

WEST CENTRAL AREA COMMITTEE

17 June 2021
6.30 - 8.30 pm

Present

Area Committee Members: Councillors S. Baigent, Bick, Gehring, Nethsingha, Payne, Porrer, S. Smith, Sweeney and Rae

Officers:

Head of Streets and Open Spaces: Joel Carré

Anti-Social Behaviour Officer: Sarah Steggles

Committee Manager: Thomas Mears

Meeting Producer: Liam Martin

Other Officers in Attendance:

Police Sergeant: Kevin Mišík

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

21/10/WAC Welcome, Introduction and Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Gilderdale.

21/11/WAC Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

21/12/WAC Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2021 were approved as a correct record.

The Chair recorded his thanks to the former Chair and members of the Committee.

21/13/WAC Matters and Actions Arising From the Minutes

The committee action sheet was noted. Councillors would send any updates to the Committee Manager outside of the meeting.

The committee noted a completed action arising from item 21/5/WAC Open Forum, item 2. A letter had been sent by the former Chair of the West Central Area Committee to the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) Executive Board to ask the Board to support the 20mph recommendation on Histon Road. The Committee noted this matter would be raised at the next GCP Executive Board meeting on 1 July 2021.

Sgt Mišík provided the Committee with the following update on item 19/25/wcac q3:

- i. A Working Group had been established that included officers from the police, council and interested members of the public looking at the following areas:
 - The security of cycle parking at Cycle Point.
 - The reporting of cycle crime.
 - Increasing CCTV coverage.
 - Proactive engagement around cycle crime.
 - Issuing Criminal Behaviour Orders to high-profile cycle thieves.

The Head of Streets and Open Spaces added:

- i. The multi-agency task group continued to meet monthly to develop an action plan which was now being used to inform a bid to the Cycle Rail Fund to deliver priority actions to improve cycle parking and security infrastructure for Cycle Point.
- ii. The management plan still to be formally signed off by planning but was nearing completion following discussions between the planning service and Great Anglia.

Update to 20/5/WAC – Castle Mound:

Councillor Payne said there was a consultation due to start about the public right of way after the last committee meeting, but there had been a slight delay due to Covid-19 and the consultation was still ongoing.

Councillor Smith added that Suffolk County Council handled the application for the public rights of way and had recommended approval for it to be placed on the definitive map and waiting for Ministerial approval. The Village Green application had been deferred depending on the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions due to the notices that were required to be displayed in public libraries.

Action: Cllr Payne to feedback progress at the next meeting.

Update to 21/5/WAC Q1 – Open Forum:

Councillor Payne provided the committee with an update on anti-social behaviour from the homeless accommodation on Histon Road:

- i. Noted the officer managing the establishment was aware of concerns raised and working proactively to reduce anti-social behaviour.
- ii. Confirmed the accommodation was due to be emptied with the residents moved on through various other agencies.

21/5/WAC Q6 – Open Forum

Action: Councillor Porrer to remind Chairs of other Area Committees to invite the Head of Streets and Open Spaces to speak on the City Centre Recovery.

21/14/WAC Open Forum

1. Councillor Porrer raised an item on funding for insurance from the Council for Residents Associations and volunteer groups:
 - i. There had been some movement nationally about a collective approach to reduce insurance costs.
 - ii. Noted it was a complex matter and one that officers had been investigating.
 - iii. Had correspondence from residents that had expressed a desire to work with the City Council to see if the insurance cost can be reduced.
 - iv. Noted that the City Council provided grants to these organisations who then spend a proportion on insurance. A reduction in insurance costs could produce a saving for the Council and the relevant organisations and could encourage more community groups to come forward.

Action: Councillor Porrer to investigate with officers.

Members of the public asked a number of questions, as set out below.

2. A member of the public raised the following issues about herbicides:
 - i. At the meeting of West Central Area committee on 21st March there had been agreement from councillors that pesticides should no longer be used on City Council land, and the minutes stated that: 'Councillor Harrison had obtained clarification from a senior environmental officer from the County Council that the City Council was not contracted, authorised or permitted to put weedkiller onto the County Council's

highway, and that the County Council's policy was to move away from the use of pesticides except in the case of certain invasive species'.

- ii. It was very disappointing therefore that spraying on footpaths had continued, and operatives in Newnham who were questioned about this said it was a County Council requirement to spray weeds as they are an obstruction and a danger to pedestrians. This was clearly nonsense.
- iii. Residents were aware of the environmental harm caused by pesticides, and do not support their use. Both the City and County Councils pay lip service to biodiversity - so why are they still spraying poison in our streets and how long will it take them to 'move away' from this ecocide?

In response to Members' discussion, the Head of Streets and Opens Spaces provided the following responses:

- i. Confirmed the City Council was acting as the County Council's contractor for the maintenance of the highways in the City and followed their specification for the use of herbicides on the County Council's assets.
- ii. The City Council was discussing with the County Council about restricting the use of herbicides in the routine maintenance of all City and County public realm assets. There had been agreement with the County that herbicides would not be used on grass verges on the highway. However, herbicides would continue to be used on sealed surfaces such as roads, kerbs, and the back of kerbside where they adjoin structures or buildings as per the County Council's specification.
- iii. A biodiversity strategy would be brought to the Environment and Community Scrutiny on 1 July that would cease the use of herbicides across the city. The strategy would go out to consultation over the summer. There will be cases where herbicides may still be needed on pernicious species such as Japanese knotweed.
- iv. Both councils were committed to working to Plant Life's guidance on biodiverse friendly grass verge maintenance. The City Council had invested in a grass collection machine as a trial to avoid the build-up of nutrients from cut vegetation and was working with the County to see how it can be used across the city and in other parts of the county. If the trial was successful, then there was the commitment for capital investment in the machine.

Action: Head of Streets and Open Spaces to report back progress.

3. A member of the public asked the following question on Grantchester Meadows car park:

- i. Notice had been given this week that the car park at the entrance to Grantchester Meadows is to be closed in two weeks' time. The Meadows are widely used by people from all over Cambridge, especially during the last difficult year. We are very concerned that this measure will be experienced by non-residents as exclusionary. We are very concerned there has been no community discussion of this move, of its implications for the community, wide and near, nor of other possible solutions to what is perceived by some as a problem. We would like to ask:
 - ii. How this decision was initiated?
 - iii. Why there was no consultation and what active measures will be taken to ensure that the meadows continue to welcome everyone?
 - iv. We urge the Council not to act unilaterally in these difficult times, but to seek consensus and collaboration.

Councillor Nethsingha said:

- i. Confirmed that there had been consultations with resident groups before the decision was taken for closure of the car park.
- ii. Understood the concerns of the loss of the car parking and noted nearby alternative parking available such as on street parking and the car park at Lammas Land.
- iii. Noted there were safety concerns with regards to the car park and there being no landowner posed problems with being able to resolve issues such as an increase in the number of individuals camping on site.
- iv. Noted there were only 6 parking spaces available for vehicles and at times the area is congested with more than the permitted number of vehicles on site.
- v. The closure of the car park would allow more people safer access to the meadows and keep the meadows safer.

21/15/WAC Policing and Safer Neighbourhoods

Police Sergeant Mišík highlighted the police activity since the Committee last met in November.

Previous priorities and engagement activity noted in the report were:

- i. Anti-social behaviour in King Street/Willow Walk
- ii. Anti-social behaviour in open and green spaces
- iii. Night time economy/alcohol related disorder

The Committee discussed the following policing issues:

- i. Anti-social behaviour relating to the cancellation of Midsummer Fair. Confirmed that resources were being put in place by the City Council and the police to tackle any crime or anti-social behaviour that may arise. A community hub was being run on Saturday and would have representatives from the City Council, parking services and the police to deal with relevant issues. As it was not an official event, the bridge could not be closed lawfully. The police would respond to any reports of anti-social behaviour or criminal activity. There would also be increased litter picking and public toilets and bins made available.
- ii. An increase in e-scooters in the city being ridden improperly, without adequate control or the wrong way down a one-way road. It was confirmed that e-scooters cannot be lawfully ridden on public roads unless it had been hired as part of the Government pilot which Cambridge is taking part. There were safeguards in place to ensure the proper usage of the e-scooter whilst hired. The police did routinely stop all road users that were not obeying the traffic rules, such as travelling in the wrong direction in a one-way system.
- iii. The night time economy and the safety of individuals at night. Confirmed the police were regularly engaging with venues and making routine visits to ensure they had proper resources in place for the night time economy. Other initiatives and campaigns were also in place to ensure the safety of individuals during the night time economy such as Cambridge Street Pastors, the Ask for Angela campaign and the taxi marshal scheme.
- iv. Anti-social behaviour relating to Caesarian Sunday. Noted similar issues to Midsummer Fair as it was not being run as an event. Noted practical issues around the provision, management, and collection of public toilets due to the bank-holiday, contributing to the level of anti-social behaviour.
- v. Anti-social behaviour relating to street begging in city centre. Noted there would be continued partnership working with the police and the City Council to respond to such complaints, manage aggressive begging, and providing individuals with the appropriate support.

21/16/WAC City Centre Recovery

Chair left. Chair gave apologies and left the meeting due to another appointment

The Head of Streets and Open Spaces gave an information update on the City Centre Recovery.

In response to Members' discussion, the Head of Streets and Opens Spaces provided the following responses:

- i. Noted that the new Visit Cambridge would aim to promote accommodation and visitor attractions in Cambridge once developed, similarly to the previous destination management organisation, Visit Cambridge and Beyond.
- ii. Noted the new destination management organisation would be committed to working with partners to ensure the city develops a sustainable tourism market offer.
- iii. Highlighted the immediate work on the City Centre Recovery in response to Covid-19. Recognised there had been changes in the retail market and shopping behaviours nationally. Noted the need to respond to such changes with the help of organisations such as the High Street Task Force that provide support on the long-term planning of city centres and high streets.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm

CHAIR