

Minutes



Listening Learning Leading

OF A MEETING OF THE

Climate Emergency Advisory Committee

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON WEDNESDAY 28 OCTOBER 2020

A VIRTUAL MEETING

Present

Sue Roberts (Chair), Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Sue Cooper, Stefan Gawrysiak, Sarah Gray, Simon Hewerdine, Jane Murphy, Caroline Newton and David Rouane

Officers

Paul Bateman, Jane Bolton, Adrian Duffield, Mark Hower, Simon Hewings, Suzanne Malcolm, Lucy Murfett, Margaret Reed, Heather Saunders, Bertie Smith, Michelle Wells

Also present:

Robin Bennett, Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Anne-Marie Simpson and Alan Thompson,

71 Chair's announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone to the committee and provided the latest information she had on the climate emergency by providing a statement which she read out. The full text is provided below as part of these minutes;

“ I have an enduring mental picture of a sad old man, looking back over the changes that have taken place in his long lifetime; his eyes downcast as the camera lingers over his face. David Attenborough was giving us his testament in A Life On This Planet. As ever, he finishes upbeat. Whilst we are creating a huge devastation and a Sixth Extinction on our planet that will likely destroy our civilisations, we have the power to change it. If you took out just one month's subscription to Netflix, you could see this extraordinary life's summary. And after that, please watch 'Kissing the Ground'. I learnt a lot on retaining and restoring our vanishing soils.

Our greatest effect as a Local Authority is on the planning system. Our emerging Local Plan is back out to consultation, on the subject of the main modifications that the Inspector has agreed with council officers. You have until the 2nd November to comment. I have submitted a response on behalf of South Oxfordshire Sustainability, where there is concern that creeping urbanisation will lock in land use changes that will further lose soils, harm wildlife, and emit greenhouse gases.

Our new Corporate Plan will come into force in a couple of days' time; with the restoration of nature and addressing climate change at the top, in accordance with the wishes of our residents. This neatly coincides with our recruiting not just one but two new climate lead officers: Andy Egan will be joining us in a couple of week's time, for one year, and Elizabeth Kingdom will start in December, for 6 months. Elizabeth's focus will be on public outreach.

We have been discussing how to get the best out of CEAC. Currently, we are following a work programme, and officers bring relevant items and items of the moment to us. For initiatives to bubble up from the committee, we have item 4 'urgent business', and today I can take suggested items for future business in that slot. To clarify the breadth and depth of work underway, we shall in future have a work programme update slot. The full work programme will be visible. We can then receive updates on the status of each element. Anyone wishing to put forward an item for a future meeting can do so then and the committee can decide how to prioritise it.

Councillor Lynn Lloyd has shown us the excellent pamphlet created by Chinnor Parish Council on their 6-point plan. It is really well laid-out and it would be good if it were appended to the minutes of the current meeting for others to see. Particularly innovative is their intention to 'minimise consumption of all resources'. I hope we can find a way to publicise good examples like this for others to emulate.

The £2 billion Government Green Homes Grant has been launched, offering up to £5,000 towards part-funding of energy efficiency improvements in people's homes; and £10,000 for full funding of measures for lower-income households. Whilst this is very welcome, we are now right up against it, because the supply chain has collapsed after years of sporadic or non-existent funding. The scheme runs for only 6 months yet has the ambition to cause the creation of 60,000 jobs.

To improve energy efficiency in their homes, householders need advice, installers and finance. Michelle Wells (from Policy and Insight) and I met with a manager from the Low Carbon Hub's Cosy Homes scheme. Cosy Homes provides a full Home Energy Assessment and Whole House Plan, showing what work needs doing, in what order, at what cost, and the likely savings on fuel. They offer a retrofit co-ordinator service too which sounds quite invaluable. However, they are finding it as difficult as everyone else to get professionals to work on this, including installers of insulation and low-carbon heating systems. The waiting time for an assessment is 12 weeks.

As the Council, I should like to see us taking the initiative on home retrofits in the future, and taking in-house the kind of activities that Cosy Homes perform, as well as providing finance solutions. Oxford City has bid for over a million pounds from the Government scheme, which it can deploy in its own housing stock, stock that we do not have. However, there is a third billion pounds that Government is providing, called Local Authority Delivery Phase 1B specifically for Local Authorities to improve their own estate, and we shall be applying for that.

I have been meeting since my election last year when I took on the Climate Lead role, with the cross-council climate group for Oxfordshire. There is a similar officer-level group. I think we all find it helpful to learn from one another. We are putting together a statement of intent which will go to the Growth Board, to formalise the position of this committee."

Electric Charging Points for Vehicles

The committee discussed progress on this issue and expressed interest in learning of any developments regarding grants for the installation of electric vehicle charging points. The committee considered that the county-wide electric vehicle steering group, upon which it had a representative, could look further into this matter and assist in providing it with a higher profile. It was noted that a survey (the commissioner of the survey was not identified) had lately been undertaken into the need for such charging points, thus the issue was receiving attention at the present time.

The committee noted that an electric vehicle charging point project in Henley had recently been temporarily halted, much to the frustration of the town's councillors.

The Insight and Policy Manager (IPM) would bring a report to the committee's meeting on 28 November 2020. The report would note the progress of the Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy development, and would include a consideration of the contribution to the Council's Climate Emergency.

The committee considered that sharing of information with community groups and parish councils in South Oxfordshire was of critical importance. It was of the view that debate could be stimulated through workshops on priorities and funding in respect of electric vehicles.

Green Homes Grants

The committee requested information on the feasibility of the council establishing a unit to help residents retrofit their homes with energy saving measures. The IPM would look into this and report back to the committee.

72 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kate Gregory and Lynn Lloyd.

73 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

74 Urgent business - Future Agenda Items

Future Agenda Items

As an ongoing administrative action, the committee agreed that an item in respect of Future Agenda Items would feature on subsequent agendas. The democratic services officer reported that it had incorrectly been added to the urgent business item on the agenda for this meeting, but would appear at the end of future agendas.

75 Public participation

There were no public speakers at the meeting.

76 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting, held on 14th September 2020, were agreed as a correct record, and the chair would sign them as such.

77 Power purchase agreement

The committee had previously received a copy of the draft minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 24th September 2020, when the previous recommendation was presented and discussed. Cabinet had requested that this item should be reviewed again by this committee. The minutes of the Cabinet meeting were awaiting publication.

The chair reported that further analysis of the issues involved into becoming part of a power purchase agreement (PPA) had revealed several disadvantages. The committee agreed that it would be valuable to explore the idea further, but with some caution. The IPM agreed to undertake further research into the strengths and weaknesses of PPAs.

78 South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2034 and the Climate Act

The Head of Planning briefed the committee on the latest situation regarding the South Oxfordshire Local Plan (SOLP) 2034 and the Climate Change Act 2008. The committee noted the contents of the report and the legal advice provided, confirming that the council's approach to climate change and adaptation through its policies in the emerging Local Plan 2034 was lawful.

The Head of Planning confirmed that climate change considerations were at the heart of planning policy. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sought to ensure that this key statute was addressed through local plans and the determination of planning applications. The NPPF specifically referred to the Climate Change Act 2008 in paragraph 149 (as quoted in the report); 'Plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account the long-term implications for flood risk, coastal change, water supply, biodiversity and landscapes, and the risk of overheating from rising temperatures'.

The committee was advised that examples were emerging through Local Plan policies to help mitigate climate change. The Inspector's decisions would be incorporated into the Plan. Similarly, the Secretary of State's directions would also be included. The council's report writing guidance covered the subject of climate mitigation, which report authors were required to adhere to.

79 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) refresh

The committee considered the proposed amendments to the Community Infrastructure (CIL) Spending Strategy, approved in November 2018, in respect of income generated by CIL, and to provide recommendations to Cabinet if necessary.

The Infrastructure Development Team Leader reported that to enable sustainable housing growth in South Oxfordshire, the district council were required to ensure that supporting infrastructure was planned for and secured. Developers were obliged to contribute to new infrastructure investment through the CIL system. The proposed changes to the CIL spending strategy would help to support the council's corporate objectives.

The committee noted that there was a requirement to pass to any town and parish 25% of the CIL revenues raised in those towns/parishes (the neighbourhood proportion) where there was an adopted neighbourhood plan, or 15%, subject to a cap of £100 per existing council tax dwelling, where there was no neighbourhood plan. Of the remaining proportion, county council and community health interests would receive 70% (50% and 20%

respectively) and the district council, 30%. The emphasis would be on new infrastructure, as the intention of CIL had always been to support new development.

The Infrastructure Development Team Leader reported that a weakness of the present system was that there was not a mechanism for town and parish councils to bid for funding for their projects. However, where these councils had a neighbourhood plan, there was scope for working with the county council. In some cases, the district council could derive benefit for its projects involving the towns. The county council itself was required to have a spending strategy, as the district council held the CIL funds and distributed them.

The committee noted that carbon neutral measures in the district council's projects could involve offsetting elsewhere to ensure their implementation. It considered that community groups should be given the opportunity also to bid for funds, as they managed many important projects in South Oxfordshire, which were in considerable need of funding. There was a role for the district council in educating colleagues in other organisations, and 'peer to peer' building would help these groups to understand bidding processes and approaches.

The committee concluded by agreeing;

- That the council would continue to work closely with community and neighbourhood groups;
- To recommend the retention of a minimum of 5% of CIL funds for green networks;
- That the council would endeavour to ensure that CIL funds allocated to partners, including the county council, were spent in accordance with the district council's corporate priorities;
- To obtain advice from the Ecology Officer in due course on the appropriate percentage level of funding for biodiversity and the nature recovery network;
- To obtain further information on whether CIL funds would be suitable to assist in the establishment of a council-led Green Homes Grants retro-fitting unit.

80 Greentech membership

The committee discussed the benefits of founder membership of Oxfordshire Greentech (OG) to support and build the low carbon economy within Oxfordshire and the proposed year one support package negotiated between the Council and OG.

The committee concurred that there were considerable benefits attaching to being a founder member, which included affording a positive profile to the district council in advising local businesses and groups to help build the green economy. OG helped groups through such activities as the organisation of special and innovative events, networking, sharing of information and featuring the work of partner organisations on the OG website.

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm

Chairman

Date