

Minutes



Listening Learning Leading

OF A MEETING OF THE

Climate Emergency Advisory Committee

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON MONDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2020

Present

Sue Roberts (Chair)
Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Sue Cooper, Stefan Gawrysiak, Sarah Gray, Kate Gregory, Lynn Lloyd, Jane Murphy, Caroline Newton and Celia Wilson

Officers

Andy Egan, Suzanne Malcolm, Candida Mckelvey, Heather Saunders, Michelle Wells.

Also present:

Cabinet member for corporate services, Councillor Andrea Powell.

81 Chair's announcements

The chair welcomed Andy Egan, the new Climate Change Lead for South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC). The chair addressed the committee:

“First and foremost, let me welcome Andy Egan to the Council. Andy is our new Climate Change Lead Officer. Amongst councillors, we have lost Simon Hewardine from the Committee because he has resigned from Council, in a move to the Channel Islands.

Today, the Government has launched its scheme to support farmers for making environmental improvements to their land, in a post-Brexit world. Rather than subsidies paid out for the amount of land that a farm has, it will make Environmental Land Management payments (ELM). This is a welcome step forward, although perhaps too little and too slow.

Environmental management pays dividends. The restoration of a ghost-pond in Norfolk has disturbed the dormant seeds of the grass-poly. The grass-poly in bloom has delighted locals as the plant has not been seen in Norfolk for over a hundred years. Meanwhile in Exmoor, beavers have been re-introduced. They have set to work and built the first beaver-dam in Exmoor for 400 years. Let us bring success stories like this to South Oxfordshire.

The Government has also launched its 10-point plan for a green recovery, with much that is laudable in it. Unfortunately, a key decision to stop bringing gas to new homes by 2023 was removed from the plan post-hoc as being too onerous for developers.

We head towards the adoption vote for the Local Plan on December 10th. The extremely high number of homes will increase the housing here by over 50%, trashing the Green Belt. Our Executive has advised that should Council vote against adopting the plan, it is likely that a Commissioner would be appointed to take over all activities of Council. Councillors would be sacked.

As the targets are very high, our land supply will quickly fail (remember land supply does not mean supply of land, it means the number of homes that will be built). When we fail to meet targets, we lay ourselves open to speculative bids for more land. In anticipation of our new plan, developers have already offered to 'help us out' in meeting targets, with bids for more land around Didcot. Of course, all land covered with concrete is lost forever to nature restoration.

The Government's Future Homes Standard which was meant to take effect in 2020, the same year that a belated consultation on it came out, languishes in some dusty corner of Whitehall. We continue to build new homes oozing out five tonnes (T) of carbon dioxide a year for their lifetime, and responsible for 50-100T just in their construction phase. Developers lobbied for the 2016 change to zero carbon building regulations to be stopped. Presumably they still play the same game.

The Government's Green Grant scheme offering £5000-£10,000 to householders for insulation and renewables has failed to come up with the goods. The scheme was supposed to start on the 1st September. I wish to install an air sourced heat pump in our home. I had to get a quote from an installer and apply for a government voucher. Works cannot begin until I receive the voucher. I applied 3 weeks ago and nothing has come through. We anticipate a very cold winter with our broken boiler. At the time of application, our installer told us that government had failed to issue any vouchers at all, two and a half months into what was then a 6-month scheme. I do not know if this is so.

One of the problems with retrofit installations is that the boom and bust and short-term nature of government incentives since 2010 have put people, including myself, out of business. It will take years to build up the industry. We are hoping that OxLEP and South Oxfordshire can take a lead on this."

82 Apologies for absence

Councillor David Rouane tendered apologies.

83 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

84 Urgent business

Under urgent business, the committee looked at a letter sent to Council Leader Sue Cooper, from Friends of the Earth (FoE). They have created a blueprint for changes needed to deliver on climate change.

It was agreed that the committee wanted more time to consider the contents, and members were asked to respond to the chair by email by Wednesday 1 December that Sue Cooper should write to FoE with support for their efforts to ask government for more council funding to do our vital climate and nature work.

RESOLVED: to

Respond to the chair by email by Wednesday 1 December to confirm that Sue Cooper should write to FoE to show support for their efforts.

85 Public participation

There were no public speakers.

86 Minutes

It was agreed that review of the minutes of the meeting on 28 October would be deferred to the next meeting, as the committee had not had enough time to consider them.

87 Circular economy

The Policy and Insight Manager introduced the paper on the circular economy. Also present was Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Councillor Andrea Powell. Who would take on board any comments raised.

The committee considered the contents and made the following comments and suggested ideas:

- We need to think about what we ask of the council, and where we get the funding from.
- Previously, waste centre staff separated items that could be repurposed. Make, recycle, reform.
- High Wycombe is an example.
- It was asked if officers could make suggestions. What next?
- The committee discussed how recycling targets can be very hard to meet if we are reducing use as well.
- Officer added that this is key policy thinking, an opportunity to advise Cabinet on how to incorporate into the corporate plan.
- There is opportunity to review waste contracts, percentage recycling targets are not the best measure. A view was expressed that energy use around recycling contract is not ideal, for example, transporting recycling to Edmonton, London.
- Look towards reduction and reuse instead.
- We need to retrain and reduce overconsumption.
- Obsolescence – repurposing of redundant activities.
- The committee discussed how to assist farmers with regenerative farming. Chiltern Conservation Board (CCB) was cited as a useful contact for engaging farmers.
- Community Action Groups – funded via County Council. Focus on waste, restoration cafés.
- Electric vehicles – car clubs. We want active transport. Private ownership of cars is incompatible with climate emergency.
- Embedding – mention of One Planet Living and doughnut economics.
- Funding issues for community buses.
- We need to influence supermarkets to reduce their waste.

Councillor Powell summed up that there will be projects each year the plan progresses, including investigation of the ideas raised – engage waste contractors, educational programmes, practical engagement, young enterprise, advising business (could approach the South and Vale business team), investigate car club options, contact Trust of Environment (TOE) – bring them in to help develop partnership groups.

88 One-year work programme progress update

Insight and Policy Manager updated the committee on the workshop held on 26 November.

The workshop was attended by CEAC chair, vice chair, Councillor Sue Cooper and Councillor Robin Bennett.

The workshop was to review the progress of the one-year work programme. The group identified projects that are pertinent to carry forward. Create a timeline for climate action plan / strategy.

They went through the pre-existing list and aligned it to the corporate plan.

89 Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy update

Councillor Caroline Newton updated the committee, as a representative on the Electric Vehicle Steering Group. Councillor Newton expressed frustration at the fact that there was no meeting yet.

Councillor Newton requested detailed targets and milestones to measure ourselves against, including a strategy for rapid charging. Aiming for an update in the new year. Consideration will be given on timings and whether they align with the adoption timetable for Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)

Climate change lead added that the work at officer level had been detailed, and across the five Oxfordshire councils. Once the detailed preparation work is approved, its ready to go. South Oxfordshire currently has the most charging points, almost three times higher than other districts.

A view was expressed that some projects have been blocked – an example being connective curbs.

It was confirmed that a meeting of the Steering Group is planned for week beginning 14 December. There is detailed behind-the-scenes work happening. Officers will feedback to County Council to get traction to get an update.

90 HM Government's 10-point green plan

Committee chair spoke to the committee about the ten-point plan.

There is a rolling out of complex interventions.

There is an issue with green home grants for retrofitting.

We want to see ambition. It was suggested that we pick two or three of the points to push within our own council.

The committee expressed that it was good to see this. Councillors want to see new homes and retrofit with air source heat pumps. If we get this technology and manufacture locally we also create jobs.

Scrutiny committee are investigating green home grants and the local capacity to get the retrofitting works completed.
We need to reduce consumption everywhere.

91 Future work programme items

It was confirmed that there was a delay on the feasibility study into identifying opportunities to invest in solar energy off site. This is a living document and things will change.
Corporate plan deliverables will bring more detail.
There will be an electric vehicle update soon.
Chair asked for consideration to a conference.

Discussion was had around tree planting – there is some beneficial planting on new developments, but the committee discussed the difficult aspects of tree planting close to homes and the insurance issues that can arise. It was suggested that Councillors Wilson and Haval could bring Tree Protection Orders (TPO) to CEAC, and involve officers Dominic Lamb, Planning Specialist Team Leader and Matt Gulliford, Senior Tree Officer. Include tree suitability for planting. A dovetailing tree policy is needed with the Local Plan, so let's work towards having one.

Consideration was given to light pollution, with concerns raised about super lit bypasses, and the effects on people, and roosting bats and birds.
Councillor Casey-Rerhaye informed the committee that County Council have been using LED lights that have been selected for long term savings, and for the benefit of nature and sleep patterns. County officers thought through the light bandwidths to use. Do we need a light policy with County Council? Or a supplementary planning document on lighting?
Dark skies policy from CCB will be circulated.
Insight and Policy Manager updated the committee that she is part of a cross county officer group. In two weeks, she will meet with them and can raise the lighting issues discussed today.

The meeting closed at 7.40 pm

Chairman

Date