

Subject: Sustainability Conference Theme 2009/10
Date of Meeting: 16 March 2009
Report of: Acting Director of Strategy & Governance
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Key Decision: No Forward Plan No. N/A
Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The City Council has organised a Sustainability Conference annually for the past seven years and it has become a feature of the annual calendar.
- 1.2 The conference has steadily grown in stature in the city and is a highly visible demonstration of the city council's sustainability commitment.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 (1) That the Sustainability Cabinet Committee directs officers in the Sustainability Team to organise the next Sustainability conference on the theme of the sea.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The city council has organised an annual Sustainability Conference for a number of years now, covering the themes of biodiversity (Urban Biosphere), water shortage, climate change, making the Community Strategy sustainable, sustainable businesses, sustainable city (Strategy launch), and education for sustainable development.
- 3.2 In recent years the conferences have typically been attended by 100-150 people from across the city and have enhanced the reputation of the city council by exploring cutting edge issues and ideas and providing a platform for engagement.
- 3.3 In 2008 the conference grew further, to become a two-day conference attended by 240 delegates from a far wider pool. It gained national press coverage and international attention; and a wider audience still by launching an impressive bid to become the world's first Urban Biosphere – prioritising green spaces and wildlife in the city.
- 3.4 For a number of reasons, it feels time to consider a sea theme to the conference:

- A new Marine & Coastal Access Bill (See Appendix 1) has new implications for the city council and the sea locally, as well as for the shoreline.
 - The Clean City, Clean Sea plastic bag campaign is based strongly on scientific evidence of the damage plastic does to marine wildlife, and this is another opportunity to show council leadership.
 - A large new windfarm development is planned for the coast off Sussex and this could easily take a whole day of the conference alone.
- 3.5 A wide range of other issues and themes could be explored or touched on during the conference, including: other marine renewables (tidal, wave), sea level rise and storm surge - climate change risks and coastal protection, marine wildlife (e.g. beneath the West Pier), local seafood, the history of Brighton re its fishing origins and bathing; the work of the Seafront office and beach cleaning teams; swimming and sailing/leisure pursuits; beach wildlife tours; Ovingdean/Rottingdean rock pools etc. Even “Sink one for Seaford”, the idea of sinking a boat off the coast nearby to create a new mini reef for marine wildlife.
- 3.6 The credit crunch may mean sponsors are harder to secure this time, but possible sponsors / partners in the conference could include The Sea Life Centre, Southern Water, The Marine Conservation Society, RiverOcean, SeaRoc/Crown Estate and the winning company in the windfarm development competition, and possibly the Environment Agency again.
- 3.7 In 2008 the conference budget rose from about £5,000 to about £10,500 because it ran over two days, but officers also pulled in £3,700 in sponsorship. The balance was shared across two council directorates.
- 3.8 One lesson of the larger 2008 conference was that partnership working – last time with the University of Brighton – helps hugely and officers propose to adopt this approach again. Early planning is also essential, and due to workload pressures and resource constraints, officers would prefer to move the conference to later in the financial year.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Seafront, communications, ecology, leisure and economic development officers have been consulted.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The net cost of the conference will need to be met from the 2009/10 budget provision and is estimated to cost up to £10,000. There is a risk that sponsorship may not be attracted and this will need to be considered in planning for the conference in order that the budget is not exceeded.

Finance Officer Consulted: Anne Silley

Date: 17/02/09

Legal Implications:

5.2 As indicated in 3.4 above, a Sustainability Conference in 2009/10 themed around the sea will dovetail with the Marine and Coastal Access Bill currently before Parliament and expected to receive royal assent later this year.

5.3 Given the length of coastline marking the southern edge of the city and the expanse of sea beyond, the Bill has real significance for the Council. A full exposition is given at Appendix 1 but the key provisions can be summarised as follows:

- A new system of marine management, covering a new planning system for setting out the Government's strategic objectives for the marine environment and developing marine plans for what should happen where in each area of the sea.
- Changes to the way licensing of activities in the marine environment are undertaken
- New marine conservation zones
- Changes to the way fisheries are managed
- Modification to the way licensing, conservation and fisheries rules are enforced.
- Creation of an Exclusive Economic Zone for the UK
- Amended system for managing migratory and freshwater fish
- Creation of recreational access to the English coast

The Council's lawyers can provide members with more detail on any of these proposals, if required.

Lawyer Consulted:

Oliver Dixon

Date: 26/02/09

Equalities Implications:

5.4 None anticipated.

Sustainability Implications:

5.5 As a coastal city, Brighton & Hove has a real impact on the local marine ecology and protecting the natural environment is a key component of sustainability.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

5.6 None anticipated.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

5.7 There are some risks attached to choosing a marine theme:

- Possible changes to the city's beaches' Blue Flag status – this is affected mainly by pollutant run off from city streets and the timing of bathing water sampling takes (e.g. after heavy rain).
- The Wastewater (sewage) Treatment plant being built at Peacehaven – although this is a positive step for the marine environment, it is very unpopular in that area.
- Marina and Shoreham Harbour developments – as developments right by the sea, these have numerous complications and vocal dissenters to both development and lack of development.
- The West Pier – calls in some quarters for demolition and re-development may conflict with the structure's importance for marine and bird life.

Corporate / Citywide Implications

5.8 Brighton & Hove is a significant UK city by the sea and the marine environment plays an important role in its life and appeal, especially for visitors.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

6.1 An alternative theme could be A Sustainable Economy. This could examine both the job creation potential of large scale energy efficiency and the future growth potential of environmental industries across the city – though this is already the subject of a Scrutiny Panel between March and May this year.

6.2 Another alternative could be related to Saving Money and Saving the Planet, in response to the credit crunch and continued interest in tackling climate change. This could explore how to expand energy efficiency programmes, smart metering and also the plans for water company programmes of water metering and retrofitting of water saving devices. But this also raises affordability issues re water metering for larger, low income families.

6.3 There is a realistic option to return to a single day conference if sponsorship and other resources (help in kind) cannot be secured to run a successful two-day event.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The Deputy Leader with special responsibility for sustainability supports the sea theme proposed.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Marine & Coastal Access Bill briefing note

Documents In Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

1. Details of the 2008 Sustainability Conference on the Urban Biosphere theme and the papers and presentations are at:

www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1196955

