they needed to be planting larger forests. They needed to look at access or acquire more land so that a lot more trees could be planted. He then referred to the County Durham plan where developers claim trees cannot be planted on newly created estates and in these cases tree planting should take place in the local area. Planning Officers needed to ensure that the number of trees planted was equal to those removed.

In response to a statement from Councillor Dunn about a planning scheme in Bowburn running out of money the Landscape Delivery Officer advised that there was money available for them to continue with the planting scheme.

Councillor Dunn referred to Integra 61 that was being built in his division and appealed to the ecology team to suggest that landowners around the site consider planting trees to form a screen from the warehouses intended for the site. Councillor Dunn confirmed that currently the land was open farmland neighbouring the site.

He then referred to the woodland in the Coxhoe area that had lost its volunteers who had looked after the woodlands and they were now struggling with maintenance of the site.

The Landscape Delivery Officer advised Councillor Dunn that Kings Wood was on the schedule for maintenance.

The Chair enquired how many trees would need to be planted to remove 100Ktonnes of carbon.

The Landscape Delivery Officer advised that the 25000 trees planted would only remove a quarter of that and a lot more trees would need to be planted.

Councillor Dunn suggested that we should quadruple the number of trees planted as this would mitigate what Durham County Council had to do to address the Climate Emergency by 2050.

The Chair referred to the woodland being for the benefit of people in the community, the carbon sequestration benefits of woodlands, increased biodiversity and recreational opportunities and asked the Landscape Delivery Officer if she would present a further report at a future meeting of the Committee.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Landscape Delivery Officer provide a further update report.