

# Minutes



Listening Learning Leading

## OF A MEETING OF THE

# Climate Emergency Advisory Committee

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON MONDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2020

## VIRTUAL MEETING

Watch the recording here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ox6J\\_NsuqlA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ox6J_NsuqlA)

## Present

Councillors:

Sue Roberts (Chair)

Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Sue Cooper, Stefan Gawrysiak, Kate Gregory, Simon Hewardine, Lynn Lloyd, Caroline Newton, David Rouane and Celia Wilson

## Officers

Andrew Lane, Suzanne Malcolm, Candida Mckelvey, Heather Saunders, Michelle Wells

## Also present:

Councillor Andrea Powell, Cabinet member for corporate services

## 60 Chair's announcements

Last week's news made sobering reading.

The horrific Australian fires during our winter are being replicated in West Coast America. Climate fires are burning out of control in Oregon, California, and Washington State. Half a million people have fled their homes in Oregon, that is 10% of the population. Whole towns have been destroyed. San Francisco at midday is as dark as dusk as the orange smoke-filled air lets through a smidgen of sunlight.

A report in the esteemed journal Nature, not renowned for its radicalism, has given evidence that global heating is accelerating beyond the cautious projections of scientists. We now expect to reach 1.5°C heating by 2030 rather than 2040. Tipping points are being reached which spirals heating out of control.

The updated Living Planet Index was also released last week by WWF and the London Zoological Society (ZSL). The collapse of nature is gaining apace. Two years ago, the world had lost 60% of animals relative to 1970. That is now 80%.

David Attenborough presented a climate documentary last night. He says "We are facing a man-made disaster on a global scale. In the 20 years since I first started talking about the

impact of climate change, conditions have changed far faster than I ever imagined. If we have not taken dramatic action within the next decade, we could face irreversible damage to the natural world, and the collapse of our societies. If we better understand the threat, the more likely it is that we can avoid such a catastrophic future.”

Residents of South Oxfordshire are highly aware of this. Nine hundred and thirty, an unprecedented number, responded to the consultation on our draft Corporate Plan. Of the themes put forward, action on nature was prioritised. Climate change came third. The Plan will be re-ordered to reflect these priorities. Thank you so much to all of our constituents who have contributed, bringing a richness of intelligent comments and ideas. CEAC will be studying the output. Today, we have been asked to consider what monitoring we should put forward against the nature and climate elements of the Corporate Plan.

I reported at our last meeting on the hearings of the 2035 Local Plan. The Inspector had invited me to write some words on a policy for nature recovery, and agreed that we could work to improve DES11, the climate change policy. Our task and finish group met with planners to work on both issues, but in the event, no changes to policy wording were permitted. We shall therefore be building thousands of fuel-guzzling homes, roads and other infrastructure, massively pushing up CO2 emissions in South Oxfordshire. How can we then hit our net carbon zero 2030 target?

Developments will be required to show no net loss of biodiversity but no net gain either. Meanwhile in Wallingford and Cholsey, we are finding estates old and new are not succeeding in their planting regimes; with hundreds of newly planted trees dying or dead.

The Inspector has stated that 15% housing growth in the market towns should be seen as a minimum and that neighbourhood plans should not put a cap on the number of homes. When the plan is forced through adoption by the Secretary of State in December, we will instantly halve our land supply from 10 years to 5. A slight housing market downturn will pitch us straight back into speculative land grabs.

However, meanwhile, we are making great progress on our climate and nature programmes. We have started working with Greentech to support and build our low carbon economy; commissioned Low Carbon Hub to study the feasibility of a new solar park, which will fit in with the Power Purchase Agreement that we are discussing today; and we have some excellent candidates for our climate change officer role - the application end date was today.

There is a draft paper that we shall soon see on a project plan for the circular economy in Oxfordshire; we have plans to respond to the National Clean Air Day on the 8th October; we are developing the communication strategy: a campaign page on our website and a twitter hashtag development, and importantly, building upon the interest shown in our Corporate Plan. Finally, a strategy is being drafted for electric vehicle infrastructure.

## **61 Apologies for absence**

Apologies from Councillor Alan Thompson. Councillor Jane Murphy was present as substitute.

## **62 Declarations of interest**

None.

## **63 Urgent business**

Committee chair, Councillor Sue Roberts, informed that the committee's request to seek legal advice on the local plan (see the last minutes of the meeting 03 August) has resulted in the preparation of report which should be available in the October committee meeting. The report will be from the Head of Planning and the Head of Legal and Democratic services.

## **64 Minutes of the last meeting**

It was asked that the minutes be amended to reflect the suggested maximum spend (from the one-year work programme underspend) on external legal advice, of £10,000. An update was requested of the Oxfordshire County Council active travel grants. It was confirmed that £2.3 million was spent in 3 centres. Witney, Bicester and Oxford city. Committee Chair confirmed that she had written to Councillor Constance.

An amend was requested, under the Aether item. It was requested that it was made clear that the next stage of work from Aether is the production of the report.

## **65 Public participation**

None.

## **66 Power purchase agreement**

Corporate energy officer introduced the report to the committee.

The paper is for the committee's consideration. A Power Purchase Agreement, or PPA, could be an element, along with a broad portfolio of projects, to help achieve the council's carbon neutral target.

The first priority, from our climate emergency one-year work programme, is that we will aim to reduce energy use from our operations, and to install renewable technologies on site. These actions alone are unlikely to bring our carbon emissions to zero, so further options need to be considered. A PPA is a mechanism for matching zero carbon electricity generation at a new renewable energy asset with the council's energy use. It then allows us to declare zero carbon emissions for the contracted energy. If a new renewable energy asset is in South Oxfordshire, this also has additional local benefits. We therefore wish to enter into discussions with other Oxfordshire Councils and other external parties to identify the opportunities available.

As written in the report, there will be a range of financial and procurement issues to resolve, so no commitment has been made yet.

There is no conflict between these proposals and the parallel process of procuring gas and electricity for the council's properties.

We realise this is a complex proposal, and we have set out the key issues in the paper, and we welcome questions at this stage.

The committee discussed PPA as follows:

- The committee were informed that the purpose of PPA was to be contracted with a new generator. Buying from an electricity company's green tariff, would not be sufficient to claim zero carbon emissions. Direct from a new generator stimulates new generation of sources of zero carbon electricity.

- The generator will be brand new and we are the only buyer, therefore we are the only consumer who can claim the zero carbon benefits. The generator is not a consumer.
- The committee wanted to understand the implications of negotiations with a mainstream energy supplier (sleeving) and what happens if they want to leave. It was confirmed that the long-term agreement is with the generator, not the energy supplier. We are awaiting further guidance but would expect to be able to sleeve with other energy suppliers over time for their service.
- Leisure centres are 70% of council emissions, but Covid-19 affects this. Officers will work closely with the leisure manager, who is responsible for future plans for the leisure centres. At present the contractor manages leisure centre bills.
- Uncertainty – closures, working from home, Covid-19 – versus a 15-year contract. The council is aiming to reduce energy use, but we will be moving away from gas and replacing it with electricity, so there will also be new demand. We can learn from other councils who have already done this.
- If there is a restructure in local government, there will be plans in place to handle existing contracts.
- Discussion was had regarding the potential use of windfarms and dual use land. The idea of solar panels and roof insulation on leisure centres – this continues to be a high priority in our work programme. This project is in its infancy and there are parallel projects being explored, such as investment in solar farms as a way of revenue generation.
- We are currently not a big enough energy user to look at a PPA and investment together.

The comments made will be considered by officers at this early stage, no negotiations have taken place yet.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Committee recommends to Cabinet that officers join discussions with other Oxfordshire councils and commercial partners to identify the feasibility of entering into a Power Purchase Agreement.

## **67 England's Economic Heartland - Transport Strategy Consultation**

Andrew Lane from Planning Policy gave an introduction to the consultation of the draft transport strategy.

England's Economic Heartland is a partnership of local transport authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

The consultation covers the Draft Transport Strategy, the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal, and the Proposal to Establish a Statutory Sub-national Transport Body. The end date for the consultation is 6 October 2020.

The website (link provided in the agenda) is very helpful and the final strategy is planned for the beginning of 2021.

Cabinet member sign off is the expected process for the response from the council.

The strategy's draft vision is "to realise sustainable growth opportunities and improve quality of life and wellbeing for Heartland residents and businesses, by harnessing the region's globally renowned centres of innovation to unlock a world class, de-carbonised transport system".

Draft key principles are:

- The strategy touches on the impact of Covid-19 and how we can do things differently in the future.

- Achieving net zero carbon emissions from transport by 2050.
- Accessibility and inclusivity – improve quality of life to all.
- Support the regional economy by connecting people and businesses to markets and opportunities.
- Ensuring the Heartland works for the UK by enabling the efficient movement of people and goods.

The consultation is asking for comment on the vision, key principles, having a step-change approach, 30 policies over 4 themes, and implementation and delivery pipelines supported by the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal.

There is no specific mention of the Ox-Cam Expressway. Policy 12 mentions the ARC with travel from Oxford to Milton Keynes is mentioned as a strategic issue to resolve.

The proposal to establish a Statutory Sub-national Transport Body – views are sought on whether to become statutory (currently operates as non-statutory). This would give more powers to create policy and be consulted on rail franchises, smart ticketing, road infrastructure strategy and procuring bus services.

The committee gave their thoughts the consultation:

- What does the statutory body replace? The statutory body would bring central government powers, not take away powers from local government. The committee want to understand how the statutory body would work with local planning.
- First mile last mile
- In support of rail travel focus and sustainable travel
- Needs more thought to rural areas.
- Connectivity is important
- Should include the Ox-Cam ARC
- Lack of vision for a strategy
- Double deck trains could replace Ox-Cam ARC
- Move freight away from the road to rail and water
- The priority should be to locate homes with jobs first.
- The committee would rather the strategy be more ambitious than its current carbon zero by 2050 target. It should be 2030, but it was also noted that the wider area covered by the strategy may not be able to achieve the same targets that South Oxfordshire is aiming for.

Andrew Lane to consider the points raised when preparing the response to the consultation.

## **68 Preparations to respond to Government's energy efficiency grants funding schemes (paper to follow)**

Committee Chair addressed the committee.

There are three strands to the energy efficiency grants

1. Advise – Cosy Homes
2. Installers
3. Financing

The chair suggests a rolling programme of loans to help homeowners – a green finance initiative, a flexible home improvement loan which can be extended to under 60's.

It was agreed that this idea could be brought to a future meeting for consideration with a paper and involvement of officers from Planning.

Insight and Policy Manager confirmed that there will be communications and promotion of the webinars on retrofitting form Cosy Homes.

## **69 Corporate Plan 2020-24 - Input into proposed metrics for Climate Emergency and Protect and Restore our Natural Environment themes**

Cabinet member for Corporate Services, Councillor Andrea Powell, introduced this item. The consultation went very well, with 932 responses. The themes on protecting the natural world was rated highest, and the climate emergency theme was rated 3<sup>rd</sup> when the public were asked to prioritise themes. This could be because the natural world theme relates directly to the local environment – more productive.

There is commitment to producing an annual report, and we want to have tangible, meaningful and useful performance indicators. This is what we are asking of the committee – to help form key performance indicators (KPIs).

Suggestions were made in the meeting, which were written up by the chair, so the comprehensive list will be circulated.

These suggestions include:

Natural world:

- Number/hectarage, Length, connectivity of nature networks, and their condition
- Number/hectarage of community and charity owned land, and
- Council owned land
- Number of trees planted or felled
- Chalk/grassland/moorland
- Water – river restoration schemes
- Water quality, biodiversity, abundance
- Action plans and collaborations we have – Local Nature Partnership, farmers, Earth Trust, Chiltern AONB.
- Joining farmer clusters to manage land, number of clusters
- Healthy chalk streams
- Creation of partnerships and action plans
- Size and condition of habitats.
- Include hedgerows
  
- Concern raised over tree counting – not effective.
- Discussion had regarding making good use of already available data sources – TEVA, Chiltern AONB, North Wessex Downs AONB.
- Noted that the Local Nature Partnership is underway, currently with West Oxfordshire District Council.

At 8pm, Councillors Murphy and Newton left the meeting.

Climate Emergency theme:

- Number of retrofits
- Carbon emissions form homes
- The number of green grants applied for
- Cosy Home referrals
- Number of homes built to Passivhaus standards
- Carbon from industry
- Carbon from transport
- New cycle tracks added

- Behavioural change – uptake from campaigns and engagement
- Weight of waste – include single use plastic
- The number of renewable installations

## **70 Future agenda items**

Insight and Policy manager has created a forward plan for committee meetings, informed by the one-year work programme. This will be prioritised with the committee chair and then taken through to Cabinet.

The meeting closed at 8.24 pm

Chairman

Date