

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE

Climate and Ecological Emergencies

Advisory Committee

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON MONDAY 16 JANUARY 2023

This was a virtual, online meeting.

Present:

Councillors: Sam Casey-Rerhaye (Chair), Sue Cooper, Kate Gregory, Lynn Lloyd, Caroline Newton (left at 19.04), Andrea Powell, Leigh Rawlins (left at 19.12), Sue Roberts and David Rouane (left at 19.19)

Officers: Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer), Ben Silverthorne (Trainee Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), Dominic Lamb (Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader), Chloe Bunting (Senior Climate Action Officer), Jessie Fieth (Senior Climate Action Officer), Kimberley Hall (Senior Climate Action Officer), Lucy Billen (Senior Communications Officer – Climate and Biodiversity), Harry Barrington-Mountford (Head of Policy and Programmes)

26 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Stefan Gawrysiak, Celia Wilson and Jane Murphy.

27 Declaration of interests

There were no declarations.

28 Urgent business

None.

29 Chair's announcements

Chair ran through the content of the agenda, pointing out the importance of items presented and welcoming the discussion. Three councillors needed to leave early, so the retrofit report, item 13, was moved to agenda item seven, to enable participation of everyone before they needed to leave.

30 Minutes of the last meeting

Resolved:

The minutes of the last meeting on 17 October 2022 were agreed as a correct record. It was noted that a response from the chair's letter to GWR had not been received yet as there was a delay to it being issued.

31 Public participation

None.

32 Domestic Retrofit in South and Vale

Jessie Fieth, Senior Climate Action Officer, introduced the report on Domestic Retrofit for South and Vale and the challenges faced, noting the limited power that the district council had in this matter. However, that did not stop the council from encouraging its progression. The officer provided some slides to the committee with some facts and figures. There were five themes in the paper, containing actions that can be taken. Committee was asked to give further comments and steer to the climate team by 23 January 2023.

Three ways were presented by which actions will be taken in this process.

- 1) Quick wins
- 2) Further research/ resources
- 3) Wider Partnerships

Members discussed what was presented to them. Overall, members agreed that this was a useful report and thanked the officer, noting that there was overlap in work at district and county level.

It was suggested that information could be added to the council tax pack regarding the “Quick Wins.” Officer replied that currently it was unknown if that could be done, but she would report back.

It was suggested that Theme 4 should be a priority as it was a power that the council had (planning), and we should do what we can.

Other ideas raised included:

- Option of further resources, whether looking at innovative finance schemes and bodies like other councils have been doing (green loan schemes).
- The committee should send a strong message that the enforcement position working with private landlords must be filled.
- Encouraging and incentivising officers to retrofit their own homes. Could be good for case studies.
- Interested in creating a link between case studies and steps towards the longer term “one stop shop.” Ensure case studies are well understood.
- List of accredited, reliable and positively reviewed providers.
- Transparent effective communication
- Action days to increase communications with communities – use thermal imaging cameras to add interest
- Incentives for carrying out works.
- Help communities to bulk buy materials
- Include Parish councils so they can share messages

A member felt that the council had lost 9 years of retrofitting homes across the district and the council will need to retrofit 9000 houses a year in South Oxfordshire to be carbon neutral by 2030. Raised ideas about a “retrofit unit” and asked whether the plan had included the Flexible Home Improvement Loan as there was no link. Officer had included the loan and will work on fixing the link issue.

An opinion was provided that training and advising for the retrofitting process should be a position created, enabling people to have their homes assessed.

The plan's rental property focus was approved of. There was a need to support people retrofitting old buildings / listed buildings and support them with knowledge of local planning procedure. A link was asked for on the South Cambridgeshire retrofit policy, as an example of good practice, and was provided after the meeting:

[South Cambridgeshire's local plan](#), 'Policy NH/15: Heritage Assets and Adapting to Climate Change' on page 129.

Communication was emphasised and the need to communicate on every level, not just social media. The idea of thermal imaging was suggested. A view was given that retrofitting was a responsibility for all of us.

Highlighting how retrofitting will eventually become a huge market, it was suggested that there was a need to encourage people to work with the council.

Some positive responses had been received from people regarding information sent out from the website. The main issue that was noticed was how people were struggling to get things fitted, e.g., solar panels, due to the inconsistency of installers. Struggling to find workers to do the work.

A member mentioned changing technology - solar sheeting, and how it was replacing solar panels due to it being lighter. It was less likely to need the roof to be adapted too. It was important for the committee to keep up to date with new technology.

A point was raised that people needed to have an understanding of what to install and when, as retrofitting a home can be a lengthy process, and people may be unsure of what work to carry out first in terms of efficiency, financing, how various works link to each other etc. Potential need for more workers and facilities to ensure people were able to get their houses surveyed.

On the booking of the council's two infra-red cameras, the climate action team had taken over the process of booking them, so contact Jessie Fieth to attain them. They were currently booked. There were specific conditions the cameras need to work efficiently, mainly in the cold winter months.

Committee acknowledged that our demands were outstripping supply, and there was potential for a market to grow. Retrofit advisors / coordinators were a needed resource, with the council being a trusted body, could help provide this.

Identified the need for a variety of case studies regarding the scale of retrofitting both small and large, to avoid putting people off starting the process. Noted that the retrofitting process was expensive, both small and large.

Overall, members felt that the demand for such works meant that there would not be issues of competition with other companies, as the demand outweighed the providers current availability, particularly for advisory services, where the council would bring value. It was added that the council would need to be aware of what skills were available and the council wouldn't have all of those. Working with housing associations should be a top priority.

The Senior Climate Action Officer thanked the members for their comments.

33 Update from the Environment Advisory Group (EAG) - Future Oxfordshire Partnerships

Councillor Andrea Powell presented an update from the EAG and thanked the officer team for supporting the work of the EAG.

Councillor Powell gave the key points from the last meeting from the EAG on 12 December 2022.

- discussion on the most effective strategic approach for solar energy production
- agreed on the focus on planning policies and planning power; and
- agreed the planning officers group should coordinate this across the county.
- the next steps in the Pasco Route Map, stating how long the process was taking, but the final recommendations will be out in March 2023. 16 recommended actions were presented, the one prioritised for us was the need to find more innovative funding across the county and the communication, especially when engaging with communities. We should ensure that we aren't duplicating the same efforts across the county.
- considered the retrofitting strategy of the county council and an update on the Climate Action Oxfordshire website. Potential retrofit workshops to be arranged by county council. The website needed to go a bit deeper.
- Oxfordshire County Council were considering developing a Climate Adaptation Resilience evidence base.

In member's discussion, a member commented that they were pleased that there had been discussion of solar farms, due to the worries of residents on the cumulative impact of the farms. This was viewed as being something that should be brought to council with some urgency.

A member highlighted the unfair amount of solar farms Oxfordshire would need to provide, over one third of country's solar power, and stressed how the market was driving forward with no control and how the controls need to be in place at central government level. As this was a spatial strategy, it needed to be as accurate and fair as if a housing development was being put there, considering mitigating factors as well. Council doesn't have powers to ask all new builds to include solar panels. An example was the Botley solar farms size and whether it was one or multiple applications - its status as national infrastructure was due to its size taken as one application. Mention given to the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) coming through, meaning ability to have higher environmental standards. We do have DES9 policy for renewable energy currently. Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) give more detail to existing policy, so you need policy in place first to then add the linked detail of an SPD.

It was suggested that we should aim high in the next local plan. Further emphasised the need for more localised production of things, especially due to the amount of strain on the grid. Councillors were encouraged to comment on the consultation for the new NPPF, which was live.

34 Environment Act update

Dominic Lamb provided an update on the Environment Act. The slides presented will be published with the minutes.

Members discussed that the update appeared to be a “wish list”, with the dates and targets being far away with a lack of steer from central government that was needed.

35 Cabinet member for Environment update

Councillor Sue Cooper provided the update, highlighting the importance of communication - a role had been created and filled by Lucy Billen in the communications team, to dedicate more resource to communicating and promoting climate issues. One of the first projects was a need to review and update the material provided on the website, and Lucy was providing an update on this to committee today.

Councillor Cooper talked about the application for bathing water status in Wallingford. We were still waiting for a response which was likely to arrive in the spring. Still working with people to collect water quality data over winter.

Officers also met with other councils as part of the Thames Valley River Service. After a review it had been agreed to disband this group so that resources can be used more proactively with existing river catchment partnerships. These collectively cover the Thames River area.

The application to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme for Cornerstone was successful. Works shall start to reduce carbon impacts of the building.

Regarding Biodiversity and nature recovery, officers had managed to implement five tree planting sites in Didcot and a wildflower meadow, this was in place of what was going to be “Tiny Forest”. Work being carried out by the parks department. “Tiny Forest” plans had shown mounting cost and archaeological barriers, so cost effective alternatives were found which were larger in size also.

It was suggested that the council should join UK100 and there was general agreement with this. Members were previously sent information by email.

Regarding rivers, a member highlighted the work Stroud District Council had been doing with environment agencies and local farmers along the river which had led to alterations to the river, lowering the risk of flooding. Could the committee investigate this? The cabinet member stated we have a similar scheme being run by the Earth Trust. Officer added that a number of schemes were being worked on by the catchment partnerships.

36 New council website pages on climate - presentation

A presentation was provided by Kimberly Hall (Senior Climate Action Officer) and Lucy Billen (Senior Communications Officer) on the changes being made to the webpages on climate. There were 17 new and updated pages, with readers staying longer to read the pages, from analysis undertaken. There was a page on retrofitting, and plenty of signposting to useful sources. Other pages included biodiversity, nature restoration, climate action, what we are doing on our own land etc.

The team were congratulated for the work being carried out on the website. Officers were not certain whether information could go out in the council tax pack, but officers would check.

37 Climate training platform for staff - presentation

A presentation was given by Chloe Bunting, Senior Climate Action Officer, on the training provisions for staff, with a view to developing similar training for members. There were four modules, ready for launch in the coming week:

- Understanding climate change
- Impacts of climate change
- How can we respond to climate change?
- The story so far at our council

It was viewed that this training was a long time coming and that it would be good for members to have similar training, especially with the upcoming election.

It was felt to be a good idea to get members to do the training, so they can direct their constituents. Upon revision of the training after 6 months there would be development of a specialist module.

There was mention of length of the training session and a member highlighted the need to raise awareness of the implications of no climate action, it was important to raise the possible consequences.

38 Climate Action Plan - quarter 2

As the members had all read the report the chair suggested that the committee should move straight onto comments and discussion. Climate and Biodiversity Team leader would follow up on any queries that could not be answered in the meeting.

The main points raised were:

- The report was complemented, and officers praised for the vast amount of work that had been done.
- How would data hub complement the work the of the report?
- Concern about the items in red
- Highlighted page 33 Action B7 of the report around the Housing Stock and whether this was still a realistic target and will we be able to deal with this. The response to this was the answer was unknown and would have to be taken to the relevant cabinet member and officers for response.
- Ways of Working (WOW) targets on page 15 of the report on procurement and monitoring. In particular, WOW4 and WOW5 (short-term) and whether they will be on target to be completed in the first year. This question will have to be taken to relevant cabinet member.
- WOW7 on report writing – an officer responded that this was linked to the training for officers, which was being dealt with. We were looking at other tools used by other councils.
- On C11 it was asked whether there was a target date for starting. There was no date as of yet but could be tied into work with planning services work with Towns and Parishes.
- L1 on page 28 – mentioned “No-Mow May” Campaign and the success that brought. There was more in the plan mentioning increase of biodiversity and tree cover and reducing pesticides when possible. Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader confirmed that there was still a lot more planned with an official name for this year’s event yet to be revealed.

An enquiry was made about Ragnor Road Green and the permission for paths. The reasoning for lighting was that it was required for safety, but there was some disagreement from local people. Chair recommended that due to the specific nature of the case, it should be taken to the relevant cabinet member, Councillor Sue Cooper. It was mentioned that a safety audit was being conducted to establish whether lighting was a necessity.

39 Future items

It was requested that the tree champions be invited to come in and provide an update. Given the large scale of the agenda today, and people being unable to attend, the item had been moved to the next committee meeting.

The meeting closed at 19:57

Chair

Date

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