

**COUNTY COUNCIL – 9 JULY 2019**

## **QUESTION FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

### **1. Question from Rose Gauntlett, Seaford, East Sussex**

Is the Lead Member aware of the environmental damage caused by ill-informed school grounds “maintenance” work? For example, at Seaford Primary School, where the grounds have been developed over a number of years for use as an outdoor laboratory, recent work cleared areas where birds lived and nested, removed undergrowth in wooded areas near an active badger sett, removed a new hedgerow planted to screen a nature trail, and cut completely the grass providing habitat for slow worms, thereby endangering a number of protected species and causing damage that in some cases may take up to five years to recover.

What criteria did the County Council use in selecting a school grounds maintenance company? How did they ensure that the company who won the tender:

- had the necessary skills, experience and training to meet the range of requirements of individual schools including those schools that are using their grounds as an open air laboratory?
- were able to tailor the work they undertake at each school to ensure the correct timing of tasks to fit in with the teaching programme for each season, to enable children to use the school grounds as part of their educational experience;
- understood the environmental impact of their work to ensure that work was carried out sympathetically to take account of breeding and flowering seasons?

### **Response by the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability**

The Lead Member has been made aware of specific works being carried out at Seaford Primary School. This Grounds Maintenance work was through a direct commission by Seaford Primary school with Glendales as the contractor and as such the County Council did not have any direct involvement. Glendales are however known to the County Council as they are also a provider of Grounds Maintenance work for the County Council.

Through our enquiries, the County Council is aware that the project is part of a rejuvenation project of the site that has involved the clearance of vegetation and brambles so that bulbs and a wildflower meadow can be planted.

Before carrying out the works, the site was carefully inspected by Glendales. Invasive hogweed was discovered on the front bank, and behind the trim trail, which necessitated further clearance works for its removal. A badger sett was also on site, but of course left untouched.

The County Council fully recognises the concerns raised and, in its own direct contract work, takes full account of all statutory, environmental and Natural England issues. In response to the complaints raised, Glendale have already made a

commitment to provide further planting to compensate for any that could potentially have been saved as part of the clearance works, and agreed by the school.

With regard to the secondary question over procurement, the grounds maintenance service forms part of a wider Grounds Maintenance and Arboricultural services contract which was tendered, evaluated and awarded in 2018. In awarding this contract the County Council had comprehensive specialist arboricultural advice to both set the service quality specification for the County Council's contract and evaluate contract bidders on their responses, experience and references.

The contract started on 1 February 2019 and runs up to 31 March 2022. It was awarded, based on responses to a key set of questions around delivery and technical awareness, including compliance on environmental & other statutory legislation. Glendale were awarded the contract following this comprehensive process and this contract now serves ESCC's corporate and schools estate.

## **2. Question from Barbara Dye, Seaford East Sussex**

Does East Sussex County Council have a biodiversity action plan? I can't find any record of one on the internet. I am moved to ask this particularly because a lot of residents who seem to care more for appearances than biodiversity take it upon themselves to mow the verges outside their homes and recently I've noticed people using glyphosate weedkiller as well. Given the many doubts raised about the safety of glyphosate (by the World Health Organisation, with successful court cases against the makers of Roundup in the US, and proposed and enforced bans by many local authorities and indeed countries) surely it isn't wise or ethical for ESCC to be allowing residents to spray it unsupervised on what is, after all, public land?

### **Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment**

The Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was produced in the early 2000s by the Sussex Biodiversity Partnership of which East Sussex County Council was a member. The Sussex BAP was never a physical document or list, other than a collection of maps and individual Sussex Habitat Action Plans. The Sussex BAP consists of local Biodiversity Opportunity Area maps to prioritise areas for action, targets for maintaining, restoring and creating BAP habitats, and partnerships working together to conserve biodiversity. The Sussex Biodiversity Partnership now no longer exists, but has been replaced by the Sussex Local Nature Partnership which continues to work across sectors and organisations, including East Sussex County Council, to secure the healthiest ecological system possible thereby protecting and enhancing the natural environment and all that it gives us.

East Sussex County Council also maintains a schedule of Wildlife Verges and where possible, these are managed to protect their wildlife interest. These verges are marked with a small yellow flower shaped marker and can be seen in many locations around the county. Verges are included on the schedule for a variety of reasons, e.g. they may support rare and vulnerable species, plant communities of conservation value, visually attractive seasonal flowers, or be verges particularly valued by the local community. To help protect these habitats for wildlife, they are not normally cut

by the County Council between 1 March and 31 August to allow wildflowers to set seed.

With respect to the use of glyphosate on road verges, the County Council only uses this for the control of Japanese Knotweed, which is an invasive non-native species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Otherwise, all of our verges are managed organically, and we are also looking at alternatives for treating kerbs and pavements. We are aware that some residents maintain the verges outside of their homes and may, in some instances, use weedkiller that contains glyphosates in doing so. The County Council would clearly prefer such chemical pesticides not to be used and would encourage others to manage verges in similar ways to the Council in order to maximise the benefits for biodiversity. The Council will be looking at what more we can do in order to make residents aware of our position on this matter and encourage them not to use chemical pesticides. However, whilst banning the use of glyphosates by third parties on highway verges may seem a sensible proposition, the Council needs to be mindful of the enforceability of such a ban. This is considered to be difficult to achieve and therefore, for the time being, the Council will continue a discouragement approach on this matter.

### **3. Question from Gabriel Carlyle, St Leonards on Sea, East Sussex**

Fossil fuel companies are forecast to invest \$4.9 trillion in developing new oil and gas fields (ie. oil and gas fields that are not already in production or development) over the next decade. Exxon alone – in which the East Sussex Pension Fund currently has millions of pounds of local people's pension monies invested - is forecast to invest \$167 billion on developing such fields.

According to one recent analysis that compared these forecasts to data from the IPCC's climate models, none of this capex is compatible with limiting global warming to 1.5°C ('Overexposed: The IPCC's report on 1.5°C and the risks of overinvestment in oil and gas', 23 April 2019, <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/oil-gas-and-mining/overexposed>).

Given these facts – and the likely negative impact on the value of the Fund's fossil fuel investments under a 1.5°C scenario - will the East Sussex Pension Fund be incorporating a climate risk assessment of the Fund under a 1.5°C scenario at its annual investment strategy review on 10 July? If not, why not?

### **Response by the Chair of the Pension Committee**

The Pension Committee's strategy day schedule for the 10 July 2019 will provide the Committee with the opportunity to review the Fund's current investment strategy. It will also look at the potential risks the Fund will be facing in the future. The Committee will be looking at various macro-economic factors, including environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) issues as part of the day. The risk that these may pose to the Fund's Investment Strategy and any potential impacts will be discussed. This will shape how the Fund develops its Investment strategy for the future.

#### **4. Question from Gemma Aallah, Eastbourne, East Sussex**

Parents4future have been made aware of the continuing delays to the East Sussex Walking and Cycling Strategy 2019. We are very keen to support our children in walking and cycling to school and after school activities. Does The Lead Member consider that these ongoing delays are unacceptable and agree they are having a negative effect, in terms of active travel and a healthier, less polluted Eastbourne? Please could we have some clear information on the way forward.

#### **Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment**

The Department for Transport (DfT) is encouraging Local Authorities to develop Local Cycling & Walking Investment Plans (LCWIPS). Whilst there is no requirement for local authorities to do so, or a definitive deadline for their submission, the County Council has proactively chosen to develop a plan which will underpin the emerging Strategy to demonstrate our commitment and to support greater levels of investment in cycling and walking in the future. This in turn will support a raft of policy areas including supporting economic growth and providing improvements to health and the environment.

I can confirm that East Sussex County Council is in the process of developing a Countywide Cycling & Walking Strategy which we currently propose to publish for public consultation in autumn 2019. It is planned that the outcome of the public consultation will be reported to my decision making meeting in December 2019.

Whilst it has not been possible to get the draft Strategy to public consultation as quickly as originally intended, it is not considered that this is having a negative impact on active travel in Eastbourne. We have and are investing significantly in walking and cycling infrastructure and behavioural change initiatives in Eastbourne. In the past year, we have completed Phase 3 of the Horsey Cycle Route which has been positively received and is already well-used. Consultation on a further phase of the route linking to Eastbourne Station will take place later this year. Preliminary design work on a number of other routes in the town is continuing.

We have delivered an upgraded pedestrian crossing on Kings Drive to assist pedestrians accessing St Thomas A Becket Catholic Primary School and work to construct a new pedestrian crossing on Friday Street will commence later this year. We are also investing £8.25m from a range of funding sources in improving the pedestrian environment in Terminus Road, Cornfield Road and Gildredge Road to support the wider investment in The Beacon extension, with consultation for the next phase of improvements to Terminus Road planned for later this year.

In addition, as part of our Active Access for Growth Programme, a Sustrans Active Travel Officer is working with schools across the county, including Eastbourne, to deliver events and activities to develop the skills to travel to school by walking, scooting and cycling. This is, of course, complemented by a number of active School Travel Plans that have been adopted by schools in Eastbourne, all of which seek to encourage sustainable travel to and from school.

Therefore whilst the Strategy is yet to be consulted upon, we have and continue to invest in and deliver both infrastructure and initiatives in Eastbourne that encourage active travel, and thereby reduce carbon emissions and promote healthier lifestyles.

## **5. Question from Alice Burchfield, Peacehaven, East Sussex**

Who took the decision that Swale Academies Trust should be brought into Peacehaven Community School as school improvement? When did they take this decision and what other partners were considered? Following on from this, who then took the decision that Swale Academies Trust should be given Peacehaven Community School permanently? When did they take that decision and what other partners were considered?

### **Response by the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability**

The decision for Swale to become the school improvement partner was taken by the local authority in October 2015 in line with the Department for Education's Schools Causing Concern guidance. The governing board at the school was consulted as required about this decision.

The local authority spoke to other trusts and local schools at the time to identify options for interim leadership. The leadership capacity identified by Swale represented the best solution for securing improvement at the school. The Interim Executive Board (IEB) made the decision to convert to an academy with Swale at their meeting on 21 April 2017. The minutes of the IEB and consultation documents are available on the school's website.

## **6. Question from Naomi Bos, Telscombe Cliffs, East Sussex**

Peacehaven Community School has around 800 students.

The Interim Executive Board (IEB) minutes of 21 April 2017 state:

### **4.1 Proposal to proceed with sponsored academy conversion**

4.1.1 The members reviewed the information circulated with the agenda. Loren advised that 8 response forms had been received from stakeholders and all had been positive in terms of converting to an academy with SAT. In response to a question Loren advised that all questions and queries raised in relation to academy conversion had been answered, either at the consultation meetings or via email following the meetings. The email responses had been drafted by Derek and checked by Penny before they had been sent. No further questions were raised.

In a letter to parents and carers on 7 May 2019 the Chair of the IEB, Penny Gaunt, wrote "I can assure you that the consultation process conducted in 2017 involved all stakeholders and all written responses we received supported the proposal for the school to become an academy with Swale Academies Trust (SAT)."

I wrote, and kept, a negative response at the time. It reflects that the message that Penny Gaunt gave to a large room of parents announcing the proposed academisation and up coming 'consultation' was that the 'consultation' would not affect or change the outcome of becoming a SWALE Academy. This is further demonstrated by the fact that a Director of Swale was drafting responses to the IEB 'consultation' before an official decision had been taken.

The claim that no responses were negative has been proven untrue, over 600 local parents have signed a petition, over 300 postcards have been signed in support of reinstating a Governing Body and for a fresh consultation and the majority of Peacehaven Town Council and both local MPs are asking for a pause and rethink.

Given no one could claim the 8 responses to the consultation is strong support where are you getting your evidence to say in press statements there is strong support?

### **Response by the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability**

The school has informed us that the formal responses to its own consultation in 2017 were all supportive of the proposal to convert to academy status as stated in the minutes of the Interim Executive Board on 21 April 2017.

### **7. Question from Scarlett McNally, Eastbourne, East Sussex**

Why is the provision for cyclists and potential cyclists in Eastbourne getting worse, when this is the best way to reduce congestion, pollution and ill-health, and where has the funding gone?

### **Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment**

Provision for current cyclists and potential new cyclists in Eastbourne is improving, not getting worse.

Alongside development contributions and the County Council's own funding allocation for local transport improvements, the County Council has secured £6.6m of external funding through the Local Growth Fund monies through the South East Local Enterprise Partnership for walking and cycling improvements in the Eastbourne and South Wealden area through the LEP's Growth Deal with Government.

The first tranche of the funding (£2.6m) was used to fund the development and delivery of the Phase 3 of the Horsey Cycle Route between Lottbridge Drove and Langney Roundabout, using Local Growth Fund (LGF) allocations secured from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP). This high quality, off-road route is already being well used and provides access to local schools, workplaces and retail areas for a large number of residents in this part of the town. Consultation on the final phase of the wider Horsey Cycle Route starts later year.

Design work on a number of other routes on key alignments in the town is already under way as part of the 2019/20 Capital Programme for Local Transport Improvements, which will be delivered using the second tranche of £4m of Local Growth Fund monies.

The County Council has also worked hard to secure the Government's Department for Transport revenue funding previously for its Local Sustainable Transport Fund programme, and latterly for its Active Access for Growth Programme, which is delivering a wide range of interventions to encourage – and enable – residents of key towns such as Eastbourne to undertake sustainable travel journeys to school, work or for recreation.

Therefore we are delivering both infrastructure and complementary revenue funded initiatives that are improving the situation for cyclists in Eastbourne which will help to reduce congestion, pollution and encourage healthier lifestyles.

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