

## **Minutes of the Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee**

**Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2023 at 6.00 pm  
in the Council Chamber at the Council House, Priory Road,  
Dudley**

### **Present:**

Councillor D Corfield (Chair)  
Councillor P Dobb (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors C Barnett, C Bayton, K Casey, J Elliott, J Foster, S Henley, M Rogers and T Russon

### **Dudley MBC Officers:**

I Newman (Director of Finance and Legal Services), R Millard (Senior Principal Accountant), A Vaughan (Interim Director for Public Realm), G Scholes (Interim Lead for Climate Change), N McGurk (Head of Transport and Highway Services), J Deakin (Waste Operations Manager), E Bradford (Head of Neighbourhood Services), S Cooper (Head of Corporate Landlord Services), S Griffiths (Democratic Services Manager) and G Gray (Democratic Services Officer)

### **Also in Attendance:**

Mr T Weller and Mr M Richards (Member of the Public by invitation)

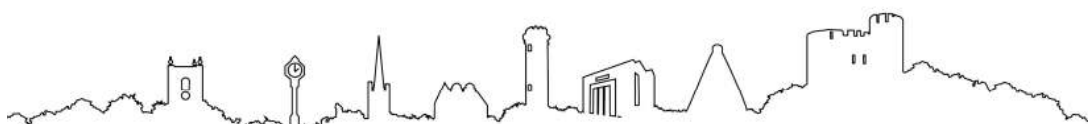
Together with 2 members of the public.

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## **24 Chairs Comments**

Councillor D Corfield expressed thanks for the condolences and support received by himself and his family during his recent bereavement.

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25 **Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor K Shakespeare.

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26 **Substitute Members**

There were no substitute Members appointed for this meeting of the Committee.

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27 **Declarations of Interests**

No Member made a declaration of interest, in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct, in respect of any matter considered at the meeting.

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28 **Minutes**

In referring to the minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> December, 2022, Councillor S Henley requested that an amendment be made to his comments under Minute no. 19(c), in that he had requested that consideration be given to amending the times of refuse waggons that were collecting household waste from residents to reduce holding up traffic, which in turn would help reduce air quality.

In referring to Minute no. 19(k) Mr T Weller requested an amendment be made regarding his concerns in relation to Climate science, in particular relating to raising resource depletion rather than resource completion, together with the reduction of fossil fuels.

Mr T Weller also referred to Minute no. 20(m) requesting that the minute be amended to advise that the Council should not have trams or busses and to utilise what was already available.

## Resolved

That, subject to the amendments above, the minutes of the meetings held on 21<sup>st</sup> December, 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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### 29 **Medium Term Financial Strategy**

A joint report of the Chief Executive, Director of Finance and Legal, Deputy Chief Executive and Interim Director of Public Realm was submitted regarding draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2025/26, with emphasis on those proposals relating to the Committee's terms of reference. Items directly relevant to this Committee were those in relation to Public Realm.

In presenting the report submitted, the Director of Finance and Legal gave an overview of the report, and in doing so, stated that the draft MTFS had been developed based on the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2022, which provided the national totals with the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2023/24 confirmed on 19<sup>th</sup> December, 2022.

The Director of Finance and Legal confirmed that the Medium-Term Financial Strategy reflected the revised spending proposals and forecasts of likely resource availability identified a total service spend of £304.2m for the 2023/24 financial year, rising to £309.4m and £310.4m for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years respectively. It was noted that the Local Government Finance Settlement had identified an additional £2.1m each year, with proposals being identified and incorporated within the final MTFS for consideration. The final version of the report would be considered by Cabinet in February 2023 and Full Council in March 2023.

Arising from the report, Members asked questions and made comments. Responses were provided where appropriate as follows:-

- a) Councillor J Foster noted that the MTFS would be reported to other Scrutiny Committees, however, it was considered that the information contained in the report did not contain enough information or any indication concerning what impact each item would have on Climate Change and Environment. It was therefore suggested that the Director of Finance and Legal obtain information regarding the impact on Climate Change from the Interim Lead for Climate Change for future reporting.

The Director of Finance and Legal acknowledged the observations made and advised that this was useful feedback for the budget next year.

- b) In referring to paragraph 55 of the report submitted, Councillor C Barnett raised concerns regarding the information in relation to Energy from Waste. It was considered that the information had the potential to be confusing or misunderstood with the impacts on the Energy to Waste facility or that they did not deliver on Net Zero targets.
- c) In responding to comments made by Councillor C Bayton in that the MTFFS report did not specify what budget had been allocated to Climate Change and Environment and that further detail was needed highlighting what elements of the budget should be considered by the Climate Change and Environment Committee, the Director of Finance and Legal advised that further information would be ascertained and incorporated into the final report.

## **Resolved**

That, subject to comments made above, the proposals for the Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2025/26, as set out in the report and Appendices to the report submitted, be noted.

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### 30 **Carbon Reduction Plan**

The Committee received a presentation from the Interim Lead for Climate Change on the Carbon Reduction Plan. In presenting the information it was reported that the Climate Plan Scorecards had been assessed and scored by qualified Climate Emergency UK volunteers, and that the Council's Climate Plans and any related documentation after 2015 and before 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2021 had been assessed and scored as part of the Climate Change Action Scorecards.

The presentation showed that Dudley had scored zero points in the assessment, which had been mainly due to the Council not having any published plans or plans in place that did not qualify between 2015 and 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2021. It was advised that although progress had been made, further work was needed.

The Interim Lead for Climate Change provided statistical information regarding the breakdown of Dudley Emissions per sector and information concerning the Mitigation rates of CO<sub>2</sub> from energy. It was noted that although Dudley were behind on the Mitigation rate, officers were confident that Dudley would be able to improve to stay within the recommended carbon budget.

Further consideration would be given to the methodology of the seven sections including Building and Heating, Transport, Governance and Finance, Planning, Biodiversity, Collaboration and Engagement.

It was considered that in comparison with the other Council's, Dudley was deemed to be mid-range and that plans for over half of the Council's in the Country had not been established or that the information used on their activity had been taken from 2019.

It was reported that CLS Consultancy on behalf of Dudley MBC had carried out a baseline assessment of the corporate estates and that work was being undertaken to review eleven corporate buildings, which gave scope for insulation and fabric improvements. The baseline assessment would give the Council aspirations for the next 5 years and provided concepts for decarbonising corporate buildings. It was advised that the work undertaken had been completed in September and would be reflected into the wider Carbon Reduction Plan.

An internal working group to drive forward behavioural change had held their first meeting in August and that it was considered important to reflect the work undertaken by this group into the wider plan on Carbon Reduction.

The Interim Lead for Climate Change reported that an assessment regarding the commercial benefit of Solar Photovoltaic Panels had been carried out in October, 2022 and it had been noted that solar economics on solar panels were more favourable.

It was advised that work was ongoing in relation to the development of the Dudley Carbon Reduction Plan, including a review on commissioning and consultants during February, 2023 for the Wider Borough Plan to support the aspirations of the West Midlands. A complete plan and list of actions where funding was needed would be issued and funding opportunities would be explored. The final draft Carbon Reduction Plan, incorporating engagement and consultation outcomes, would be submitted to Cabinet in September, 2023.

A priority action plan had been set out to include baseline data from CLS Consultancy who identified an invest to save scheme that could be set up. It was advised that all opportunities to introduce renewable energy needed to be considered including further work on the waste plant and local regeneration.

The Interim Lead for Climate Change commented that the decarbonisation programme would need to be carried out throughout the Dudley Borough and that work was needed to promote behavioural change for local people and internally at the Council. The Cabinet Member for Waste Management and Climate Change expressed his interest in engaging champions from each Directorate.

In referring to the Planning Policy, the Interim Lead for Climate Change advised that opportunities were being explored on how to achieve Net Zero including introducing carbon offset funding, which permitted planners to request for an offset payment per tonne from developers should their developments not reach the Net Zero target.

The Chair requested that a further update report be provided in six months including statistical information in relation to Low Carbon.

Arising from the presentation, Members asked questions and made comments. Responses were provided where appropriate as follows:-

- a) In referring to the Climate Plan Scorecards, Councillor C Bayton expressed her disappointment that Dudley's Climate Plan Scorecard was zero and stated that working alongside the seven neighbouring Boroughs in the West Midlands would need to be explored to achieve better outcomes.
- b) In responding to questions raised by Councillor C Bayton regarding the publication of the next set of Climate Plan Scorecards and how likely Dudley would improve their score, the Interim Lead for Climate Change advised that the next published scorecards would be in six years' time and that information regarding work being undertaken from now would be accumulated, and reflected in the next Climate Plan Scorecard.
- c) Councillor C Bayton also commented that with reference to the Dudley Emissions breakdown, it was noted that the 5% focussed on the public sector would not make an impact and that she would like to see further progress made in this area.

- d) In responding to questions raised by Councillor C Bayton and clarification sought in relation to Corporate Estates funding to decarbonisation, the Interim Lead for Climate Change advised that funding would take time to come through and that business plans would need to be put forward to obtain future funding.
- e) Councillor C Bayton commented that there had been missed opportunities in the construction of the new Duncan Edwards Leisure Centre and that running costs may cause problems in the long run.
- f) In referring to the Climate Plan Scorecards, Councillor C Barnett expressed his disappointment of Dudley's Climate Plan Score being zero and queried as to when the Carbon Reduction Plan would be published and whether the Plan would provide further detailed information.

Councillor C Barnett also questioned when the publicity campaign would be undertaken and commented that residents needed to be on board and engaged for the Plan to be beneficial.

In response the Interim Lead for Climate Change advised that there were a considerable number of actions being undertaken, which would elevate the Climate Plan Scorecard for Dudley, however, an evidence base was needed to be established. It was advised that the Cabinet Member for Waste Management and Climate Change had a greater involvement and that the priority actions were to consult with residents throughout the Summer and that the draft Carbon Reduction Plan be implemented by September 2023.

- g) In responding to a question raised from Councillor C Barnett regarding information on the carbon offset payments, the Interim Lead for Climate Change advised that the target of Net Zero by 2041 was Borough wide and that behavioural changes and external consultants would help achieve this. It was advised that the introduction of carbon offset funding would permit planners to request for an offset payment of £95 per tonne from developers should their developments not reach the Net Zero target.

The Interim Director of Public Realm commented that although the Climate Plan Scorecard was at zero, lessons had been learnt and that time had been spent during the Summer and Autumn months in managing to close the gap on funding.

Councillor C Barnett stated that he hoped that there would be an improvement on the Scorecards and that Dudley should strive for more ambition. Councillor C Barnett was of the view that the carbon offset payments would not be beneficial and that should a Developer be unable to achieve the Net Zero position then the development should not go ahead.

- h) In referring to the Dudley Emissions breakdown by sector, Councillor T Russon referred to the 33% produced by the Transport sector and indicated that an infrastructure was needed to achieve Net Zero. It was also commented that there were few Electric Vehicle charging points situated around the Borough.
- i) In response to questions raised by Councillor T Russon regarding what plans were in place to investigate moving away from natural gas on domestic properties and alternative fuels, the Interim Lead for Climate Change advised that there were timescales in place by 2030 to include Hydrogen as part of the renewable mix, however, this would be considered in the future. It was advised that technology would need to be implemented to carry out any strategy going forward.
- j) The Chair stated that a by-product of any smelting carried out produced Hydrogen and that alternative fuels would be a significant item to consider.
- k) The Cabinet Member for Waste Management and Climate Change advised the Committee that technology needed to be implemented, which was restricting progress. It was noted that plug in hybrid cars were now self-charging and that the earlier hybrid cars were using chargers where they could use petrol which would impact those with an electric car. It was acknowledged that there was a need to find people with the relevant skill set and to engage manufacturers locally.
- l) In response to a question raised by Councillor K Casey concerning the lack of comparative information with immediate neighbouring Councils with regard to the information presented on the Climate Plan Scorecard, the Interim Lead for Climate Change advised that information of the neighbouring Boroughs Climate Plan Scorecard could be obtained and circulated to Members.



- m) Councillor K Casey raised questions regarding work force planning, what measures were needed to attract people into jobs and whether behavioural change could be achieved with each section. The Interim Lead for Climate Change advised that there was a structure and plan in place to build on, and it was recognised that work force planning required the right technology and skill sets in place. Further work was also required in relation to appropriate training to ensure all Directorates were informed.
- n) Councillor J Foster commented that any changes needed to be driven by hearts and minds and considered that it was important for people to understand how much Climate Change was a priority as some people did not believe that Climate Change was a problem. It was considered that the commitment to Climate Change should feature when considering any future recruitment, promotions or appraisals. Councillor J Foster also commented that further work was needed to be undertaken at Senior Management level to drive home the message to people.
- o) The Chair referred to the number of measures undertaken in response to the 2020 Climate Emergency, including the appointment of the Interim Lead for Climate Change, which was a positive undertaking and Officers were continuing to work to provide information.
- p) The Cabinet Member for Waste Management and Climate Change clarified that Officers were undertaking a significant amount of work and Officers with the enthusiasm towards Climate Change would be engaged to become champions. It was advised that once these Officers were in place, they would be able to provide the Scrutiny Committee with further information of the work undertaken, however, it was anticipated that this would take time to implement.
- q) Mr T Weller made comments and was of the view that there was no sense of urgency of Officers and should demonstrate their commitment towards Climate Change and that with regards to the Carbon Reduction Plan everything must be reduced. In view of this it was considered that the Council had not got the basics right by placing trains back on trainlines. It was also suggested that solar panels should be installed on all buildings.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That the presentation on the Carbon Reduction Plan be noted.

- (2) That a further update and information including statistical information in relation to Low Carbon be submitted to the Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee within the next six months.
  - (3) That the Interim Lead for Climate Change be requested to provide comparative information of the neighbouring Boroughs in relation to the Climate Plan Scorecard and circulate to Members.
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## 31 **Corporate Estates**

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Corporate Landlord Services in relation to the Corporate Estates Strategy. In presenting the information it was reported that there was an existing Estates Strategy in place, which was continually being evolved; that the Council held various properties for different reasons; a regular process to review, report and confirm if individual properties were fit for their intended purpose were carried out, providing clear objectives for properties and being clear on the reasons why the Council held onto and discarded properties accordingly.

The Head of Corporate Landlord Services provided an overview of the mainstream of existing buildings and the reasons they were retained, together with an overview of office sites with leases, structural issues and annual running costs. It was advised that the totals spend for offices totalled under £3million, which was due to rise by 12%.

Information was provided at the meeting regarding developing the new strategy between 2023 and 2028, which involved three phases of work. Phase one included, agreement as to which sites would be in or out of scope, collation of high-level data, and seeking agreement from informal Cabinet on assets to be retained, taking into consideration many factors.

Phase two of the works involved an assessment of the findings from the external property report, detailing site by site assessments of those sites remaining in scope from Phase one and recommendations on retained office need including desk numbers and occupancy proposals. It was advised that work had been undertaken in buildings on possible location areas for employees.

Phase three involved the implementation phase and assigning a programme manager to oversee various projects and delivery of the plan. It was noted that some projects would be more complex than others and that the work undertaken in offices and relocating people were being considered.

Arising from the presentation, Members asked questions and made comments. Responses were provided where appropriate as follows:-

- a) In responding to questions raised by Councillor C Barnett concerning how far employees and the public would need to travel to a Council building should buildings be removed and raised concerns of the potential increase in traffic congestions, the Head of Corporate Landlord Services acknowledged that this would be a factor to consider going forward and that there had been a significant cultural change in working patterns and consideration would need to be given for the possibility of employees to utilise assets near to where they live.
- b) Councillor T Russon commented that hot desking would be practical and suggested the possibility of employees working outside regular Core hours. The Head of Corporate Landlord Services agreed that working patterns should be reviewed and the strategy was an opportunity to change current working arrangements.

## **Resolved**

That the presentation on the Corporate Estates Strategy be noted.

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### **32 Progress Update on the trial of the use of pesticides and maintaining the Borough's Green Spaces**

A report of the Interim Director of Public Realm was submitted regarding a progress report on the trial of the use of pesticides and maintenance of the Boroughs Green Spaces.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services outlined the report submitted and in doing so advised that the Council, alongside many other authorities, used Glyphosate as a non-selective chemical to manage weeds throughout the Borough. Following a report submitted to the Housing and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee in September, 2021 alternative treatments such as Katoun Gold, Chikara, foam stream, strimming, weed rippers, hoe and hand weed and flame guns were considered to be used to reduce and/or eradicate the use of Glyphosate.

It was reported that during 2022, the Grounds Maintenance Team carried out trials on alternatives to the use of Glyphosate at four locations across the Borough. Reference was made to Appendix 1 of the report submitted demonstrating before and after photographs of areas where alternative methods had been carried out.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised that public feedback was received and that 359 weed related enquiries were received between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2022. It was noted that 14 enquires related to roads within areas where weed control trials were being carried out, and 16 formal complaints in relation to weeds were received, 7 of which related to the practice of weed spraying.

It was considered that the trial had been successful and whilst the Council safely uses Glyphosate, Officers were aware that there was a view that the authority should look to move away from its use. It was advised that it would not be possible to use non-Glyphosate Katoun Gold or Chikara for the management of hard surfaces and highways.

Members asked questions, made comments and responses were given where appropriate as follows: -

- a) In responding to questions raised by Councillor M Rogers regarding what vehicles were required to transport equipment for the use of foam stream and whether a quad could be used as an alternative, the Head of Neighbourhood Services clarified that the equipment would be transported on a 3.5 tonne vehicle and that the equipment needed would be too large to fit on a quad vehicle.
- b) Councillor M Rogers considered that the report did not identify the costings for labour and acknowledged that two operatives were dedicated to undertake foam stream and queried whether the cost of labouring could be a solution to carry out alternatives.

In response the Head of Neighbourhood Services clarified that all work carried out for weeding was laborious, therefore, the budget would continue to be used for labour and that two people were needed to carry out works.

- c) Councillor M Rogers queried the amount of visits undertaken by the Grounds Maintenance Team to administer the pesticides at the locations across the Borough. The Head of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that in order to have the most effective impact, two visits were required, and that some methods worked better when weeds were visible and was weather dependent. It was confirmed that Chikara and Katoun Gold were used initially followed by a second treatment of Katoun Gold.

- d) Councillor C Eccles commented that the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds had labelled pesticides as dangerous to wildlife and that it was considered that Glyphosate could be a possible carcinogen. It was suggested that mechanical weeding should be considered to be used before the use of pesticides to maintain weeding and that comparison costs for undertaking work manually should be collated. It was considered that there had been no discussions or community involvement to help maintain the Boroughs green spaces and that residents had made a number of complaints regarding the brown stains created by the use of pesticides.
- e) Councillor C Eccles further considered that there had been no ambition or attitude to move away from the use of Glyphosate, and referred to previous concerns raised at the Housing and Public Realm Scrutiny in 2021. Councillor C Eccles suggested reports had not covered the possibility of the use of planting or building wildflower meadows, which would save on mowing.

In response, the Head of Neighbourhood Services advised that wildflower meadows and mowing were separate and that the Grounds Maintenance Team carried out mowing dependent on the weather. It was acknowledged that the use of pesticides needed to be reviewed and that thousands of sites were being reviewed with a view to using alternative techniques to move away from pesticides.

- f) Councillor C Eccles suggested that the Cabinet Member for Highways and Public Realm be consulted to review the use of shrub beds in the Borough and further work undertaken on street cleansing. It was reported that residents had requested to plant, however, had been informed that there was no budget to carry this work out.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services acknowledged the comments made and undertook to liaise with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Public Realm. It was reported that the Green Care section was currently going through a restructure and a review was being undertaken on working practices.

- g) Councillor T Russon commented on the staining on the pathways and the road after the use of pesticides and enquired as to the cost to seal edges to stop weeds growing out.

In responding to comments and queries raised the Head of Neighbourhood Services clarified that sweeping was carried out where weeds can grow, that weeds were treated accordingly, however would be still present, therefore, a follow up sweep was undertaken. It was advised that sealing up edges would be a difficult task to do.

- h) Councillor J Foster suggested that alternative ways to reduce the use of pesticides be reviewed, and requested that the Cabinet Member for Highways and Public Realm explore the costing of planting wildflowers.

In response the Head for Neighbourhood Services confirmed that weed control on hard surfaces would still be needed and would look at and tackle wildflower planting. It was acknowledged that there were benefits to planting, however, what type, where to plant and finding the right products would need to be considered.

- i) Mr M Richards considered that there was evidence that the use of Glyphosate could not be used safely and that although the report had advised that Officers used pesticides in line with regulations, reports had been published to advise that Chikara and Katoun Gold had both been described as hazardous.
- j) In responding to a number of questions raised by Councillor C Barnett, the Head of Neighbourhood Services clarified that weeds maintenance was undertaken by Council employees and the structure was currently being reviewed. It was stated that the work had to be balanced due to the varying season and that there was a need to get the right people in the right place at the right time. It was advised that should there be an investment towards wildflowers, there would need to be an understanding of the suitability of where the wildflowers could be planted. It was acknowledged that other methods of weeding would need to be reviewed, however, this would be a challenge to undertake.
- k) In referring to the recommendations set out in the report submitted, Councillor M Rogers stated that he did not agree to the recommendation in regards to the use of non-Glyphosate, Katoun Gold and Chikara due to this being considered as a herbicide and pesticide, which would wipe out insect life and in turn would invalidate the recommendation of planting wild flowers.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That the report on the Progress update on the trial of the use of pesticides and maintaining the Boroughs Green Spaces be noted.
  - (2) That the Cabinet Member of Highways and Public Realm, in view of the Scrutiny Committee comments as set out above, considers the use of alternative methods in place of non-Glyphosate, Katoun Gold/Chikara, for managing grass edges and obstacles and shrub beds as part of future annual weed control programmes.
  - (3) That a review of shrub beds undertaken by Officers to determine their current condition and appropriateness during 2023/24, be supported.
  - (4) That the Cabinet Member for Highways and Public Realm be recommended to consider commissioning a detailed review of where foam stream could be used effectively and including a review of sweeping schedules across the borough.
  - (5) That the Cabinet Member for Highways and Public Realm, in consultation with the Head of Neighbourhood Services, be recommended to explore costings in relation to the planting of wildflowers.
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### **33 Public Forum**

A member of the public was in attendance and requested that climate change should be considered in relation to domestic property insulation; referred to an insect crisis and the significant impact this would have on the environment. He also considered that substantial progress had been made by the Church of England in relation to the environment and climate change in comparison to the Local Authority.

Mr M Richards raised concerns that public transport was not referenced in the Transport Policy but predominantly related to fleet transport.

Another member of the public welcomed the report and was encouraged by the useful comments made by Members concerning the Carbon Reduction Plan, the speed of plans and need of greater ambition. It was suggested that further information should be provided to residents in relation to insulation and retrofit grants, and that consideration be given to any support that could be given in applying for grants.

The member of public further suggested that Officers and Council employees undertake a carbon literacy test.

Mr T Weller commented on the Carbon Reduction Plan and in doing so advised that the Council urgently needed to protect and enhance nature by biodiversity.

In tribute to Councillor D Corfield's son, Ben Corfield, Mr T Weller had created a woodland area dedicated to him and was known as 'Ben's Wood', next to the Lorry Park at Frankley Northbound Services.

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34 **Action Tracker**

**Resolved**

That the Action Tracker as outlined in the report, be noted.

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35 **Questions Under Council Procedure Rule 11.8**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

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The meeting ended at 8.10pm

CHAIR