

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT
MEETING HELD IN THE REMOTE MEETING
ON WEDNESDAY, 27TH SEPTEMBER, 2023 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Amy Allen, Steve Jarvis, Chris Hinchliff, Michael Muir and Louise Peace*

In Attendance:

Georgina Chapman (Policy & Strategy Team Leader), Ellie Hollingsworth (Policy & Strategy Trainee), Omar Ezzet (Strategic Planning Officer), Nigel Smith (Strategic Planning Manager), Marc Wilcox (Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategy Project Manager – Hertfordshire County Council) and Eleanor Hopcraft (Committee, Member & Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 4 members of the public, including registered speakers.

Councillor Val Bryant was also present.

74 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1:22

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gerald Morris and David Levett.

Councillors Cathy Brownjohn and Dominic Griffiths were absent.

N.B. Councillor David Levett was marked as absent on the Decision Sheet, however he had provided his apologies prior to the meeting.

75 MINUTES - 19 JULY 2023

Audio recording – 1:45

Councillor Amy Allen, as Chair, moved the minutes for approval and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 19 July 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

76 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2:21

- (1) 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.

77 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3:09

There was no other business notified.

78 INFORMATION NOTE: WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2023/24

Audio recording – 3:36

The Policy and Strategy Team Leader provided a verbal update on the Work Programme for the 2023/24 civic year and advised:

- The theme for the meeting was sustainable development. The meeting in December would focus on Waste and the March meeting would be on Achievements.
- The Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan had been revised as part of the Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP).
- The second round of the Solar Together Scheme was open until 27 October 2023. Communications had gone out to Community Groups and Parish Councils on the Scheme.
- Work was ongoing on a draft climate-related risks log for North Hertfordshire, which was part of the work of HCCSP adaptations sub-group.
- The Home Upgrade Grant Round Two was due to be launched, with a marketing plan underway to get communications out to eligible households.
- Work was ongoing on the London Luton Airport Expansion Documents. Relevant areas were being reviewed to ascertain whether previous concerns had been addressed and if remaining concerns had been incorporated into required documentation.
- There was work underway on heat decarbonisation plans for the three leisure centres, which were the top energy using and emitting buildings in the Estate.
- The Council had recently launched a Community Investment Fund, where community groups could apply for funding for capacity-building activities.
- The Action Tracker had been amended to only include actions that the Council could meaningfully influence on.
- Two actions on the tracker had not yet started, as they were awaiting the appointment of the Waste Awareness Officer in 2024.

The following participants asked questions:

- Councillor Amy Allen
- John Webb

In response to the questions, the Policy and Strategy Team Leader advised:

- Community groups had to be non-profit to be eligible for the Community Investment Fund. They also had to comply with the Grant policy of the Council and show that they had a good governance structure.
- Organisations that had received more than £10k from the Council recently were ineligible to apply for this funding.
- The Council asked for groups applying for funding to have a Safeguarding Policy as a minimum. Previously, groups had applied without a Policy and the Council was able to provide them with guidance on safeguarding templates so they would become eligible to the grant funding.
- The funding needed to be allocated by the end of the financial year, and rolling applications would be accepted.
- Eligible organisations did not have to involve volunteering, but the funding would only apply to capacity-building activities.

79 SUSTAINABILITY SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD)

Audio recording – 17:10

The Strategic Planning Officer provided an update, with slides and advised:

- The Sustainability Strategic Planning Document (SPD) provided detailed advice and guidance on policies within the Local Plan.
- The SPD was not part of the Development Plan but would be a material consideration for planning applications.
- Sustainability referred to the means by which we meet our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- The scope of the SPD included passive design, transport, water and materials.
- The SPD provided technical guidance in areas such as climate change mitigations, energy efficiency, sustainable locations and transport.
- Benchmarks would be set for developers. Bronze indicated that the developer was policy compliant, with Silver and Gold showing developers who had gone higher than what was required in the Local Plan.
- There would be a mandatory requirement of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) from November. This was included in the SPD with 10% BNG representing Bronze or baseline requirement and higher gains considered Silver or Gold.
- Further detail on different scales and types of development was provided in the appendix.
- The draft SPD was due to be presented to Cabinet in November. Subject to approval by Cabinet, the SPD would go out for consultation.

The following participants asked questions:

- Councillor Michael Muir
- Deolinda Eltringham
- John Webb
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Roger Lovegrove
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Chris Hinchliff
- Julia Sonander

In response to the questions, the Strategic Planning Officer and Strategic Planning Manager advised:

- The SPD would not be able to enforce the building of solar panels on south-facing roofs, but it could be considered in the upcoming Local Plan Review.
- There were opportunities for developers to be encouraged to make these more sustainable decisions.
- The SPD included a section on providing energy efficient appliances within homes, however gas supply could not be ruled out completely.
- The SPD could not introduce wholly new policies at this stage. The Bronze, Silver and Gold approach was aimed at strongly encouraging developers to make provision to meet higher standards. This would count in their favour in the planning balance when applications were considered.
- The Council was limited on what could be enforced that was not within the current Local Plan. Introducing formal policy or an outright requirement would be for the Local Plan Review.
- Retrofitting was included within the SPD.

Councillor Amy Allen commented that some gas supply infrastructure needed to be kept as there could be a switchover to alternatives in the future, and it would be advantageous to keep the infrastructure in place.

Councillor Steve Jarvis commented that the gas industry was keen to replace methane with hydrogen, but there were issues with its production. It would be much more efficient to use renewable energy through a heat pump.

Deolinda Eltringham commented that the use of hydrogen gas had many issues, such as the production of nitrogen dioxide and leaks.

80 BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

Audio recording – 50:24

The Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Recovery Strategy Project Manager from Hertfordshire County Council gave a presentation with slides and advised:

- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) was a mechanism within the planning system to deliver improvements to local diversity. The programme would be rolled out in phases, with major developments within the first phase.
- All major developments would need to deliver at least 10% BNG, which must be secured for a minimum of 30 years.
- Developers and landowners needed to be aware of the costs associated with delivering BNG over 30 years.
- The first phase was meant to start in November 2023, but had been delayed to next year. Small sites would still be rolled out in April 2024.
- Delivering gains onsite should be prioritised over offsite. Offsite gains were expected in some cases but should be near the site where possible.
- Where there was no onsite or offsite possibility, there was a national credit system to deliver gains. Evidence would have to be provided to show that you had exhausted all onsite and offsite options.
- The Site Matching Service aimed to connect those seeking BNG sites within Hertfordshire and request information on available sites.
- There were separate processes for offering and seeking sites.
- To advertise a site on the service, the minimum information that would need to be provided was habitat information, site location and site size. Providing additional information such as a site survey would improve matching chances.
- Sites are matched by criteria such as habitat types, BNG units and strategic significance.
- A single flat fee would cover listing and submitting a request for a site. If no matches were found within 3 months, the site could be relisted for free, or a refund would be given.

The following participants asked questions:

- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Michael Muir
- Deolinda Eltringham
- John Webb
- Councillor Chris Hinchliff

In response to the questions, the Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Recovery Strategy Project Manager advised:

- Once BNG became mandatory, developers and landowners would have to maintain BNG on the site for 30 years.

- The Sustainable Hertfordshire ambition aimed to deliver 20% biodiversity enhancement on County-owned developments and land by 2030.
- At the design stage for BNG sites, the ecologists would consider if the habitat would be appropriate for a future climate. Landowners would also have to think about incurred costs, such as fencing and management.
- A S106 agreement could be used to protect BNG sites. DEFRA would be providing a new legal mechanism called Conservation Covenants which could be used to protect BNG sites.
- BNG sites could be used for economic uses as long as it did not negatively affect the habitat.
- When a planning application is received for a BNG site, the Natural England Framework would be used to determine the BNG unit score of the site.
- The service aimed to get the best offer of BNG sites within the County, and would try to deliver BNG on local land.

81 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 1:46:03

Roger Lovegrove gave a presentation and advised:

- The Council had declared a climate emergency, and exceptional things needed to be done to ensure developments were built to a high standard.
- LETI (London Energy Transport Initiative) had established alternative building standards. These exceed the current building regulations and could be added to the Sustainability SPD and Local Plan.
- LETI standards were normally used in one-off builds but should be relevant to whole estate developments.
- Using the standards outlined by LETI, homes would need only 3 kilowatts of heating.
- These homes would cost more to build, but this could be balanced against the running costs.
- Alternatives to standard bricks included wooden frames filled with rigid insulation.

Councillor Steve Jarvis commented that Mr Lovegrove had set out some interesting points in his presentation, and Central Government needed to give local authorities the capacity to be able to build environmentally friendly homes.

The Strategic Planning Officer commented that there was limit with what could be done within the Local Plan. The Sustainability SPD mentioned building standards and LETI as an aspiration for developers within the Gold Standard.

John Webb drew attention to the recent launch of the EV charging points strategy by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) for future discussion. The strategy aimed to provide more charging points so residents and businesses would be able to charge their vehicles conveniently. The aim of the strategy was for 2030, with a minimum of 3,000 public charging points needed in the County.

Councillor Amy Allen commented on the distribution of EV charging points in Letchworth and the issues surrounding ownership and infrastructure to support EV charging. There had been issues in a new development in Royston with on-street charging points.

Councillor Steve Jarvis noted that Watford already had a significant volume of on-street EV charging points. More off-street charging points were due to be installed across North Hertfordshire, and more progress was likely to be made due to the new HCC strategy.

Wednesday, 27th September, 2023

Councillor Amy Allen thanked those who attended the meeting and advised that the next Cabinet Panel on 6 December 2023 would focus on Waste.

The meeting closed at 9.35 pm

Chair