

## **TRAFFIC, ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY PANEL**

MINUTES OF A MEETING of the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel held on Tuesday 17 January 2012 at 4.00 pm in Conference Room K, Civic Offices, Portsmouth.

(NB These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting which can be found at [www.portsmouth.gov.uk](http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk).)

### **Present**

Councillor Caroline Scott (Chair)  
Councillor Robert New  
Councillor Les Stevens

### **Witnesses**

Mr Stuart Campbell, Arboricultural Officer  
Mr Gary Scammell, Colas

#### **1 Apologies for Absence (AI 1)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Margaret Foster and Councillor John Ireland.

#### **2 Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)**

Councillor Caroline Scott declared a personal, non-prejudicial code of conduct interest in that some years ago she worked for Southern Water.

#### **3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 December 2011 (AI 3)**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel held on 20 December 2011 be confirmed and signed by the chair as a correct record.**

#### **4 Review into how the council responds to the issues of surface water flooding in the city (AI 4)**

The chair of the panel welcomed Mr Gary Scammell Colas and Mr Stuart Campbell, PCC's Arboricultural Officer. A handout was circulated to the panel that had been drawn up by the Woodland Trust about the role trees played in alleviating flooding. A folder was also given to the panel which contained the results of research that had been done on stormwater management systems.

The panel was interested to hear the part that trees could play in preventing surface water flooding. Mr Scammell said that trees could intercept 12% of rainfall before it hit the ground and that vegetation also helped with this. This was dependent upon the species of tree.

Mr Gary Scammell advised the panel that he had worked for PCC's tree department from 1994 to 2005 but that he now worked for Colas and looked after highways trees. Mr Scammell advised the panel that species selection in relation to highways planting was premised on what implications there were for a landowner and their insurers. For example some roads in the city have problems with surface water flooding but trees in the same road are causing problems in terms of subsidence and cracks in the pavement caused by tree roots. Mr Scammell said that some areas to the north of the city had been identified as being suitable for planting small copses and this should help with surface water flooding in the long term.

The panel heard that the trees that could be planted on the highway were restricted by the PFI contract in place between PCC and Colas which stated that trees could only be planted on a new for old basis. There is also a cost implication and the types of trees that can be planted need to be suitable for the space. For example it would not be sensible to plant willows near people's property because of the size of the canopy and root system which would be likely to cause problems.

The panel heard that surface water had never been considered in deciding which species of tree to plant in the city. One of the best species for soaking up water was alders but they would have no real impact for about 20 years. Plane trees were also good for soaking up water but they were far too big to plant in residential areas.

Councillor Stevens said that in his view the problem with surface water had been made worse by people concreting over their front gardens.

Mr Campbell agreed that saturation was being lost. Mr Campbell said that planting in parks was not restricted in the same way as in the urban landscape and larger forest type trees could be planted that had a big canopy. However, it will take a long time before planting would be effective.

Mr Scammell said that there was not much point in his view in trying to do anything retrospectively so far as planting trees in urban areas was concerned as options are so limited.

In response to questions, the following matters were clarified

- it was confirmed that all trees were useful for soaking up water but poplars, planes, alders and willows were particularly effective. However, these species all had vigorous root systems so were not suitable for most highway planting.
- Where a tree has to be taken out because of subsidence problems, it was not possible to plant a replacement in exactly the same place.
- Planting on Southsea Common is subject to many covenants and in addition it is not a particularly good environment for trees.

- Another problem with planting trees on the highways is that utilities often use verges because it is easier than digging up hard surfaces. There is therefore less space for trees to be planted.

The panel felt that every effort should be made to maintain the existing trees and that when species are being selected, one of the factors to be taken into account should be their ability to soak up water. No one at the meeting was aware of any scientific study being carried out in relation to the difference tree planting in Portsmouth could make to reducing surface water flooding.

The panel expressed concern that front gardens were being concreted over and asked that the planning department be contacted to ascertain their policy on granting dropped kerb applications.

The chair of the panel, Councillor Caroline Scott thanked Mr Campbell and Mr Scammell for their verbal presentations.

The panel next considered a concern that Councillor Les Stevens had about unsuitable waste matter being tipped into drains. He showed the panel some photographs of an instance when this had happened which showed a build up of congealed fat that had been used for frying in commercial premises that someone had tried to get rid of by tipping it down the drain.

The panel agreed that the draft report would be considered at the next meeting which would be informal. Draft conclusions and recommendations would also be discussed and members were asked to bring their suggestions to the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 4.35 pm.

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