

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a virtual meeting of **Area North (Informal)** held by video-conference using Zoom meeting software on **Wednesday 23 March 2022**.

(2.02 pm - 3.03 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Adam Dance (Chairman)

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| Neil Bloomfield | Clare Paul |
| Mike Hewitson | Crispin Raikes |
| Tim Kerley | Mike Stanton |
| Tiffany Osborne | Gerard Tucker |



Officers:

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| Adrian Moore | Locality Officer |
| Tim Cook | Locality Team Manager |
| John Hammond | Lead Specialist (Built Environment) |
| Jo Morris | Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services) |
| Becky Sanders | Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services) |

NB: Where an executive or key decision is made, a reason will be noted immediately beneath the Committee's resolution.

64. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 January 2022 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

65. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Malcolm Cavill and Dean Ruddle.

66. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

67. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 4)

Members noted the next meeting of Area North Committee was scheduled for Wednesday 25 May 2022 at 2.00pm, and would likely be a virtual meeting using Zoom.

68. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 5)

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

69. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman reminded everyone present that in order to enable members to continue holding remote, virtual meetings, Full Council agreed in December to amend Part 3 of the Council's Constitution to allow its remote meetings to function as consultative meetings and delegate decisions to the Chief Executive.

As the next meeting of Area North Committee was scheduled for late May, the Chairman conveyed a good-luck message to all councillors who were standing in the forthcoming local elections.

70. Reports From Members (Agenda Item 7)

Councillor Mike Hewitson reminded members that some months ago Area North had agreed a grant for the Youth and Family Centre in Stoke Sub Hamdon, He was pleased to note that works were now complete and the Centre was looking really good and was a fantastic facility for the local community. He gave his thanks to all those involved with the project.

Councillor Mike Hewitson also referred to a grant that had been approved for the United Reformed Church in Stoke Sub Hamdon to be turned into an arts centre, He noted that unfortunately it looked like the project would now not be going ahead and so the funding allocated to the project could be returned to the grants budget.

Referring to other previously awarded grants, the Chairman noted that the project at South Petherton Tennis Club had been recently completed, and works were nearly finished at South Petherton Bowls Club. He also advised members that he had agreed a discretionary grant for a defibrillator at Frogmary Green Farm for the park runs.

71. Grant to Norton sub Hamdon Parish Council - Play Area Upgrade (Executive Decision) (Agenda Item 8)

Prior to presentation of this item, the Locality Officer and Locality Team Manager responded to some points of detail raised by a member regarding the current funding available in the grants budget, the timeframes for spending or allocation, and possible dates for project completion due to the transition to a unitary authority.

The Locality Officer presented the report which asked members to consider the awarding of a grant of £12,482 towards an upgrade of the play area at Norton Sub Hamdon recreation field. He advised that Louise Brooks, Clerk to Norton Sub Hamdon Parish Council, was present in the meeting to answer any questions from members.

The Parish Clerk addressed members and explained that the existing play equipment was 25 years old and the parish council were wanting to invest in the future of the village. The play area was very well used and if possible they were hoping to complete the project in time to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee.

Ward member, Councillor Mike Hewitson, expressed his strong support for the proposal and noted it would be an asset to the area.

During a very brief discussion several members expressed their support for the project. It was proposed, and unanimously agreed, to recommend to the Chief Executive that the grant be approved, as per the officer recommendation.

RESOLVED: That Area North Committee recommend to the Chief Executive that a grant of £12,482 be awarded to Norton Sub Hamdon Parish Council towards the upgrade of the play area at the recreation field, the grant to be allocated from the Area North capital programme and subject to SSDC standard conditions for community grants (appendix A).

Reason: To consider a grant funding request for upgrading the play area at Norton Sub Hamdon recreation field.

(Voting: Unanimous)

72. Making the Most of Martock (M3) - Update (Agenda Item 9)

The Locality Manager introduced the report which gave a brief overview of what the partnership was set up to do, an update on the current situation with M3 (Making the Most of Martock) and provided members with an opportunity to consider the future relationship of SSDC with the local partnership. He explained the situation was unusual in that there were very few groups where SSDC involvement was as it was with M3. The report was before members to discuss the current arrangements and whether the Committee wished to continue supporting M3 at this level of involvement in the future.

Ward member, Councillor Neil Bloomfield, provided an overview of the partnership and gave some local insight. In his opinion things had changed over time and he felt it was no longer necessary for SSDC to be a core partner. Some of his other points raised included:

- Last March he had been in a meeting with fellow ward member Councillor Louise Clark and with the County Council, and he thought that SCC, the Parish Council and SSDC had been withdrawn as core partners at that time.
- He understood the Parish Council was no longer a core partner and they had now agreed to send a representative as an observer.
- He no longer believed the partnership served any real local purpose. Plus, with the local authority structure changing to unitary was it still appropriate to be involved?
- The partnership had served its purpose in its time, but things had changed over time.
- The Parish Council had since taken on much of the role that M3 had originally been set up to do. They also used to provide admin support for the partnership but that had ceased some time ago.
- He felt some aspects of the partnership had become unconstitutional.
- He recommended that SSDC withdraw completely from the partnership, as there was no longer any need for SSDC to be involved.

The Locality Manager explained that from an officer perspective SSDC were not committed to support anything, and had not been asked for any resource or involvement in the partnership. He responded to other points of detail raised by members during discussion, including:

- the term 'core partner' might be interpreted that we may provide something, and is possibly more appropriate to an organisation local to the village.

- The suggestion of becoming an advisory member was a possible compromise and might better reflect the active role that SSDC could undertake.
- There have been communications with M3 previously when compiling the report, and they are aware the matter is being considered.
- The January minutes for the group indicated that Councillor Louise Clark was in attendance as she had provided a verbal update.

During further discussion, comments made by members included:

- The views of the other ward member who is also the Committee representative to the group would be useful, and also to hear the views from a representative of M3.
- Having been professionally involved with the group back in 2004-2007, it must be noted that M3 has done much good work.
- Councillor Clark had been involved in several communications about the report at a drafting stage and no comments had been received.
- Concern about whether 'The Pinnacle' publication would be under threat if SSDC withdraw from the partnership.

It was proposed and seconded to defer the report until the next meeting, in order to obtain the view of Councillor Clark as fellow ward member and representative on M3. The Chairman expressed some concern about deferring the report as it would be the third time the matter had been raised at Committee. He believed that both the Parish Council and M3 were aware of the report but no one had requested to make representation. The Chairman advised that if Councillor Clark was unwell for a long period of time the matter may need to be progressed outside of committee.

The proposal to defer the item to the next meeting was carried 7 votes in favour and 1 against.

RESOLVED: That the report be deferred to the next meeting of Area North Committee in order to obtain the views of Councillor Louise Clarke - who is one of the ward members for Martock and also the Area North Committee representative for M3, but was absent from the meeting of Area North Committee on 23 March 2022 due to being unwell.

(Voting: 7 in favour, 1 against)

73. Phosphates Update (Agenda Item 10)

(Councillor Adam Dance left the meeting near the end of the officer presentation of this item, Councillor Mike Stanton was then in the Chair from 2.55pm).

The Lead Specialist, Built Environment explained that he was attending Area North to provide a brief update on the situation regarding the managing of phosphates in relation to development. He noted that several members may have been involved in discussions on the same issue at Full Council the previous week. He gave a brief overview of the history to the current situation to remind members of the issue. Some of the points he raised included:

- The history and background of the phosphate situation and the impact within the areas of South Somerset.

- Land based mitigation would require either Local Government or 3rd party bodies to identify and deliver land management based solutions.
- The phosphate calculator was a tool that allowed applicants and agents to understand the likely phosphates emissions before and after development to create a differential which was the level of phosphate mitigation they would need to deliver.
- From an operational perspective, the phosphates mitigation work has substantially increased the workload for each impacted application.
- This process has allowed some developers to use existing land, upgrade existing cesspits and other small scale solutions to allow smaller housing developments but not currently strategic scale development.
- One significant project delivered 110 house in Crewkerne where the applicants were able to fallow a large amount of land to provide an offsetting through not spreading phosphate fertilizer on that land.
- The Royal Haskoning document gives a 'best practice' guide. This sets out where the most effective land management solutions would come from for best value for money in terms of visibility and costings and provide an opportunity for land owners whether promoting projects would suit them.
- Explained the work currently being done by Somerset West and Taunton council and their commitment to delivering phosphate mitigation projects. However they currently have retained council hosing stock, which SSDC do not have, although we are working with local housing associations to encourage these mitigation projects.
- The five Somerset councils wrote to Defra and what was the ministry for housing, communities and local government last year requesting they consider funding infrastructure improvements.
- Solutions required are not at a district or county level and that national standards and national best practice needs to be rolled out to help Natural England with more evidence rather than 'reinvent the wheel' as progress is made.
- There was currently a lack of coordination and focus in terms of the national bodies involved in the process. The solutions need a coordinated approach at government, non-governmental organisation level, and those associations that represent the various interests involved.
- Land management solutions are unlikely to be the long term primary solution given the likely land take involved. There needs to be a recognition that engineered solutions need to come forward more quickly.
- This wasn't only a problem for Somerset and it was happening elsewhere across the country, with about 25 local authorities impacted.
- Should start to see land management solutions coming forward in South Somerset (non-strategic sites) in the next few months.

During a very brief discussion, the Lead Specialist, Built Environment responded to a point of detail raised about the possibility of lobbying central government to consider suspending the five-year land supply protocol in the current circumstances.

A member asked a specific question regarding the possibility of some funding to purchase phosphate testing kits for local use which had been raised previously at a member briefing. In response, the Chairman noted he would take the matter forward with the relevant portfolio holder.

There were no further questions. The Chairman acknowledged that members had received a lot of information recently about the phosphates situation, and he thanked the Lead Specialist and wider team as much work had been done.

Members were content to note the verbal update.

74. Area North Forward Plan (Agenda Item 11)

There was no discussion and members were content to note the Forward Plan.

75. Planning Appeals (for information) (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted the report that detailed the planning appeals which had been lodged, dismissed or allowed.

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Chairman