

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT
MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING
ON TUESDAY, 23RD FEBRUARY, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg and Councillor Steve Jarvis (Chair), (Vice-Chair), Val Bryant, Sam Collins, Gerald Morris, Michael Muir, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir and Claire Strong*

In Attendance: *Reuben Ayavoo (Policy and Community Engagement Manager). Georgina Chapman (Policy Officer), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Darryl Simmonds (CSC – IT Support)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 9 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

27 WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY

Audio Recording – 8 seconds.

The Chair, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer gave advice on the following:

- Attendance;
- Live streaming;
- Noise interference;
- Voting;

The Chair, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, started the meeting proper.

28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 4 minutes.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ian Moody.

Having given due notice Councillor David Levett advised he would be substituting for Councillor Ian Moody.

29 MINUTES - 5 MARCH 2020 TO 17 NOVEMBER 2020

Audio Recording – 4 minutes 13 seconds.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet Panel held on 5 March 2020, 7 July 2020, 9 September 2020 and 17 November 2020 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer be authorised to apply the Chair's digital signature.

30 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 44 seconds.

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (4) The Chair advised that the theme of the meeting would be a round-up of the Panel's work in the previous year and a discussion of the foregoing Climate Change Strategy;
- (5) The Chair noted that the topic of Air Quality had not been included in the agenda and advised that the Environmental Health team that manage the Monitoring information and produce the Annual Status report had been diverted to work around the COVID pandemic and the withdrawal from the European Union. The aim is to have this as future agenda item to fully explore the impact of COVID on areas with poor air quality.
- (6) The Chair advised that Item 8 – Work Programme & Action Tracker would be taken before Item 6 – Public Participation.
- (7) The Chair advised that item 8 – Work Programme & Action Tracker would aim to include a discussion regarding the review of the Climate Change Strategy.

31 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 7 minutes 47 seconds.

There was no other business notified.

32 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 14 minutes 31 seconds.

The Chair invited Julia Sonander, Transition Town Letchworth (TTL), to address the Panel.

Julia Sonander gave a presentation on Transition Town Letchworth's suggestions for future climate action policy, including:

- TTL had observed that 5 minute speaking slots per group for contributions at Panel meetings were not sufficient, especially for a group which could engage with a discussion on a range of themes;
- It was unclear whether the Panel had properly scrutinised papers submitted by members of the public and discussions after presentations often focussed on verbal presentation rather than papers;
- Issues which engaged multiple decision making bodies had been directed to the Panel as they concerned the environment which hampered potential changes in policy;
- It had been unclear to which body within the Council a given issue should be addressed, e.g cycle infrastructure;
- TTL had encouraged NHDC to adopt an ambitious emissions reduction target to be introduced through planning policy and to ensure that all new homes met the highest energy efficiency standards allowed under the National Planning Policy Framework;

- The government had released the response to its Future Homes Standard consultation carried out in 2019;
- The government had acknowledge that there was a need to remind local planning authorities (LPAs) of the role that government expects Local Plans to play in developing a greener built environment;
- The government had announced it would not amend the Planning and Energy Act 2008 and that LPAs would retain the power to set local energy efficiency standards for new homes;
- This announcement was important for NHDC as the local plan examinations were coming to an end and developments were already being proposed for planning approval;
- TTL wanted to see supplementary planning documents requiring the highest energy efficiency standards and 0-Carbon readiness in new housing developments, and for NHDC to establish a working group to examine the potential of these retained powers;
- In conversation with other groups in the Transition Town network, TTL had looked at the approach to public engagement taken by other local authorities and encouraged the creation of working groups, and moving away from the Panel format focussed on talking towards seeing actions taken.

The Chair thanked Julia Sonander for her presentation.

The Chair opened a discussion with Members, Officers and public participants including:

- SPDs and planning regulations work was ongoing to bring about a Passivhaus standard;
- The Transport Users Forum existed to examine work on things like cycling infrastructure and was actively working on that topic;
- The Cabinet Panel on the Environment existed to discuss issues and generate policy and was supportive of moving towards taking more direct action;
- Papers and presentations submitted by the public were of great use to the Panel and essential in benchmarking the goals of the Panel and policies of the Council;
- Cross-cutting issues that engaged a range of Council bodies and outside partners were difficult, e.g biodiversity and water use minimisation;
- Work was ongoing on water use minimisation including discussions with Affinity Water and public awareness/encouragement campaigns;
- The Local Plan and associated SPDs had been in development for a long time and the legislative framework did not always allow the Council to push for environmental standards; this was now a regular feature of planning discussions; e.g electric vehicle charging points were a standard condition of every approval;
- The Task & Finish Groups arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were a good working model the Panel could benefit from emulating;
- Planning and discussion over delivery was a problem across government;
- Members of the Panel would appreciate the Leader of the Council attending meetings and increased public scrutiny;
- If the Local Plan is approved a significant number of Section 106 agreements are likely to come in future generating funds for infrastructure projects including cycle paths;
- There were a range of voluntary groups and other organisations in the District which could be mobilised to assist with actions on cycle paths, tree planting, and other environmental works;
- Internal briefings ensured that the Leader of the Council and senior officers were up to date with the work of the Panel;
- The problems facing Council implementation and action on climate policies included budgetary concerns but also logistical problems like workforce and land holdings; e.g tree planting, where there was budget land was harder to find;
- Rewilding options were being considered by the Council's green space management team in consultation with the Countryside Management Service;

- Local residents' action groups such as Action for Insects had worked productively with the Council in the past and were keen to continue this working relationship and take on more sites and projects;
- The Green Space Management Policy was being reviewed to reflect a change in emphasis to biodiversity and there was scope to involve local groups to utilise resources the Council did not have access to e.g volunteers and specific expertise;
- Local landowners could be engaged with to volunteer to meet the Council's land resourcing needs;
- Ongoing management plans were essential for any tree planting efforts undertaken by the Council;
- Explaining to residents that rewilding measures and changes to mowing patterns on grass verges and other green spaces was a deliberate policy decision not a failure of maintenance was an ongoing issue; volunteers had promoted public awareness campaigns on this;
- The Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill was an opportunity for the Council to take a public leadership stance on ecological issues.

The Chair thanked Members, officers and public speakers for participating in the debate.

N.B the Chair called for a comfort break at 5 minutes to 9:00 PM.

The Panel reconvened at 9:01PM and the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer conducted a rollcall.

33 DISCUSSION LED BY THE CO-CHAIR

Audio Recording – 1 hour 31 minutes.

The Policy & Community Engagement manager gave a presentation on the revised Climate Change Strategy and highlighted points including:

- The Council was acting in partnership with organisations across the district including Herts County Council Climate Strategy Partnership, Affinity Water, the Environment Agency, and other public interest groups e.g Plastic Free Letchworth;
- NDHC climate policies had sought to reduce its carbon footprint significantly and other efficiencies in terms of water, single use plastics and emissions reduction in vehicle fleets and no-idling licensing requirements were being put in place;
- The Climate Change Strategy review proposed development under three headings of reducing the Council's carbon emissions, facilitating businesses and citizens to reduce their carbon emissions through policy development, and to guide and encourage outside bodies (citizens and businesses) to go further with their environmental impact goals;
- Specific actions included ensuring that Council estate buildings use energy efficient and zero carbon measures; putting green clauses in leases and licenses of properties; exploring on-site generation of energy; replacing Council fleet vehicles with ultra-low emission vehicles; exploring opportunities for low-emission refuse freighters; quantifying how much land would need to be planted to offset some carbon emissions; instituting a once a year cut-and-lift regime on verges; strengthening hedgerows and preserving scrubland; ensuring masterplans are designed around foot travel rather than private vehicles; bringing Passivhaus or similar standards in to design SPDs; signposting residents to retrofitting services to boost energy efficiency; working with Herts Waste Partnership; encouraging support for community tree planting initiatives.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure highlighted the following:

- The revised climate change strategy aimed to do three things; bringing the Council's estate up to the highest environmental standards, ensuring decisions made by the

Council in areas like planning promoted environmental protections as a priority, and working with outside partners to assist and encourage environmental policies beyond the resources of the Council;

- The revised strategy would set out a road map on the Council's carbon emissions reduction journey with an accurate assessment of its starting position, a target for net zero, and goals along the way.

The Chair led a discussion on contributions to the meeting and the revised Climate Change Strategy with Members, Officers and public participants including:

- There were differences in carbon emissions assessments and assessment of the District's emissions came from central government, whereas NHDC was able to assess its own emissions as a Council;
- Net Zero and Carbon Neutral were subtly different measures to do with whether third party emissions were considered;
- NHDC would have to rely on some degree of carbon sequestration but was able to do this in-District;
- There was a Natural Environment Readiness Fund available from central government which could provide funds to projects to allow them to attract further investment;
- The Council should aim for a more ambitious target than the national objective of 2050;
- The target date for achieving zero carbon should be ambitious but achievable;
- Too short a date could lead to a failure in finding lasting and sustainable reduction policies; long term solutions were required;
- The Climate Change Strategy and environmental policies more generally relied on the Council convincing the public and other bodies to make progress themselves;
- Explaining the reasons behind climate change related policies to the public was essential;
- The existing housing stock in the District was a significant emissions/energy efficiency problem and a way forward to bring existing houses up to standard was required;
- Building regulations were set nationally and while the Council had good working relationships with housing providers in the district, NHDC primarily had a lobbying and supporting role in bringing existing housing stock up to energy efficient standards;
- The Council would continue to work within HCCSP to encourage change county-wide and magnify its influence with outside bodies;
- NHDC should sign post and provide support for residents seeking to retrofit and to housing associations, and highlight the successes of business and groups with high environmental standards;
- The revised Climate Change Strategy was a positive step forward and the Panel was satisfied with its aims and intentions but keen to strengthen its target date.

It was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That the revised Climate Change Strategy be endorsed;
- (2) That the target date for achieving Net Zero Carbon District status be brought forward to 2042.

REASON FOR DECISION:

- (1) To promote policies which allow NHDC to take a leadership role in local efforts to address the climate emergency.
- (2) To ensure the Cabinet Panel on the Environment's feedback on the strategy is heard by Cabinet.

34 INFORMATION NOTE - WORK PROGRAMME & ACTION TRACKER

Audio Recording – 8 minutes 24 seconds.

N.B The Chair invited the Policy & Community Engagement Manager to present the Information Note prior to taking the Public Participation item.

The Policy and Community Engagement Manager presented the Information Note entitled Work Programme and Action Tracker, drawing attention to the following:

- 2.2 of the Information Note on the EdiCitNet Project;
- NHDC officers were working with the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership and leading on biodiversity policy development;
- EP24 on the Action Tracker; it was found that a weekly notice was not financially viable but alternatives were being investigated;
- EP29 on TerraCycling where the Communications team had worked with the Morrison's Community Champion to arrange a TerraCycle point at the store in Letchworth;
- A Waste Awareness Officer working on a campaign as per EP41 had been recruited;
- EP42 on community composting workshops had led to an advert for subsidised home composting equipment on the external website;
- On EP30 & 39 links to home furniture recycling and real nappy information was available on NHDC websites & social media platforms.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong

The Chair advised that developments in blister pack recycling policy was able to be monitored by the Herts Waste Partnership but was of low impact and primarily led by private sector agencies and in view of current resourcing demands was not a priority target.

RESOLVED: That the Information Note entitled Work Programme and Action Tracker be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure the Cabinet Panel on the Environment is able to plan its workload and monitor actions.

Audio Recording of Meeting

The meeting closed at 10.13 pm

Chair