

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT

**MEETING HELD IN THE VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 9TH OCTOBER, 2024 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Mick Debenham (Chair), Amy Allen, Tina Bhartwas, Dominic Griffiths, Bryony May and Claire Strong.*

In Attendance: *Georgina Chapman (Policy & Strategy Team Leader), Deborah Coates (Principal Strategic Planning Officer), Omar Ezzet (Strategic Sites Planning Officer), Ellie Hollingsworth (Policy & Strategy Trainee) and Sjanel Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer).*

Also Present: *At the start of the meeting 6 members of the public were present.*

10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 31 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Joe Graziano.

Councillor Lisa Nash was absent.

11 MINUTES - 17 JULY 2024

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 44 seconds

Councillor Mick Debenham, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Amy Allen seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 17 July 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

12 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 24 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) 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.
- (3) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These are serious decisions, and mean that, as this was an emergency, all of us, Officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.

13 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 7 seconds

There was no other business notified.

14 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 14 seconds

The Chair confirmed that members of the public were in attendance and would participate in any discussions related to Agenda Item 6.

15 INFORMATION NOTE: WORK PROGRAMME AND NEW PROPOSED ACTION TRACKER TEMPLATE FOR 2024/25

Audio recording – 4 minutes 31 seconds

N.B. Councillor Dominic Griffiths joined the Zoom call at 19:41.

The Policy and Strategy Team Leader presented the Information Note entitled 'Work Programme and New Proposed Action Tracker for 2024/25' and advised that:

- The Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) had been approved by Cabinet in September 2024 and this would be discussed later in the meeting.
- A new action tracker had been formulated following feedback from previous meetings and this included SMART actions, which had not been included on the previous action plan.
- The action tracker would include items with an anticipated completion date and would confirm ownership of the item.
- Members could suggest items for the action tracker, by contacting the Policy team or through the Chair at the wash up meeting.
- The action tracker would be discussed at every meeting and could lead to items being recommended to Cabinet.
- Successful engagement events had been held for stakeholders and residents regarding the Local Nature Recovery Scheme led by Hertfordshire County Council. Phase 2 of the project would commence in autumn 2024 with a draft strategy ready for March 2025. During the winter months there would be online engagement with stakeholders in Hertfordshire.
- Stage 3 of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme was expected to be completed by the end of October 2024. Surveys have been completed and consultants will commence a review of the planning pack prior to applying the Heritage Foundation guidelines.
- Parish Councils and local groups had been encouraged to apply for funding under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The Grant Panel meetings considered applications last week and successful applicants would be advised and notices published as Delegated Decisions.

The Policy and Strategy Officer advised that:

- The second round of the Solar Together scheme had closed, and installations had been finalised. In total 104 installations had been completed in North Herts and 514 installations in Hertfordshire.
- The Hertfordshire Growth Board had launched their 'Sustainable County' mission with a specific focus on developing an energy plan for Hertfordshire. A working group would be formed shortly.
- The Retrofit guidance document was now available, and a link was sent to attendees in the group chat.

- The Home Upgrade Grant 2 (HUG2) closed at the end of September 2024 and aimed to improve the EPC rating of homes in fuel poverty.
- There were now 380 subscribers to the Engagement Hub and updates were sent out on a regular basis.
- The presentation included as Appendix B was presented at the latest Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) meeting and highlighted the key priorities for the new government.
- The focused objectives of GB Energy were to produce clean energy and reduce greenhouse gases. £8.3 billion had been invested by the government with £600M allocated to local authorities.
- There were five functions of GB Energy, one being the Local Power Plan, a scheme for renewable energy projects in the local community with commercial assistance and this was detailed in Appendix B.
- The restriction on onshore wind farms had been lifted, and the upcoming reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) were aimed at supporting green energy and the environment.
- There had been permission granted for three new solar farms with associated infrastructure and grid access.
- There was a housing target of 1.5 million new homes over the term of parliament.
- There was funding of £6.6 billion to reduce fuel poverty in collaboration with local authorities, similar to that of the HUG2 scheme.
- There were plans to create three new national forests in England with the expansion of nature rich environments and woodlands.
- Skills England had set up a new partnership with employers and an aim to reform the apprenticeship levy.

The following members of the public asked questions:

- Deolinda Eltringham
- Roger Lovegrove

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

- That the inverter information would be feedback to iChoosr the distributor for the Solar Together project and would be covered in the Solar Together closing report.
- The three new solar farms were agreed at a national level rather than by North Herts Council.
- There were plans to review the Climate strategy, and dual-sided, raised solar panel farms could be considered then.

The Strategic Sites Planning Officer presented an item entitled 'Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)' and advised that:

- The document was linked to the Local Plan, particularly policy SP1 and was not intended to have any increased financial burden on developers.
- The draft had been subject to a six-week public consultation in January 2024.
- There were 89 representations received from the consultation from 17 different individual and from organisations. The majority of the representations were supportive of the SPD and the objections related to costs and areas where further clarification was required.
- The feedback included a request for further information regarding the requirements of the benchmarks and for alternatives to Passivhaus and the Low Energy Transformation Initiative (LETi).
- Following the consultation the draft was reviewed and repetitive information removed.
- The document had been divided into eight broad themes which were aligned to the North Herts Council design code.
- Individual household extensions were exempt from the SPD.

- The SPD included a glossary and a list of acronyms.
- There was an explanation of the three standards, Bronze, Silver and Gold for each of the eight broad schemes and this was available in the background papers at 6.2 of the report.
- It was deemed that bronze was the current expected standard.
- The SPD had been reviewed by external consultants.
- There had been minor changes to the NPPF since the SPD was drafted.
- Each of the eight themes had their own checklist for standards.
- The standards were the same for residential and commercial developments.
- Developers who achieved higher standard would be reviewed more favourably.
- Information regarding the standards of each development would be published on the Council website.

The following Members and members of the public asked questions:

- Roger Lovegrove
- Deolinda Eltringham
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to a question the Strategic Sites Planning Officer advised that there had been interest from existing developers who wanted to achieve silver or gold standard on their sites.

In response to questions the Principal Strategic Planning Officer advised that:

- It may be viable for the Churchgate project to achieve the silver and gold standards, and this would be explored alongside the Enterprise team.
- Whilst the SPD could not dictate that a developer complied to their standards, it was expected that prospective house buyers would seek properties built to a higher standard.
- The SPD would be included in the new Local Plan and complied with government legislation requirements.
- The SPD would not fix all problems but went some way to solve some issues.
- The SPD was adopted by Cabinet in September 2024.
- The SPD would form part of the planning application process.
- The Planning Control Committee would be made aware of the intended building standards for each of the eight areas when considering planning applications.
- The standards would also be publicised on the planning portal and on developers marketing advertisements.

The meeting closed at 8.22 pm

Chair